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Learning to be Norwegian

A case study of identity management in religious education in Norway

by

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy in Sociology

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Declaration

I confirm that this thesis is my own work and that it has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

During my PhD registration one article of mine has been published in an editorial journal, and one book chapter has been published. Both of these draw on the data collected for this thesis.

Eriksen, L (2008a) “Verdifellesskap eller uenighetsfellesskap” [“Community of values or community of disagreement?”]. In *Verdier [Values]*. Å. Røthing and O. Leirvik. Oslo, Universitetsforlaget.

Eriksen, L (2008b) “Kjerner og identiteter I debatten rundt skolens formålsparagraf”. [“Cores and identities in the debate about the object clause of Norwegian state school”] *Kirke & Kultur* **113** (1): 7-20.

List of Abbreviations

- KRL: The abbreviation is used for two versions of the religious education subject from 1997 to 2008. From 1997 to 2002, it stood for “Kristendomskunnskap med religions- og livssynsorientering”. This translates literally as “Knowledge of Christianity with information about religions and life-views” (my translation). From 2002 to 2008 it stood for “Kristendoms-, religion- og livssynskunnskap”. This translates literally as “Knowledge of Christianity, religions and life-views”.
- RLE: “Religion, livssyn og etikk” Translated as “Religion, life-views and ethics”. The name of the religious education subject from 2008 to present.
- WRERU: Warwick Religious Education Research Unit.
- CULCOM: “Cultural Complexity in New Norway”. A research programme at the University of Oslo.
- L97: The national syllabus of Norwegian state schools of 1997.
- M74: The national guidelines for Norwegian state schools of 1974.
- M87: The national guidelines for Norwegian state schools of 1987.
- NOU: Norsk Offentlig Utredning. The White Papers of the Norwegian government.
- RE: Religious Education.

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Finally, Ragnhild: I was told that the last year of a PhD was going to be horrible. It hasn't been. It has been wonderful. Thank you.

Summary

My PhD project is called *"Learning to be Norwegian. Religion and national identity in religious education in Norway."* It is a case study of how religion is mobilised in the construction of national identity, both from above and below. The "above" perspective is operationalised as a discourse analysis of Curricula in Norway from 1974 to 2008. The "below" perspective is operationalised as participant observation in classrooms, following 15 teachers in 3 secondary schools in Eastern Norway.

In terms of theoretical questions asked of this material, I engage with the literature on multiculturalism in Western Europe (Barry 2001, Baumann 1996, 1999, Eriksen 2007, Fuglerud and Eriksen 2007, Joppke 2004, 2009, Modood 2007, Parekh 2006, Phillips 2007). I identify a distinction between liberalists, multiculturalists and hybridists in terms of the key question: What is the best way to understand groups with identity claims? My main claim to originality in is that people can be described as engaging in fluidising and solidifying practices – making social structures more fluid or more solid through their social activities. This implies that there are different levels of *viscosity* in how solid or fluid groups with identity claims are. Theorists dealing with groups with identity claims, including the sociology of religion, education and identity, would benefit from a variable social ontology of groups. I propose that the terms "Viscosity" - "boundaries" and "work", taken together provide one such framework that works well with my data.

Significant empirical findings include a shift over time in the meaning of the term "values". In 1974, the word "values" was connected primarily with ethics in the formal curricula. By the 1990s this had changed. It was now also, and dominantly, connected to notions of identity. Religion is consistently mobilised for identity through metaphors of personal stability, or and through establishing metaphorical connections that make the nation appear as sharing crucial features with the individual self.

These ideas are revisited in classroom ethnographic data. The assumptions found in the curriculum are challenged by the practices of teachers and pupils. It is clear that the most important concepts of identity, such as "Muslim" or "Norwegian" are being worked on by defining what and who is on the inside and what and who is on the outside. Nevertheless, the classrooms become effective learning communities, though more through shared actions, shared discussions and well-managed disagreement than through sameness and shared values. Teachers and pupils use the concept of "facts" both to further their own normative arguments, but also to remain out of the reach of accusations of cultural or religious insensitivity. Finally, my study undermines static conceptions of how discourses affect the social world. As an alternative, I try to develop an understanding of actors engaging in fluidising and solidifying practices.

PART I

INTRODUCTION

1. INTRODUCTION

How do people in Norway come to feel that they are Norwegian? And does religion play a role in this process? I have written this PhD thesis to try to find answers to these, and similar, questions. The thesis presents a case study of religious education in Norway. This case study is used to develop an analytical toolkit that I hope can be useful for those interested in understanding *groups with identity claims* better.

To do this, I investigate how religion is mobilised in the construction of national identity, both from above and below. The “above” perspective is operationalised as a discourse analysis of formal curriculum documents in Norway from 1974 to 2008. The “below” perspective is operationalised as participant observation in classrooms, following 10 teachers in 2 secondary schools in Eastern Norway over three months.

The connection between national identity and religion is an important and timely topic. Religion, education and identity are at the heart of European politics, and will continue to be so (Døving 2009; Jackson 2003; 2004; 2010; Jackson, Miedema, Weisse and Willaime 2007; Joppke 2009; Skeie and Weisse 2008). Religion has returned to the public sphere, and questions of religion and identity currently have a high profile in public debate. Sadly, there is also a high potential for conflict. European countries are relating to threats and realities of terrorism in the UK and Spain, a referendum over minarets in Switzerland, debates about Mosques in Germany, Islamic covering in France and Norway,

caricatures in Denmark and complex accusations and realities of Islamophobia and anti-Semitism in many countries (Døving 2009; Joppke 2004; 2009). These are political conflicts that threaten human dignity in the form of racism, discrimination, sexism and violence. The controversies and dilemmas that policy makers need to deal with are many and complicated. It is here that a public sociology of religion, multiculturalism and identity can have an important impact on policy makers as well as a wider audience. This thesis is my small contribution to an engaged sociology of religion, multiculturalism and identity.

I have chosen to study religious education to gain a deeper understanding of the connections between religion and national identity. Religious education is an important battleground for dialogue and conflict concerning religion (Jackson et al 2007). Religious education is seen by many states as a key tool in the toolkit for identity management and citizenship building. Whereas the examples above exemplify the surface scratches and wounds of the increased visibility of religious and cultural diversity in Europe, religious education has potential for deeper and more lasting interventions. Religious educators are uniquely placed to address underlying causes for conflict, and to teach skills in living together with diversity. As such, religious education is of massive significance today, and will continue to be so in future years. In this thesis, I target these crucial issues.

A case study can say little about the world outside the boundaries of the case. However, case study research can reveal much about the intellectual tools we all use to understand the world as we find it. As I describe and analyse my case, I will use my own analytical toolkit. It is this toolkit that is the main contribution

of this thesis. This has consequences for the structure of the thesis. First, I present the literature that I wish to engage with. Then I present the analytical tools that I will use to investigate my case. Then I present and analyse my case study data, using the analytical tools already presented. Finally, I evaluate to what extent my analytical tools are a constructive contribution to the debates presented in the literature review. I use my case study of identity management in religious education in Norway to generalize to theory about groups with identity claims.

In terms of theoretical questions asked of this material, I engage with the literature on multiculturalism in Western Europe (Barry 2001; Baumann 1996; 1999; Carter and Fenton 2010; Døving 2009; Eriksen and Stjernfelt 2009; Eriksen 2007; Eriksen and Sørheim 2006; Fuglerud and Eriksen 2007; Joppke 2004; 2009; Modood 2007; Phillips 2007; Sen 2006) I identify a distinction between liberalists, multiculturalists and hybridists in terms of the key question: What is the best way to understand groups with identity claims?

The multiculturalism debate is an umbrella debate. A range of more detailed, empirically informed, social scientific conversations deal with the practicalities of identity management. I engage with two such bodies of literature. I look at a debate concerning how religious traditions should be represented in the classroom, as well as a body of literature dealing with the intersection between sexuality and national identity in Norway.

The aims of this thesis are as much conceptual and theoretical as empirical and analytical. This has consequences for the organization of the thesis. One such

consequence is that the literature review and the presentation of my conceptual approach, are not merely preliminaries to the empirical analysis. Rather, part II of the thesis, dealing with the literature, is not only reviewing the academic literature, but also staking out the theoretical and conceptual grounds in which I locate my research aims. Equally, part III presents my analytical strategy and conceptual vocabulary, and includes results of the research as important as the empirical analysis in part VI. My main claim to originality in this thesis is the metaphor of *viscosity*: this term makes it easier to think realistically about the fact that different groups are groups in different ways. Some may be very fluid, whereas others may be very solid. In between, we are likely to find a range of different degrees of viscosity. The term *viscosity* is seen in relation to two more terms, namely *work* and *boundaries*. Together, I argue that this trio of concepts makes a useful analytical toolkit for understanding groups with identity claims.

The thesis as a whole is structured to emphasize the logic of generalizing from a case to theory (Yin 2009). I do this in the following way: I present the analytical tools that I have developed during my research. Then, I use these tools to present and analyse the data from the case study. The relevant mode of evaluation is the extent to which my analytical tools enable relevant and original insights into identity management in Norwegian religious education. Whether or not these insights are relevant and original can only be seen in relation to the academic literature in the relevant fields. It is therefore necessary for the logic of the argument to spend some time presenting the relevant academic literature, the theoretical background for the analytical tools, as well as the analytical tools themselves.

Structure of the thesis

This thesis consists of seven parts. In addition to the introduction (part I) and the conclusion (part VII), there are the following five parts. Each part consists of either one, two or three chapters. The thesis has a total of 14 chapters.

Part II: Literature (Chapters 2, 3 and 4). This section reviews relevant literature on multiculturalism (chapter 2), Norwegian sexualities (chapter 3) and Religious Education (Chapter 4). A common feature is identified in the three chapters: all discuss the relative benefits of constructionist as opposed to realist accounts of groups with identity claims. In addition to reviewing literature, the aim of this part of the thesis is also to stake out debates between constructionists and realists as the theoretical and conceptual territory in which my research questions are located.

Part III: Conceptual Approach (Chapters 5 and 6). These two chapters present my own conceptual approach. The aims of this thesis are as much conceptual as analytical. As such, this part of the thesis is more than just conceptual and theoretical preliminaries. Rather, I see it as presenting some of the most original contributions of the thesis. I try to devise a strategy and a conceptual vocabulary to analyse groups with identity claims. In part III, I establish my reasons for trying to get the best out of constructionism and realism, and thus moving beyond the debates I present in chapters 2, 3 and 4. I also establish the reasons why I deploy the notions of viscosity (section 6.1), boundaries (section 6.2) and

work (section 6.3) as my prime analytical devices. Chapter 5 provides an analytical horizon, detailing the theoretical foundations of my conceptual approach. Chapter 6 presents the analytical toolkit in detail.

Part IV: Research Design (chapters 7 and 8). This part of the thesis presents the logic and practicalities of the research that I have done. In chapter 7, I outline the scope of the knowledge claims that I make in this thesis. I explain to what extent, and in which ways, my findings in this thesis can be generalised. I argue that there are two different logics of generalisation at play in this thesis. First, there is the limited way in which my study of two schools sheds light on religious education in Norway. This is the art of generalising to a population (section 7.2). Second, there is the more rigorous way in which the analytical tools developed in a case study can be claimed be useful also in other cases. This is the logic of generalising to theory (section 7.3). This logic underpins the presentational logic of this thesis: first, I present my conceptual approach, then I apply this approach to data, then I evaluate the utility of the approach for data analysis.

In chapter 8, I provide information to achieve as much transparency and accountability as possible in my account of the data. I discuss the use of multiple methods (section 8.2), the choice of text and strategies for analysing these (sections 8.3 and 8.4), the selection of schools and how I gained access to these schools (sections 8.5 and 8.6). Finally, I discuss my own research role during classroom observation.

Part V: Background (chapters 9 and 10). The aim of this part of the thesis is to provide the reader with the contextual information needed to fully understand the analyses of the empirical chapters. Chapter 9 is an historical analysis of religious education in Norway. Here I give an educational and political context that may help to understand the field of inquiry. The historical background is crucial to understanding the formal curriculum documents analysed in chapter 11. However, it also provides knowledge useful for engaging with the classroom observations in chapter 12. Chapter 10 is a presentation of the schools in which I did my fieldwork. It is intended to give a flavour of the practicalities of religious education in Norway, as well as a richer description of the field than I am able to give in the more theoretically informed analyses in chapters 12 and 13.

Part VI: Analysis (Chapters 11, 12 and 13). These three chapters constitute the empirical analysis of the thesis. The intention is to deploy the analytical strategy and vocabulary presented in chapter 5 and 6 in the analysis of my data. Chapter 11 is a discourse analysis of three formal curriculum documents, collected from the National Guidelines of 1974 and 1987, as well as the National Syllabus of 1997. I look especially at how the legitimisation of teaching about religion is connected to the changing concept of ‘values’. I further investigate how the meaning of what I call the “religion-values node” varies between being concerned with ethics and identity. Chapter 12 is an ethnographic account of my classroom observation data. I investigate the on-going practices of identity management in the classroom. I focus on situations where teachers, pupils or both find themselves in friction with the formal curriculum. Chapter 13 revisits the discussions about multiculturalism (chapter 2), Norwegian sexualities

(chapter 3) and religious education (chapter 4). The aim of the chapter is to evaluate the extent to which my analysis can shed light on these debates. More specifically, chapter 13 evaluates the extent to which my analytical toolkit represents a contribution in terms of getting the best out of constructionism and realism.

The presentation follows the logic of generalization from a case to theory, rather than a chronology of process. The analytical tools have been developed through an abductive process of analysis, even though they are presented in a kind of pragmatic deductive “application” logic of presentation. A similar thing is true of the discourse analysis. The term “values” is used as a methodological device to crack open issues of identity and the uses of religion. Its importance was found abductively. If the thesis had followed a processual logic, the centrality of values would have been a “finding”.

Even though the structure of the thesis focuses on the theoretical and methodological contributions of the thesis, I hope that the case study is of intrinsic interest to those interested in national identity, religious identification and religious education in Norway.

The category of *groups with identity claims* may include national groups, religious groups, ethnic groups and other groups. What these groups have in common is that they extend the opportunity, or demand, for individuals to identify with this group. I focus on national and religious groups, but the analytical tools developed might well be useful for other types of groups as well.

The aims and research questions might be summarised as follows:

Analytical research questions:

How is religion mobilised in the construction of national identity?

- How is religion connected to national identity in formal curriculum documents (Chapter 11)?
 - o How is religion presented in the formal curriculum documents (11.2)?
 - o How is national identity presented in the formal curriculum documents (11.2).
- How are religion and national identity connected in classroom interaction (chapter 12)?
 - o How is religion done and presented in classroom interaction?
 - o How is national identity done and presented in classroom interaction?

Conceptual Aims:

Devising a strategy and conceptual vocabulary (analytical toolkit) for the description of groups with identity claims (chapters 5 and 6).

- o Show that the strategy and conceptual vocabulary can be improved in the academic literature on multiculturalism,

Norwegian sexualities and religious education (chapters 2,3 and 4). The analytical toolkit is intended to develop these literatures by getting the best out of constructionism as well as realism (chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 13).

- Deploy the analytical toolkit on data from the case study on religious education in Norway (chapters 11, 12).
- Evaluate the analytical utility of the analytical toolkit for the case study of religious education in Norway (chapter 13).
- Evaluate the utility of the analytical toolkit in terms of developing the academic literatures of multiculturalism, Norwegian sexualities and religious education. Specifically, evaluating the relative merit of the analytical toolkit in providing descriptions of groups with identity claims that bridge the gap between constructionism and realism (chapter 13).

Having outlined the structure of the thesis, and presented the aims of the project along with the research questions, I turn to presenting the relevant academic literature.

PART II

LITERATURE

Part II of the thesis presents the relevant academic literature. Through presenting reviews of the literature on multiculturalism (chapter 2), Norwegian sexualities (chapter 3) and religious education (chapter 4) I stake out the larger conceptual territory in which my research questions are located. The main focus of the literature review is how academics within these three distinct academic literatures approach the description of groups with identity claims. Furthermore, I argue that the most relevant divide, which is to be found in relation to all three fields, is a debate between constructionists and realists. The section that follows explains why I have selected these three fields of literature, and how they are related.

When teachers, analysts and policy makers think about religious education, they engage with multiculturalism. This is because a new cultural and religious plurality has become evident following large-scale immigration to Europe since the Second World War. Cultural and religious plurality was always a fact in Europe, but now it is a visible and politically important fact in many countries. As a result, many states have engaged in cultural identity management of their own populations. This has been more or less explicit. One such strategy of the management of cultural diversity within a state has been called “multiculturalism”. In academic literature, multiculturalism is a strategy where the state encourages and enables a minority category to act and organize themselves as *a group* (Eriksen and Stjernfelt 2009: 23; Kymlicka 1995: 6; Modood 2007: 2; Parekh 2006: 2-3).

It is important to emphasize that this narrow definition of multiculturalism lives alongside a broader understanding of the term (Eriksen and Stjernfelt 2009: 21-24; Modood 2007: 1-2). Outside the academic field, multiculturalism is often used to describe a broader sense of embracing cultural diversity, an ethos of non-discrimination and anti-racism. There is a danger of actors using important criticism of the narrow understanding of multiculturalism as a misplaced weapon in a larger political struggle across Europe: to promote either the emergence of the populist right, or the return to a more or less benign nationalism within centre-left parties.

In this literature review, I shall argue that academic debates about multiculturalism lack a workable understanding of the groupness of groups. Why is this an important problem? The main point of contention in debates about multiculturalism is whether, and in what ways, citizens should be treated in terms of the categories through which they may be described. These categories might be related to ethnicity, cultural background, religion, gender, sexuality, ability and so on. A complicating factor in these debates is that academics and policymakers do not have a consistent way of interpreting these categories. Do these categories consist merely of traits, knowledges or feelings of belonging in the individual? As institutions and organisations? As face-to-face communities? As imagined or virtual communities? Which of these manifestations constitute a “group”? Is it useful or just, or both, to make these groups markers that release political rights and obligations, welfare access or representation? If so, when and how?

Too many theorists attack this challenge by trying to define the best way of understanding “groupness” and deduce policy from a vantage point of conceptual purity. While conceptual hygiene is useful for clear thinking, in this case such a strategy will miss the point. Groups are groups in different ways. They form around different axes, they have different modes of identification and they vary in mode and strength of attachment amongst their members. The literature review will focus on the various attempts to understand groups with identity claims in culturally diverse western societies. I argue that there is a need to step back from the attempts of conceptualising groups directly. The literature review shows the need for an analytical language that enables a differentiated social ontology of groups.

The multiculturalism debate is an umbrella debate. Under its canopy there are a whole range of sub-disciplines that struggle with these questions in their own concrete ways. It is in these more empirical and practical controversies that academic debate may inform and influence policy. My case study touches on two such debates and I shall discuss them below. My main point is to show that the concerns that I have highlighted in the multiculturalism debate are revisited in these debates. This is why I claim that a single case study may inform three different literatures: they are struggling with the same questions.

Importantly, these two debates also highlight issues that are relevant to the subject matter of the case. It is therefore useful for a fuller understanding of the case at hand to give some background information about the academic arguments that surround questions of national identity (Norwegianness) in

Religious Education. To discuss the issue of Norwegianness, I have decided to consider a new and instructive body of work done on Norwegianness and sexuality. This topic emerges in my own material, it struggles with the same issues of groupness, and it represents the cutting edge research on Norwegianness today. I also review a debate between Robert Jackson and Andrew Wright concerning the representation of religions in religious education. This is directly relevant to issues in my data. It also relates to more theoretical debates in social theory of how to represent groups with identity claims. Finally, it is a contemporary instance of a longer debate framed between constructivism and critical realism. My own discussion will also be structured to relate to this division within sociology. As such the discussion about representing religions in education is instructive.

To summarize, multiculturalism is a large field of inquiry. The debates here are at a high level of abstraction. To complement this general inquiry with debates closer to the case, I discuss religious education and Norwegianness. They are, in many ways, specific instances of the more general case of describing and understanding groups with identity claims. I structure the discussion of all three bodies of literature around the fault line that divides constructionist and realist approaches. Consequently, I hope to provide the reader with more than just an intellectual context for understanding the questions I deal with in the analysis. I also present the argument that the problem of groups with identity claims is a problem which is encountered in many academic fields. This is because it is a problem that relates to ontological and epistemological questions relevant to wider social theory. Through the three chapters that follow, I hope to provide a

background for locating the theoretical and conceptual aims of the thesis as well as the empirical and analytical research questions.

2: MULTICULTURALISM

In this chapter, I shall review the history of theory about multiculturalism; outline the main discussions within, as well as about, this field. Finally, I present three approaches that represent the present debates about multiculturalism. Phillips, Modood, and Carter and Fenton are chosen because they are frequently cited, and they represent a range of approaches that constitute the contemporary discussions in this field. Moreover, they differ from each other in terms relevant to my own research questions. Their main disagreement concerns the degree to which it is legitimate or sensible to represent minority groups as corporate entities in public debate and in policy. Before I return to these contemporary debates, I present an historical overview.

2.1: Overview of multiculturalism

Eriksen and Stjernfelt (2009) as well as Joppke (2004) have argued that the field of multiculturalism is driven by politics, rather than theorising. A useful place and time to start an overview of multiculturalism is Canada in 1971. According to Eriksen and Stjernfelt (Eriksen and Stjernfelt 2009: 204-205) the Canadian Trudeau government had created the *Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism*, which further resulted in the *Bicultural and Bilingual Act* of 1969, in response to tension between Canada's Anglophone majority and Francophone minority. However, due to a range of responses from groups other than the English speakers and the French speakers, by 1971 the idea of biculturalism had been expanded to multiculturalism. It was explained explicitly

as a contrast to the melting pot strategy of the United States, emphasising instead that Canada existed as a cultural mosaic. Canada has ever since been a driving force in theorising multiculturalism. The UK, the Netherlands and Sweden are European countries that have actively embraced a multiculturalist platform (Joppke 2004). Multiculturalism has also had a great impact on other countries, but it has not been enshrined in national laws in the same way as it is in Canada. Joppke points out how Canada, Australia, the Netherlands and the UK had all “retreated” from multiculturalist policies around the turn of the century. He claims that these countries established “*a new assertiveness*” of liberal principles in their place (Joppke 2004: 243-256). Other commentators, such as Døving (2009), Eriksen and Stjernfelt (2009) and Phillips (2007; 2008) also emphasise the increase of a hegemonic monocultural nationalism.

Academic writing on multiculturalism tries to keep up with political developments. Scholars have been analysing, legitimising and developing multiculturalism as a coherent political strategy. The academic history can usefully be divided into three stages:

The first stage is the emergence and rise of academic theories of multiculturalism. This took place, roughly, in the 1990s. In 1989 Iris Marion Young published her article “*Polity and Group Difference. A Critique of the Idea of Universal Citizenship*” (Young 1989) followed by her book “*Justice and the Politics of Difference*” (Young 1990). By 1999 Canadian political scientist Will Kymlicka claimed that multiculturalism had “*won the day*” (Kymlicka 1999; Modood 2007: 15).

The second stage is the “retreat from multiculturalism”. This term was coined by Christian Joppke in 2004, in an article where he describes how countries that put in place multiculturalist policies have to some extent withdrawn from these (Joppke 2004). He also summarised some important academic criticisms of multiculturalism. Joppke focuses on Brian Barry’s book “*Culture and Equality*” (Barry 2001). Other influential criticisms were Susan Okin’s feminist critique (Okin, Cohen, Howard and Nussbaum 1999) and Gerd Baumann’s detailed ethnographic critique of multiculturalism as “dominant discourse” (Baumann 1996), as well as his more theoretical hybridist critique (Baumann 1999).

The third stage is happening now. There is a struggle to reshape policy and social theory to take account of the criticisms that have been levelled at multiculturalism.¹ There are a number of strategies to respond to the retreat of multiculturalism. I shall list six.

1. A return to a mono-cultural nationalism. Skirbekk (2008) might stand as a Norwegian representative. He argues that a firm cultural solidarity is necessary to make a welfare state work. Furthermore, he argues that national cultures are the only contender for such solid cultural units. This is a marginal academic position, but an important and sizeable minority voice in political debates in many countries.

2. “Assertive liberalism”. Barry (2001), Joppke (2004; 2009), Eriksen and Stjernfelt (2009) and Sen (2006) might stand as representatives of this position.

¹ However, there is still a sense amongst some critics of multiculturalism that multiculturalism is the dominant top-dog, and that it is innovative and radical to criticize it.

They all argue that theories of mainstream multiculturalism are flawed, and that more classical liberal ideas provide a better guide for policy in diverse societies.

3. New types of social theory and policy that deal with diversity management. A developed example is Cosmopolitanism (Appiah 2006). Many of these emphasise hybridity and flexibility. Some important representatives of this trend are Baumann (1996; 1999), Hylland Eriksen (Eriksen 1993a; 1993b; 1993c; 1996; 2001; 2007; 2008c; Eriksen and Sørheim 2006), Urry and his reworking of “Complexity” (Urry 2005) and Steven Vertovec with his concept of super-diversity (Vertovec 2007).

4. Arguing that groups with identity claims should be the object of study, not a resource for explaining behaviour. The critical literature on ethnicity is relevant here. Not all of this is new. Frederik Barth’s “Ethnic groups and boundaries” (Barth 1969) is a good example. Nevertheless, this approach is relevant to the contemporary discussion about multiculturalism. Examples might be Rogers Brubaker (Brubaker 2004; 2006), Ruane and Todd (2004) and Fenton and Carter (2010). The work of Gerd Baumann (especially 1996) is another example of how theory engages with groups as the object for explanation.

5. Strengthening the arguments for multiculturalism understood as group recognition and rights, both pragmatically and philosophically. The British political scientists Tariq Modood (Modood 2007) and Bhikhu Parekh (Parekh 2006) might stand as the foremost proponents of this today. Cora Alexa Døving (Døving 2009) represents this position in the Norwegian debate.

6. Saving the term “multiculturalism” from “groupism”. Phillips (2007) and Sen (2006) are representatives of this position. Both Phillips and Sen do not wish to abandon the term “multiculturalism”, but try to redefine it in order to answer some of the criticisms levelled against it, especially that of “groupism”.

The points in this list are not strictly of the same order, and are not mutually exclusive. Amartya Sen, for instance, is mentioned twice in the list above. In his 2006 book “*Identity and Violence*” he seems reluctant to let go of the term “multiculturalism”, but eager to rid the term of its connection to group rights. He tries to re-brand what was previously called “multiculturalism” as “plural monoculturalism”. Similarly, most recent approaches pay at least some attention to the recent concern of social theorists about cultural hybridity, complexity and flexibility.

The next sections present the three stages in the history of multiculturalism that I have outlined. This presentation has two aims. First, to give the reader a general background of the theoretical field that I engage with in this thesis. Second, to present an argument as to what my thesis may contribute to the discussions about multiculturalism, identity and religious education.

2.2: Mainstream multiculturalism

The section that follows is an outline of what I call “mainstream culturalism”, the body of thought that emphasises group rights. When Canadian political scientist Will Kymlicka claimed that multiculturalism had “won the day” in 2001, it was this mainstream multiculturalism he had in mind (Kymlicka 2001).

Similarly, it was this kind of mainstream multiculturalism that the world, according to German sociologist Christian Joppke, was retreating from in 2004. I will present mainstream multiculturalism by introducing elements of three thinkers from the USA and Canada. These are Iris Marion Young, Charles Taylor and William Kymlicka.

An important aspect of mainstream multiculturalism was the critique of “colour blind” liberalism. Iris Marion Young criticized the idea of universal citizenship in an article in 1989 and in a book a year later (Young 1989; 1990). Her basic point was that “difference blind” policies had unequal consequences.

With Young’s critique of difference-blind liberalism in mind, we can consider the point made by Canadian political philosopher, Charles Taylor, in his important essay *Multiculturalism and the politics of recognition* (Taylor 1992). Taylor’s argument runs roughly as follows. Human beings form their identity in dialogue with their surroundings. We are thus deeply cultural beings, and our culture remains a part of our identity. If a person’s cultural identity is not recognized (whatever that may mean), this will cause psychological harm. It seems as if Taylor is not worried about the majority: their culture is very much recognized, even to the extent of being taken for granted and not seen as cultural at all, but simply “universal” or “neutral”. Taylor would then say that a so-called “difference blind” society is systematically depriving minorities of a source of human flourishing that it supplies to the majority.

Will Kymlicka’s book *Multicultural Citizenship* (1995) is often referred to as the most mature presentation of mainstream multiculturalism. It is his attempt to

show that multiculturalism is not at odds with liberalism. On the contrary, it is, according to Kymlicka, an approach that springs out of liberalism. Furthermore, Kymlicka sees his multiculturalism as a viable way to save liberalism from perceived threats that emerge under the conditions of cultural diversity. Kymlicka makes one point clear: multiculturalism wants to grant the individual a right to culture, not give rights to cultures. Any policy measures that incorporate groups with identity claims, or aims to strengthen a cultural group, are means to an end. This end is a society where the access to an authentic culture (your own) is equally available to all citizens. Kymlicka argues that liberalism is based on letting the individual live by her own choices. The role of culture is that of a context of choice for the individual. He makes the fair point that the options we see before us as we choose our path through life are culturally filtered. Furthermore, the scale by which we evaluate the value of the options in front of us is also cultural. Cultures, then, should be supported and recognized so that they can continue to offer a rich tapestry of life options to citizens as they live their lives.

I have now presented “mainstream multiculturalism” as a mode of thought that emerged in Canada, and peaked in popularity towards the end of the 1990s. It is still a relevant body of thought for understanding present day discussions about cultural diversity in contemporary Western Europe. However, mainstream multiculturalism has faced some important criticisms. These criticisms form a set of concerns that form the basis of the present discussions about multiculturalism. I shall present these criticisms in the section that follows.

2.3: Critiques of Multiculturalism

In this section, I present four central criticisms of multiculturalism:

1: Multiculturalism gets in the way of the self-expression of majorities. This is the criticism that comes from the mono-cultural nationalist participants of public debate. Skirbekk (2008), but also to a lesser extent Brox (Lindbekk, Brox and Skirbekk 2003) and Nore (2009), argues that nation states, and the ethnic solidarity that underlies Nordic welfare states, is threatened by a multicultural ethic. Amongst the holders of this multicultural ethic, traditional Norwegianness is the only cultural expression that is frowned upon. In a sense, this is a marginal argument in the academic debate about cultural diversity. However, it is an argument with political impact, and I find this a good reason to include it in an overview like this. A more subtle argument comes from Agedal (2001; Brottveit, Hovland and Agedal 2004), who argues that there exists a misunderstood ethos of cultural sensitivity which causes institutions to underplay national rituals. It seems implicit in Agedal's approach that these rituals are flexible enough to accommodate new cultural impulses. Thus, rituals can expand the notions of Norwegianness rather than restrict the life of any individual member of a minority participating in the ritual. My own data also reveals a similar concern among teachers: they are afraid to offend, and some are very cautious when presenting instances of majority culture, often resulting in "safe" pedagogies leaning heavily on textbooks.

2: Multiculturalism causes the fragmentation of society. An important instance of this concern is when, in 2004, the chair of the Commission for Racial

Equality, Trevor Phillips, claimed that multiculturalism was turning into a “*dangerous form of benign neglect and exclusion*” (quoted in Phillips 2007: 5). Anne Phillips further comments: “*In a significant marker of a new approach towards cultural diversity, the Community Cohesion Review Team set up to review the events was charged with identifying good practice on social cohesion*” (Phillips 2007: 5). Amartya Sen summarises this concern when he points out that many policies that were implemented with the label “multiculturalism” should rather be seen as “plural monoculturalism” (Sen 2006).

3: *Multiculturalism does not secure the rights of women and minorities within the minorities.* Susan Okin led the way in her essay “*Is multiculturalism bad for women?*” (Okin et al. 1999), a question she answered with a clear “yes”. Brian Barry (2001) also makes this point forcefully. The thrust of this argument is that multiculturalist policies have tended to benefit traditional elites and men within the groups. These tend to act as gatekeepers. Illiberal forms of discrimination have, Okin and Barry claim, been legitimized under the cloak of “culture”.

4: *Multiculturalism “freezes” cultures* that would, under other institutional circumstances, be in a process of flux and change. Identities may be reified and traditions can stagnate. The work of Gerd Baumann (1996; 1999) might represent this critique. There are at least two aspects of this. One aspect is the freezing of culture, which might occur to fit into the institutional structures put in place by a state. A second aspect is, again, that multicultural policies tend,

according to these critics, to put power in the hands of traditional leaders who act as gatekeepers to the cultural group.

These four concerns, taken together or separately, represent the most common and important criticisms of mainstream multiculturalism. They concern the results of multicultural policy. Nevertheless, they also present challenges to social theorizing about multiculturalism. The first concern is of a slightly different nature than the other three. Eriksen and Stjernfelt (2009: 17-18) point out that nationalism and multiculturalism (certainly what I have called mainstream multiculturalism) share a “culturalist” view of the world. In many cases, people who attack multiculturalism on the basis of how it restricts the majority population will not be that concerned with the remaining three points. Conversely, those who criticize multiculturalism according to points 2, 3 and 4 above, would often find themselves levelling the same criticism towards nationalists as multiculturalists. Finally, even though I am critical of both overt and implicit national frames of mind, I want to emphasize that nationalism is not merely an ogre from the past. Billig (1995: 43-46) argues that even though “hot” nationalism is rarely seen amongst scholars and ruling elites, “banal” and taken-for-granted nationalisms abound. Such banal nationalism may underlie many moderate and mainstream political positions, and the rejection and demonization of such nationalism by a perceived politically correct elite might be an important aspect of the rise of the populist right in Europe.

These four points sum up the challenges that scholars and policy makers now face when dealing with cultural diversity. I call this “the third phase” of

multiculturalism. Nationalist, liberal, hybridist, cosmopolitan, bolstering mainstream multiculturalism or re-branding multiculturalism strategies are all part of this picture. I shall conclude this review of multiculturalism by turning my attention to three representatives of this third phase. The first is Tariq Modood. He argues that multiculturalism in its mainstream understanding still has a role to play. The second is Anne Phillips. She wishes to save multiculturalism from the groupism of the old mainstream approach. Both either wish for, or implicitly already use, a differentiated and flexible social ontology of groups. The third is Gerd Baumann, who has developed the most effective analytical tool for putting such a differentiated and flexible social ontology into practice. He distinguishes between *dominant* and *demotic discourses* in how groups with identity claims were talked about.

2.4: Contemporary debates

I present these three scholars to pinpoint what these cutting edge researchers share despite their disagreements. This discussion can make clearer why this thesis is a relevant contribution to the academic conversation about multiculturalism.

Tariq Modood:

Tariq Modood is a political sociologist and the most vocal defender of multiculturalism today. His position is self-consciously in the tradition of mainstream multiculturalism, pointing to Young, Taylor, Kymlicka and Parekh as inspiration. His book *Multiculturalism - a Civic Idea* (2007) is, according to

himself, an “*attempt to rally back the lost support for multiculturalism among the centre-left*” (Modood 2008: 552). Central to his concern is to establish a non-essentialist conception of groups. He argues that an idea of groups is crucial to enable collective agency and social mobilisation along axes where people find themselves oppressed or marginalised. In other words, without some concept of groups, Modood argues, social theorists and policy makers will be blind to a crucial and legitimate avenue of political struggle: identity politics.

Modood clearly recognises the flexibility and variation between different groups and types of groups. He writes:

[...] not all groups are groups in the same way. Some might have a much more organized community structure than others; one might have strong economic networks based on religious affiliation, another on endogamy, and yet another may be much more economically dependent on the position of educational qualifications or on shaping popular culture (Modood 2007: 117).

This does not mean that cultures do not exist. Modood uses Wittgenstein’s concept of family resemblance to establish what he calls a non-essentialist concept of groups. A family may share in a set of traits, but no one trait is shared by all. It is nevertheless possible to recognize the family as a group.

This means that a sensible multiculturalist policy, in Modood’s opinion, will deal with the concerns of each group if and when the group mobilises to address these concerns. It is important to Modood that groups are groups in different ways. What works for religious group A does not necessarily work for ethnic

group B. Many minority groups see themselves as marginalised or challenged by the labels the majority and other groups might use to describe them, or perceive institutional structures of society to work to their disadvantage. Modood suggests that any public response should be a response to actual suggestions from concrete social movements: if citizens choose to mobilise around a cultural identity, then they should be free to do so. Modood does not propose a once-and-for-all model of what a multicultural society should look like. It might be an urban, hybridist, *melange*-like society. It might become parallel groups with strict boundaries. Most likely, some groups, or some boundaries between groups, will be of the first variety, others of the second. His point is that this should be the result of a bottom-up political process with individual and collective grass-root agency. It should not be a top-down government strategy of detailed identity management.

Anne Phillips:

Anne Phillips (2007; 2008) also wishes to reclaim multiculturalism. However, she is more sceptical of groups and group rights than Modood. There are two reasons for this. First, she emphasizes the internal power structures within minority groups to a greater extent than Modood. This is not surprising, given her feminist position. Second, she emphasizes that dominant ideas, are core aspects of the structures of marginalisation, bigotry and racism that constitute the problems in diverse societies. These dominant ideas include the idea that cultural difference is fundamental and profound, and the conflation of individual identity and group identity.

She does not do without a concept of groups. However, she insists that policy should not involve corporate rights, nor should it treat groups with identity claims as corporate entities. She then proceeds with case comparisons and analysis, and emerges with a set of arguments that is internally coherent and that answer many of the challenges she argues against. However, her approach means that crucial concepts, in this case “groups” and “culture”, remain un-theorised, defined only by negation through the many cases we have seen. It is difficult to apply a “Phillips-ian” approach to cases she does not deal with in her books herself. She does not provide easily transferable analytical tools.

There is one important strategic difference between Phillips and Modood. They both identify a foundational and static view of culture (especially non-western cultures) as a major aspect in the marginalisation of cultural minorities. However, they disagree about the best way of fighting this. Modood argues that people need to mobilise along the lines upon which they feel challenged and that this means taking the labels of oppression as the rallying point for an emancipatory political movement (Modood 2008: 552). Phillips argues, on the other hand, that pigeonholing in static groups may be part of the origin of oppression, and as such must be identified, neutralised and fought directly .

The concerns that Modood and Phillips highlight would be easier to write and think about if they shared an analytical vocabulary that gave substance to a *differentiated social ontology of groups*. Modood all but says this explicitly. His philosophical anchoring of the social existence of groups in the concept of family resemblance gives a coherent response to naive deconstructionists. It also

gives a framework that allows for considerable variation within his concept of “group”. He lacks, however, a vocabulary that allows him to structure the space within that framework. He has established that it makes sense to talk about groups, even though groups exist in the world in a whole variety of ways. However, he can only describe cases and examples. Beyond that he (reluctantly, it seems to me) continues to speak in an analytical language. He often uses only the end-points of a sliding scale: essentialist and anti-essentialist understanding of groups. No groups in the world exist at these extreme points. They exist in the sticky and slippery grey areas. Another weakness of Modood’s theorising (though not his examples and so clearly not his world-view) is that he theorises as if the meeting between a group and a policy-maker is a one-time affair. He provides no language to discuss the feedback-loops whereby policy influences the solidity or the fluidity of the group (for more on feedback-loops in identity formation, see Hacking 2004).

Phillips, on her part, seems to avoid theorising about her concepts altogether, in a welcome focus on the subject matter: the cases at hand. However, it makes her concepts of culture and groups hard to grasp. This makes it more difficult to reapply her approach in other questions. It also results in very different readings of her thinking (compare for instance Squires 2008; Thompson 2008). Nevertheless, she writes in ways that indicate that she sees the groupness of groups as something variable and processual. She speaks of how a policy move may result in “solidifying the group into something very substantial” (Phillips 2007: 19). Phillips works within a differentiated and processual social ontology of groups, but does not make this explicit anywhere. Instead, she remains tied to

speaking of groups as essential and non-essential, reified or not reified, as if groups were either non-existent or forever set in stone.

Gerd Baumann:

In his book *Contesting culture* (1996) Gerd Baumann presented an approach to analysing groups with identity claims. Through his detailed analysis of the very diverse London borough of Southall, he arrived at his dual concept of *dominant* and *demotic discourse* (Baumann 1996: 188-190). Baumann uses the term dominant discourse in a way that is parallel to what I call mainstream multiculturalism. When people used the dominant discourse, they employed a static and bounded concept of culture. This discourse was embedded in politics and institutionalised through schools and local government. Demotic discourse, on the other hand, was from “below”, and was far more flexible, and drew its resources from the everyday life of people involved. In demotic discourse, cultural artefacts (such as words, figures of speech, music, forms of dance) moved across group boundaries. This did not mean that individuals did not employ the dominant discourse. Baumann’s point is that individuals and groups behave strategically in terms of which discourse they employ in what situation.

To my mind this gives a fine-tuned instrument to analyse how groups do their groupness, and how the practical working out of categories results in groups being groups in different ways, and to different extents. When people use the dominant discourse, they tend, according to Baumann, to solidify groups. Using the dominant discourse, they tap into resources from politics and various policy benefits that might be material or symbolic. In writing this thesis, I have

benefited much from Baumann's approach. Not only is it more suited to ethnographic description than the work of Modood and Phillips, it also responds to many of the concerns they raise. It is processual, it allows an explanation and a description of how groups vary both across groups and across time. In other words, it provides a differentiated social ontology.

I am inspired by Baumann's approach, but I do not adopt it. Firstly, the word "discourse" means too many things to too many people, so I want to use it sparingly. More importantly, his analytical terms pre-suppose an empirical connection between a discourse emerging "from above", and the process of solidifying culture. Conversely, he sees a connection between discourses emerging from below, and fluidising processes. One can easily imagine a case of solidifying actions emerging from below, or fluidising actions coming from a figure of authority. This goes against the grain of Baumann's model. This is not really a criticism of his work - he developed his terms in the face of his data, where this empirical connection was clearly present. It is, however, an argument for why I do not wish to adopt his model. Thirdly, he builds the normative analysis into his terms. It is clear that "dominant discourse" is bad and "demotic" is good. Now, I shall not claim that I will be able to come up with neutral terms. That is impossible. However, I do think that someone who disagreed with my normative analysis could use the terms that I suggest. Finally, Baumann's model fails to take account of competing discourses, be they from above or below. How does an analyst use Baumann's terms to analyse a situation where there are several dominant discourses? Or, and this is connected to the first point about the term "discourse", are the ways of talking about these

issues “from above” reducible to “a discourse”? Again, in Baumann’s ethnography in South London in the mid-1990s, he argues convincingly that this is indeed the case. The message of groupism and mainstream multiculturalism was THE dominant mode of political action in relation to cultural diversity. The flexible, conflictual and processual aspects of Baumann’s approach are an inspiration for my own work. However, these ideas would be more widely applicable if they were formulated at a more general level of theorising.

Carter and Fenton:

A consequence of the debate about multiculturalism is that present research still has not found good enough analytical tools for the description of groups with identity claims. One of the six responses to mainstream multiculturalism listed earlier was to treat groups as the objects to be explained, rather than using group belongings as explanatory resources. The following section will present some recent work that develops this avenue.

I wish to turn on a debate concerning ethnicity, which I see as another subset of “groups with identity claims”. In their article, Carter and Fenton (2010) argue that many contemporary scholars wish to “rethink” ethnicity. Carter and Fenton go further; they want to “think without ethnicity” (Carter and Fenton 2010: 2). Their argument radically goes against any form of primordealism, substantivism or essentialism when referring to ethnicity. They specifically refer to the work of Ruane and Todd (2004) and Rogers Brubaker’s book with the telling title “ethnicity without groups” (2004). Rather than thinking about people as always already part of ethnic groups, they argue that the relevant explanatory factors to

study are “[...] *not ethnicity, but power, resources, social relations and institutions [...]*” (Carter and Fenton 2010: 2). They argue instead for a return to the more classic concerns of sociology: “*We are seeking a sociology of power, the state, class relations and inequality, economic change and social institutions, which are the staples of sociology*” (2010: 3). In a sense, their article contains a checklist of criteria for a successful analysis of groups with identity claims. Consequently, I shall list some of their relevant claims. They argue for

“an alternative approach in a sociology which emphasizes agency, and is grounded in an analysis of actors in material situations. This is allied to the concept of ideational resources, social categories and identities upon which actors draw, [...]. [T]hese ideas and assumptions are played out in a context of material and political change” (2010: 1-2).

Without explicitly claiming that their approach is within what they broadly call “sociological realism”, they do draw on literature within that tradition. This tradition may be understood as a subset of “critical realism” and may include theorists such as Layder (1997), Archer (2003), Sayer (2000), Hammersley (1990) and Fairclough (Fairclough, Sayer and Jessop 2002). Carter and Fenton argue that they rely on a “*stratified social ontology: that is to say that it recognizes as analytically distinct, and hence as mutually influential, different domains of the social world*” (Carter and Fenton 2010: 17).

This thesis is addressed directly at several of the points made by Carter and Fenton. I share the basic thrust of their argument. Specifically, I hope to turn to group formation as a question to be answered. Furthermore, I attempt to emphasise agency and ground my analysis in material situations. I *do* look upon identities and social categories as ideational resources upon which actors draw. I also wish to situate my study in the context of material and political change. A quick look at the differences also works to pinpoint my relation to previous literature. Rather than being a statement of intent, though, the thesis is an attempt at an empirical case study. As such, I am rather relating to the “staples” of other sociological traditions than that of class analysis. Specifically, I am inspired by a Foucauldian tradition of discourse analysis in my document analysis, and a tradition of social interactionism inspired by Erving Goffman in my classroom ethnography. This is not to deny class analysis. Indeed, I have tried to minimize the impact of class through selecting schools for my case study analysis with broadly similar class positions. Also, to the extent to which class is made explicit, it appears in the historical context for the investigation. Thus, I approach the question of thinking about groups with identity claims as something to be explained through the staples of a micro-sociological tradition.

In his article ‘Between Foucault and Goffman’ (2004), Ian Hacking argues that *“Michel Foucault’s ‘archaeology’ and Erving Goffman’s interpersonal sociology are complementary. Both are essential for understanding how classifications of people interact with the people classified [...]”* (Hacking 2004: 277). In this sense, I follow Hacking’s example and, in terms of social theory, I stand “between Foucault and Goffman”, the title of his article. Carter and Fenton

themselves use Hacking in their presentation of a social ontology. They present his terms “making up people” and “feedback loop” as a basis for understanding the material and reflexive aspects of identification and group formation (Hacking 1999; 2004). It seems to me that Carter and Fenton see in Hacking the beginnings of a social theory that gives a firm grounding for the powerful kind of analyses that talk about how instances of the world are “socially constructed” without taking up an anti-realist position. In his book ‘The social construction of... what?’ (1999), Hacking argues that the phrase “X is socially constructed” rarely means “X does not really exist”, rather that X is not set in stone, and is subject to the agency of various stakeholders.

Carter and Fenton write about a stratified social ontology (2010: 17). By this they mean that the world is divided into analytically separate social domains. I deal with this issue in two ways. Firstly, I use Goodlad’s (1979) and Afdal’s (2006) model of domains of curricula to model religious education in Norway. In practical terms, this represents a mid-level stratified ontology of the wider field of religious education in Norway. I use this model for two reasons. Firstly, it allows me to analyse two different forms of data under one analytical umbrella. Secondly, and connected to the first point, it allows me to argue for connections between my two bodies of data. In a sense, this is just what Carter and Fenton argue that Layder’s ‘domains of the social world’ do (Carter and Fenton 2010; Layder 1994; 1997). I claim that my use of “domains of curriculum” has a closer fit to the empirical field of this study than Layder’s abstract categories.

Further, my concept of *viscosity* aims to give an analytical metaphor to grasp a variable ontology of groups with identity claims. Rather than distinct and abstract “stratifications”, I describe a continuous scale of faster or slower moving flows. This means that the different domains of any field, and their degree of solidity, must be established empirically in any given study. In this way, empirically, an ethnic group may be very stable and slow-changing. The group’s fluidity is glacial: its viscosity is high. As such it is very much “real”. Such a group can “do” things in the world. Nevertheless, this understanding of the group does not reify groupness, and is consistent with the claim that fluidity is logically prior to stability.

Finally, the question of “slow flow” leads to the final discussion that runs as a subterranean theme through this thesis. Critical realists pose a range of challenges to what they frame as a dominant, constructionist mode of explanation in sociology of multiculturalism, identity and religion. This divide may be overemphasised. Nevertheless, I feel that constructionists must find ways of speaking convincingly of stabilities and the materialities of their objects of investigation. This thesis is a starting attempt to bring to the table new analytical metaphors that start to bridge the gap between constructionists and realists. I start from a position of a constructionist reaching out towards realists. If realists would say that this is a “realist” account of groups with identity claims, that would be an indication that I have, to some extent, succeeded in my ambition.

2.5: Concluding remarks

This discussion frames my analytical aims in this thesis and provides some analytical tools to discuss and describe the groupness of groups with identity claims. My review of the literature on multiculturalism suggests that there is a need for analytical tools that achieve the following:

- A differentiated social ontology of groups with identity claims
- A processual view of group formation and the changes in the groupness of groups with identity claims
- A practical way to break down abstract notions of structure and agency.
- A description of groupness that gives structure to the present grey area between non-existence and essentialist descriptions of groups
- Applicability to a range of cases

Debates about multiculturalism act as an umbrella. Underneath its canopy there is a range of more specific, local debates that revolve around the same, fundamental issues. In the rest of this chapter, I shall present two such debates. The first is a debate within religious education, concerning the representation of religion. The second is the recent literature discussion concerning the interface between Norwegianness and sexuality. These two debates touch on the subject matter that I deal with in my empirical work. However, they also show that the issues concerning groupness and a differentiated social ontology of groups are relevant to these debates. Not only are they relevant, but they are relevant in

analogous ways. This is why I claim that developing analytical tools through a case study may speak to several literatures simultaneously.

This concludes the presentation of the general debates around multiculturalism. In the two following chapters, I move on to present two more case-specific literatures and their relevance to my research aims. However, I note that the general questions outlined in the discussion on multiculturalism are revisited and instantiated in the two chapters that follow. I start with presenting a recent body of literature that may be called ‘the Norwegian sexualities approach’.

3. NORWEGIAN SEXUALITIES

3.1: Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss my findings and analysis in the light of a new and specific literature discussing Norwegianness, gender and heteronormativity. I shall call this literature the Norwegian Sexualities Approach. It is focussed around discussions on Norwegianness and heteronormativity, though it also includes contributions on other aspects of sexuality. Also, some of the contributors are also involved in research on gender and feminist theorising. There is a range of reasons for focussing on this literature. First, and most important, is my own finding that gender and sexuality are the topics within which discussions of Norwegianness are most often discussed directly. Gender equality and homotolerance are often presented and understood as relevant markers of Norwegianness. In the struggle of inclusion and exclusion, the gendered and sexed bodies of various minorities stand as the most visible battleground.

Second, there is a significant empirical overlap between the fields of religion, gender and sexuality in relation to discussions of Norwegianness. They are all often spoken of in terms of values, a term which will be a crucial object of investigation in my analysis in later chapters.

Third, this literature is an example of a wider trend that also includes this thesis: the study of power-laden identities. Masculinities, whiteness, heterosexuality,

Norwegianness (which can be substituted for just about any Western country-ness) and secularity are all topics that have been of greater interest to social scientists in recent years.

Fourth, the underlying theoretical approach of this literature, inspired by post-colonial and queer theory, speaks to my own theoretical analysis. It does so both in terms of some important similarities, and in terms of some differences. In comparing and contrasting the strategies of the “Norwegian sexualities” approach with my own, I hope to highlight two points. First, I see my own work as complementary and supportive of theirs. Second, I will be able to pinpoint that which is distinctive about my own analytical voice, and discuss in what circumstances this represents a useful development to a wider academic and political endeavour: to understand connections between identity and empowerment in societies such as Norway, that are coming to terms with a newly discovered plurality.

The research program CULCOM at the University of Oslo, Åse Røthing in particular, has been instrumental in producing and co-ordinating research done on “Norwegian sexualities”. Important contributors to this approach are Åse Røthing and Stina Helene Svendsen (Røthing 2007a; 2007b; 2007c; 2008; Røthing, Mühleisen and Svendsen 2009; Røthing and Svendsen 2008; 2010; Forthcoming; Røthing and Svendsen 2009b), Randi Gressgård, Cathrine Egeland and Christine M. Jacobsen (Egeland and Gressgård 2007; Gressgård 2005; 2008; Gressgård and Jacobsen 2008) as well as the contributors to the edited volume “Norske Sexualiteter [Norwegian Sexualities]” edited, and

significantly contributed to, by Røthing and Wenche Mühleissen (Røthing and Mühleissen 2009). May-Len Skilbrei's chapter (Skilbrei 2009) also argues that the accepted range of sexualities on display is different for different ethnic groups, and that there exists an accepted "normal" Norwegian style of displaying sexuality. Though not directly involved in this exchange, the work of the anthropologist Marianne Gullestad should be mentioned (2002; 2007). The writers in the Norwegian Sexualities Approach frequently cite her work, and she pioneered the descriptions of Norwegian identity from a perspective informed by post-colonial theory. Røthing, Mühleissen and Svendsen point out that their line of inquiry is part of a wider international body of work that emphasises how sexuality is mobilised as a boundary that demarcates the "western" from the "non-western" (Røthing et al. 2009: 1). They cite, amongst others, Oyewumi (1997), Narayan (1997) and Butler (2009). Similar work in Sweden includes Lundström (2009) and Bäckman (2009). Furthermore, they point out that the intersection of religion and sexuality in particular, is mobilised to draw the lines between "us" and "them", such as Puar (2007), Jacobsen (2004), Gressgård and Jacobsen (2008) and their own work (Røthing et al. 2009: 5)

3.2: The work of Åse Røthing, an example of the Norwegian Sexualities approach

Røthing has written, or contributed to, much of the most important work within the Norwegian sexualities approach. Her work outlines a mode of analysis of Norwegian identity that I find useful, and which intersects with my own work. I

will therefore use her work as a representative of the Norwegian sexualities approach.

Røthing, in her article *homotolerance and heteronormativity in Norwegian classrooms* (2008), shows how homotolerance is encouraged in sex-education in Norwegian schools. She argues, however, that this is done in a way that erects boundaries between “good” Norwegianness and “bad” cultures, either elsewhere or within the national borders as a result of recent immigration. Based on her fieldwork in Norwegian schools, she claims that “*The overall goal for the teaching seems to be to make sure the (presumed heterosexual) students develop tolerant attitudes towards homosexuals and homosexuality and thus become good Norwegian citizens*” (Røthing 2008: 259).

She points to how metaphors of “development” or “progress” are used, seemingly representing an evolutionary account of cultural difference, with Norway at, or near, the top. Furthermore, she argues that the presentation of homotolerance through schoolbooks and teachers’ practice maintains or produces heteronormativity. This may seem a paradox. However, she points to a variety of instances that exemplify ways in which the naming and teaching about homosexuality, while well intended, reinforce rigid categories of sexualities and the privileging of heterosexuality as unmarked and “normal”. She points out how much of the education is geared towards how pupils, who are assumed to be heterosexual, should tolerate, and be positive towards homosexuals. This entails telling stories of the difficulties of being gay or lesbian, and the discrimination they face.

However, according to Røthing, the teachers simultaneously tell another kind of story. Homopositive teachers want to encourage and empower pupils that are, or might be, homosexual, that “*it is perfectly OK to be gay in contemporary Norway*” (Røthing 2008: 259). Røthing comments on the resulting potential paradox like this:

However, the message ‘it is perfectly OK to be gay in Norway today’ obviously contradicts with the teachers’ emphasising of the problems gays and lesbians do face or might face, and one might ask whether the first message comes through when a significant part of the teaching dealing with homosexuality seems to focus on various sorts of ‘problems’. (Røthing 2008: 259).

Røthing moves on to focus on four ways in which teaching for homotolerance can reproduce heteronormativity.

- i) The pupils are often spoken to as if they are a heterosexual “we”, tolerating “them”.
- ii) The heterosexual “we” are conceptualised as here, whereas the different “other” is conceptualised as somewhere else, “out there”, mirroring an image of centre and margin in the hetero-homosexual matrix.
- iii) Heterosexuality remains taken for granted and invisible.
- iv) Homosexuality is presented as something that one can be “for” or “against”, seen as a moral question, and a question that the heterosexual is in the privileged position to ponder.

Finally, Røthing argues that homopositivity ends at the point where it challenges heteroprivileges, and also at the point where it challenges the stability of sexual categories. The educational material presents men having sex with men or women having sex with women as OK, as long as those involved *actually are* gay or lesbian, or at least honestly trying to find out where their sexuality lies. Røthing writes:

Questions like ‘maybe my attraction to the “opposite” sex will go over after a while? and ‘maybe I will stop being a heterosexual if I just wait and see’? are not likely to be introduced through lectures dealing with sexuality. (Røthing 2008: 263).

It is important to remember here that this homotolerance is firmly presented to be something that marks “Norwegianness”. Røthing finds that gender equality and homotolerance stand as *the* areas where Norwegian culture is presented as having something to offer. Røthing finds this to be the case, both in the sexual politics that underlie curriculum development and classroom practice in Norway. Interestingly, the implication is that “Norwegianness” is imagined as homopositive but heterosexual. Homopositivity becomes a marker of Norwegianness, even while the notion of Norwegianness remains firmly heteronormative.

This link between homopositivity and Norwegianness is further developed and documented in Gressgård and Jacobsen (2008). They point to a range of examples of how acceptance of homosexuality is presented as a marker of how well migrant minorities are integrated in Norway. The main focus of interest

concerns Islam in Norway. They analyse writings in the public sphere, as well as government documents.

3.3: Discussion

There is a coherent theoretical underpinning for this approach. Mühleissen, Røthing and Svendsen give some detail as to how they see this. They present the approach as informed by foucauldian biopolitics, butlerian queer theory and post-colonial feminism (Mühleissen, Røthing and Svendsen 2009). Randi Gressgård has also contributed to several articles that present theoretical foundations for the mode of analysis that I have called the Norwegian sexualities approach, such as Gressgård (2005), Egeland and Gressgård (2007) and Gressgård and Jacobsen (2008).

In their article *The “Will to Empower”* Cathrine Egeland and Randi Gressgård (2007) investigate feminist uses of the term *intersectionality*. It seems that this term carries with it a useful analytical strategy, seeing different identity-categories such as gender, race or class not as separate, nor merely additive, but mutually constitutive and interwoven in complex ways. The aim of the article is to find ways of theorising feminist issues in a way that avoids essentialising categories, but still gives some foundation for political action. In this article, and in the questions raised here, Gressgård and Egeland lift questions relevant for the Norwegian Sexualities approach into an epistemological and ontological debate discussing various understandings of constructionism and realism. These questions have clear similarities to the questions discussed in the former section

on representation of religion. It is these questions that my analytical tools are intended to address.

Gressgård and Egeland identify two problems they see as emerging in the attempt to understand complex identification categories in non-essentialist ways. First, they observe that many researchers deconstruct “*the dominant order but exempt the unprivileged other*” (Egeland and Gressgård 2007, 212). However, even though this is given political justification, Egeland and Gressgård seem to suggest that these strategies often involve a certain epistemological sleight of hand: such analysts are, according to Egeland and Gressgård, seeing the powerful within a constructivist framework, whereas the powerless are seen within a framework of authenticity or even a surreptitious realism. They mention Beverley Skeggs as an example of this. Egeland and Gressgård are presenting a view very similar to my own. They point out, and criticize, what I call an understanding of power as distortive. The stories of the powerful distort the truth, whereas the stories of the powerless, apparently, do not.

Secondly, they identify the critical realist work of Leslie McCall as presenting another possible solution to the problem of construction and political mobilisation. According to Egeland and Gressgård, McCall claims that a critical realist approach will avoid essentialism, processes of othering and provide a valid knowledge basis for an anti-hegemonic politics through a “*systematic sensitivity to the complexity of the world*” (Egeland and Gressgård 2007: 217). They seem to dismiss this approach with reference to the idea that our complexity management strategies are also the result of the relevant actors’ “will

to power”. In other words, construction will still have the final word in how we make sense of the world, according to Egeland and Gressgård.

These abstract challenges translate directly into the topics discussed within the Norwegian sexualities approach. Let us take the first point: Non-hegemonic positions are also the result of the actors “will to power”. “Deconstructing the hegemonic Norwegian position” often entails pointing to the arbitrariness of markers of Norwegianness, as well as showing how these markers tend to serve some political purpose. Often, such deconstruction aims to show that what is seen as “authentic” is better understood as politically useful for someone powerful. However, deconstruction in this style may not be a sufficient basis for political change. Maybe big doesn’t need to be bad, and the state has valid reasons to target and sanction the minority practices that it finds problematic. Also, “dominant” and “hegemonic” become slippery terms, especially in discussions involving intersectionality. When ethnic majority, sexual minorities (white gays and lesbians, say) criticize ethnic minority sexual majorities (Norwegian-Pakistani homophobia), who is being hegemonic? Another slippery slope is the framing of scale: Homotolerance may be a minority view in a global scale, a hegemonic view in Norwegian public discourse, and a minority view in various cultural and sub-cultural groups in Norway today.

This vision of power as distortive is something the authors often are aware of.² Constructionist accounts of the world are often the result of an attempt to disassemble the natural to give space for political action. It seems to be a

² I shall come back to this in greater detail in my discussion of Robert Jackson’s writing in chapter 4.4.

problem of language that these texts seem to imply criticism or unreality of the object of analysis. The authors are often aware of this, and the awareness results in caveats. Some examples of this are found in the Norwegian Sexualities literature: towards the end of their *Demanding Tolerance* article, Gressgård and Jacobsen summarise as follows:

That we in this article have contributed to deconstructing the discourse of tolerance and the functions of governance within liberal universalism, does not mean that we reject tolerance and liberal tolerance as such. (Gressgård and Jacobsen 2008: 37 my translation).

Similarly, Røthing and Svendsen start the conclusion of a chapter with the following caveat:

The analyses in the [chapter] above can maybe give the impression that we do not agree with the positive evaluation of those sexual norms that are presented as Norwegian, or that we do not think that coercion and lack of freedom in relation to sexuality are negative. This has not been our intention. On the contrary, we - of course - see consensuality and equality as absolutely crucial guidelines for human interaction in general, and sexual interaction in specific (Røthing and Svendsen 2009a: 76 My translation).

I have myself felt the need to include such caveats (Eriksen 2008a; 2008b). This is a weakness inherent in the constructivist language that has been developed so far. This is a challenge, maybe especially in terms of reaching out to larger

audiences and to make social research relevant to more people. Hopefully, a richer choice of developed analytical metaphors might be a help to unmask and critique some taken-for-granted and powerful identity categories. This is my ambition as well as the ambition of the Norwegian sexualities approach.

A crucial task of my analysis therefore, will be to show how my own analytical toolkit, presented in chapter 6, represents a useful addition, or complementary approach, to the analytical languages used within the Norwegian Sexualities approach. My analytical toolkit enables me to discuss the cultural and institutional arrangements (the “solidified work”) of dominant groups not as inherently evil fictions, but still place them under scrutiny and thus expand the space for political action.

Before I present my own conceptual approach in chapter 6, I use the next chapter to present one more relevant field of literature. This is a debate concerning how religion (or religions) should be represented in religious education. I focus on a debate between Robert Jackson and Andrew Wright.

4. THE INTERPRETIVE APPROACH TO RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The overarching research theme of this thesis is “how are religion and national identity connected in religious education in Norway”? To get to grips with this question it is clearly necessary to look at how religion is presented in the classroom. When it comes to understanding representation of religion in educational settings, there is already a vibrant academic literature. Is religion to be presented as insiders see it? As outsiders see it? Which insiders or which outsiders? Is “religion” in itself an ethnocentric term used to group together disparate phenomena which colonialists and missionaries thought looked like analogies to Christianity? How critical or positive is education towards any specific religious tradition? Or towards religion in general?

For many educationalists, these questions are not descriptive, but normative. They tend to ask how religion *should* be presented. That is not my primary concern here. My concern is how religion *is* presented, and how this relates to various groups that make “identity claims” in a context of plurality. However, several educationalists of religion have discussed multicultural and intercultural religious education, and provide useful benchmarks for comparison. More importantly, in developing my own account and analysis of what is going on in Norwegian religious education classrooms, I develop analytical tools that can be useful for educationalists as well.

4.1 The interpretive approach: A presentation

The focus of my presentation will be on the approach to Religious Education developed at the Warwick Religion and Education Research Unit, especially through the work of its director, Robert Jackson (Jackson 1997; 2003; 2004; 2008). In so far as one can talk about a thesis standing in a tradition, this thesis sees its view on representing religion as within the Interpretive Approach, but is hopefully a distinct enough piece of work to represent a contribution to the approach, not just an application of it.

The interpretive approach is a *multifaith, non-confessional* approach using *interpretive and hermeneutic* methods inspired by recent debates in social anthropology. As such it draws heavily on the methods and the findings of *ethnographic studies*, both in developing the underlying thinking, and in developing curricula and learning tools, such as textbooks. It is an approach, not a theory, and as such it is *epistemologically open*, developing tools that aim to include a range of perspectives, both from the researchers and educators that use it, as well as the learners. Jackson has operationalised the approach by suggesting that users develop and apply their *sensitivity* in relation to following three concepts to their research or their teaching: *representation, interpretation* and *reflexivity*.

Jackson presents the *aims* of the approach as follows:

With our approach, a basic aim of RE is to develop a knowledge and understanding of the grammar - the language and wider symbolic patterns - used by people within religious traditions, so

one might understand better their beliefs, feelings and attitudes. It is hoped that through this, inter-religious and inter-cultural understanding will be fostered [...] (Jackson 1997: 129, original emphasis).

The historical and philosophical background will already have given some understanding of what Jackson means by the three concepts of representation, interpretation and reflexivity. However, in what follows I will elaborate on how the three operationalising concepts are brought into use for teachers and researchers within religious education.

Representation:

This has mainly to do with presenting religion. Jackson is sceptical of abstract outside accounts of religion. He claims that these are often totalising and removed from context. His scepticism leads him to deconstruct the notion of religion into three constituent parts: i) *the individual*, ii) *the membership groups* and iii) *the religious traditions* (Jackson 1997). Jackson emphasises that a programme of learning can start at any point in the hermeneutic circle, in this case in any of the three domains of religion. Nevertheless, in the curriculum material produced by WRERU, the religious traditions are presented from the perspective of an individual (often a child approximately the same age as the intended learners) in the context of one (or more) membership groups. So, rather than being presented with facts about, for instance, Hindu beliefs and rituals, the learners are introduced to a young Hindu. To the extent that beliefs and rituals

are part of the spiritual life of this individual, learners are introduced to these *in context*.

This tri-partite subdivision of the concept of religion has several advantages in terms of the pitfalls Jackson and his research team wanted to avoid. It allows for different individuals identifying with the same religion (or at least the same religious label) presenting different, perhaps even contradictory, versions of their religious tradition. It can also illustrate how one individual may draw on several religious traditions, or even several membership groups (either within or across traditions). The introduction of the membership group (the denomination, sect, caste, congregation, the mosque or the temple or youth groups etc) also allows for the contexts of choice, presenting possibilities and constraints on the choices that the individual can make. All in all, it allows for subtle and contextual representations of religions that can also present the internal diversity of religious traditions.

Interpretation:

This refers to the process by which the pupil gains and constructs knowledge of a religious tradition or an aspect of religious experience or life. Rather than attempting to set aside the previous knowledge of the learner, the aim is to build upon it, relating and re-relating new concepts to previously known concepts (Jackson 2004: 88). This also has relevance to the various learning styles and different backgrounds that any group of pupils may have.

Reflexivity:

Jackson highlights three aspects of reflexivity (Jackson 1997; 2004). First, the impact that the subject matter may have on the pupil, through enabling the pupil to re-assess and understand their own way of life. Second, enabling the pupil to step outside the material studied, and engage in a constructive critique of the ideas presented. Critiquing religious traditions in a constructive way is a difficult, but increasingly relevant skill in a multi-faith society. This includes competence in the art of disagreement. Third, developing with the pupil the ability to assess one's own interpretive process. This includes the skill of methodological self-criticism. It seems natural to include in this third point the ability to assess the sources of information used in the teaching.

To summarize, Jackson argues for a Religious Education that is multi-faith, non-confessional, concerned with the lived context of religion and the way religion is actually *done*, highly aware of the internal diversity and contestation that exists within religions, and sensitive to the dangers of misrepresenting others through the use of one's own categories.

4.2: Relating the interpretive approach to other approaches to religious education

In his book *Rethinking Religious Education and Plurality* (Jackson 2004), Jackson compares and contrasts his approach to a range of other approaches to religious education. He focuses on the UK setting, but the arguments are relevant to many other countries. He quickly dismisses a public, confessional (in

the case of England and Wales, Christian) religious education, and also the model of publicly funded faith-based education. He dismisses arguments that claim that multi-faith religious education leads to relativism and confusion. He further argues (in Chapter 2) against the idea that it is the task of religious education to uphold any one religion for reasons of cultural continuity.

He also discusses what might be called contextual and dialogical approaches to religious education. He discusses the work of three scholars (Jackson 2004: Chapter 6). First, Heid Leganger-Krogstad's contextual approach, which emphasises engagement with the local community as the starting point of relating religious education to pupils. Second, Wolfram Weisse's dialogical approach, developed in Hamburg and emphasising face-to-face dialogue and issues of social justice and citizenship. Third, Julia Ipgrave's dialogical approach, developed in Leicester, going deeper into the dialogical, or multi-voiced, nature of children's discussions about religion. Jackson seems to see these approaches as compatible with the interpretive approach. Either he sees them simply as subsets, or as developments of his approach. Either way he sees no real need to adapt his own framework in the light of these findings.

Jackson goes on explicitly to reject what he calls post-modern approaches to religious education. He discusses the work of Erricker and Erricker (2000), as well as that of Wardecker and Miedema (quoted in Jackson 2004: chapter 7). He criticizes these for being practically unworkable, discriminating against pupils with foundationalist religious views and for not introducing children to crucial contemporary political issues. Finally, he discusses the religious literacy

approach (Jackson 2004: chapter 5). I shall focus on this work, partly because this approach is close enough to create some intellectual friction, but different enough to clarify some important aspects of the interpretive approach. Moreover, Jackson later discusses further points concerning the representation of religion in the classroom with the most prominent advocate of the religious literacy approach, Andrew Wright (Jackson 2008). My particular interest in this debate is that it parallels the academic discussion about multiculturalism concerning how to understand groups with identity claims.

4.3 The interpretive approach compared to the religious literacy approach

Andrew Wright's main concern is, certainly in his recent work, that religious education should deal with questions of Truth with a capital T (Jackson 2004; Wright 2007; 2008). He calls this the religious literacy approach. He is not confessional, nor exclusive in his approach. Rather, he claims that religions are primarily based around claims of the ultimate truth of the world and the order of things. These claims are, in a profound way, mutually exclusive. This aspect of religion is not found in individual experience, but in the public linguistic traditions and communities (written and oral, one presumes) that uphold these truth-claims and make them come alive for their adherents. He ends his most recent book *Critical religious education: multiculturalism and the pursuit of truth* with the following exhortation:

[...] only by expanding the present experience of pupils in a manner that enables them to address issues central to the concerns

of the world's religions will it be possible to develop appropriate levels of religious literacy through which they can explore issues of ultimate truth and truthfulness in a critical and potentially life-changing manner (Wright 2007: 260).

Becoming literate in the ways in which the different religions present their truth claims, is the only way, according to Wright, in which pupils can grow in terms of living truthful lives themselves. The important thing to learn, then, is not how people are religious, but what religion can tell people. In order to achieve this, it is clear that he needs to present some form of mainstream version of these religions. Rather than seeing each religion as a distributed and situated collection of individuals and their versions of dogma and ritual, religious education should present some accepted orthodoxy. What makes Wright interesting for the purposes of this thesis is his insistence that religions can and should be treated as relatively stable entities, as “*robust social facts*” (Wright 2008: 5, 9-10). Furthermore, Wright claims that the truth-claims of accepted orthodoxy lies at the heart of each religion. Consequently, presenting the particular truth-claims of accepted mainstream versions of each religion is crucial for religious education. Without taking seriously that religions present mutually exclusive truth-claims,, religious education would not have any bearing on pupils’ ability to critically appraise their own and other’s claims to ultimate truth and truthfulness in life.

Wright is critical of what he calls a liberal consensus in British religious education. He claims that comprehensive liberalism is unable to cope with the

“*scandal*” that religions, when taken seriously, have particular, and mutually exclusive, truth-claims. Jackson is one of several examples of this, his “contextual” approach fragmenting the representation of any specific religion’s truth-claims into a mass of individual heterodoxies. Wright calls this an overdone nominalism, claiming that Jackson’s position is that the naming of any religion is nothing more than a label which covers disparate phenomena with nothing in common but their labelling as, say, “Muslim” or “Hindu”. According to Wright, this is a tactic that allows Jackson, and other liberal educationalists, to uphold their commitment to the basic values of freedom and tolerance.

So what is it Wright wants to achieve with his critical realism, and his insistence that religions can be presented as “*robust social facts*”? It seems as if Wright is suggesting a form of religious education that makes it clear that if religion A is right, then all the others are wrong. He sees this as a challenging truthfulness that comprehensive liberals are unable to deal with, since it implies that “tolerance” and “freedom” are not ultimate positions in relation to truth. It is important to emphasise that Wright does not want schools to engage in religious nurture of any one religion. Rather, it seems, he wants to emphasise that religion is about serious and difficult questions with real conflictual potential. Liberal approaches, according to Wright, underplay the seriousness of the fact that these religions are presenting different and deeply incompatible accounts of Ultimate Truth. “Tolerance,” is for Wright a glib and condescending approach to religious difference. He sees religious literacy as the best way that schools can help children engage maturely with the actual particular content of religion. His intention is to help young people to grow as humans from the message that

religions may have, but also to stand up respectfully and face disagreements about questions of ultimate truth. Wright sees epistemological and ontological realism as a precondition for achieving this aim.

Wright's main challenge to Jackson is in the 2008 article "*Contextual religious education and the actuality of religions.*" Wright writes:

Contextual religious educators tend to view discrete religious traditions as artificially constructed systems disconnected from the ordinary experiences of children and, as such, largely irrelevant to the process of personal formation (Wright 2008: 2).

He goes on to argue that Jackson's position indicates that, since no one insiders presentation can give a full account of a religious tradition, it is up to the researcher to "construct" the representation of the religion:

"This [an appreciation of power structures involved in representing religion] leaves him [Jackson] no alternative but to construct accounts of the religions, and to assess their validity by appealing to a consensus amongst the various interested parties, rather than considering the extent to which they adequately describe socio-cultural reality" (Wright 2008: 8).

According to Wright, Jackson claims that religions are only "arbitrary constructions" (2008: 7) imposed by western scholarship, and that religions exist "in name only" (2008: 5). In essence, Wright argues that the "bottom-up" approach of Jackson is in danger of misrepresenting religions as they appear as

social phenomena today. The checks and balances in place to make sure the individuals chosen are in some way “representative” are either lacking, or too bound up in a politically correct and positive presentation of the groups. Interestingly, Wright echoes a critique made by postmodernists Erricker and Erricker: that Jackson’s choices of voices are subject to disciplining forces of policy, zeitgeist and vetting by the groups involved.

Given Jackson’s distancing from postmodernist views, it should be clear that Wright’s accusations are misrepresentations, or at least exaggerations, of Jackson’s position. For a number of reasons, Jackson does *not* want to get rid of the concept of religion. Rather, he calls for “*a middle way*” (Jackson 2004: 90), which involves “*a general loosening of established approaches*” (Jackson 1997: 69). More fully, Jackson argues that

[t]he European Enlightenment view of ‘religions’ as clearly distinct and internally consistent belief systems should be abandoned in favour of a much looser portrayal of religious traditions and groupings, variously delimited and politically contested by different practitioners and non-practitioners (Jackson 2004: 90).

Furthermore, he suggests “*sensitivity*” (Jackson 1997: 69; 2004: 89) and, following Edward Said, self-awareness and an acknowledgement of power. Wright puts it like this:

Jackson holds that reference to particular religions as complex, organic, constantly changing and internally diverse entities can still function as a useful heuristic tool through which to explore the

life-worlds of religious adherents, provided appropriate caution is exercised (Wright 2008: 3).

Jackson himself draws attention to how he considered dropping the term “Hinduism” and “Hindu tradition” when presenting Indian religion, but decided to keep it “*but using them critically, with plenty of qualifications*” (Jackson 2008: 15). The point of Jackson’s tentative middle way seems clear at this stage.

What reasons does Jackson give for his “middle way?” The main thrust of his argument is to make present conceptions of religions looser. It is clear that he sees this loosening as a main task of his academic work. The arguments in favour of a looser conception of religions are threefold: i) It is closer to the empirical data available through ethnographic methods, and as such more truthful. ii) It is closer to the lifeworlds of the learners, and as such better pedagogy. iii) It appreciates and combats the power differentials at work in representations of religion. This is true both of authorities within religious membership groups, and, on a larger scale, on outsider, often Eurocentric, representations of religion.

Jackson states three reasons for keeping the concept of religion at all. First, without it pupils will be ill prepared for multi-faith society. Second, that religious educators need a language that pupils with realist views of religion can use and be comfortable with. Furthermore, preliminary conceptions of a “whole” religious tradition can be a useful heuristic “scaffolding” that gives structure to the more contextual information that is also provided in the course of a teaching module. As long as the presentation of the “whole” tradition is not the end point

of teaching, it can play a crucial pedagogic role. Jackson's third and final reason for keeping the concept of religion, is that it heuristically marks out a field of experience and study. This, he argues, remains true despite important radical critiques of the concept of 'religions'. There are enough family resemblances across traditions, and enough shared transcendental reference points, to keep the concept of religion as a starting point for investigation.

So far, I have presented Jackson's position, some alternative approaches, and presented some debates emerging from critiques of the interpretive approach. What follows is a discussion of the relative merits of the criticisms, and an appraisal of how the interpretive approach can be made more resistant to such criticisms.

4.4: Discussion

In this section I argue that Jackson's balancing act is the result of a well thought out position on power and social construction. However, this position remains ad hoc and external to the theory itself. I argue that it would strengthen the interpretive approach to include a productive concept of power, and make it integral to the approach. As it stands, the ontological status of religious traditions can only be expressed through what they are not: *not stable, but also not completely deconstructed*. Furthermore, power is now an ever-present caveat and contextual presence in Jackson's scheme. This is because Jackson sees power as something that is *out there* to a larger or smaller degree, and when it is there to a large degree, it tends to distort an authentic representation of the

world. I suggest a productive concept of power, conceptualised as fluidising or solidifying work, which may go some way in addressing the challenges raised.

This discussion has two parts. First, I shall discuss Jackson's view of social construction and realism. Second, I shall look at Jackson's use of the concepts of power and politics. It will become clear that the two parts are intimately interlinked.

Construction

The terms "construction" and "social construction" have acquired a range of meanings and usages in social science. Trying to get hold of what exactly Jackson means when he uses the terms is not that easy. Let me present a few examples.

Thus terms such as "Hinduism" or "Christianity" as examples of "religions" should not be taken as referring to bounded and uncontestable systems, but to the various constructions of each religious tradition made by different insiders and outsiders" (Jackson 1997: 64).

"When I refer to different constructions of religion or religions I am saying something different from both of these. I am neither advancing an anti-realist view, nor am I making universal claims about religion as a human construct. I am simply recognising, as with other broad patterns of social and cultural life, such as 'work', 'family', 'politics', 'childhood', 'law', 'marriage' and 'art', that 'religion' and 'religions' are social and cultural constructs the meaning of

which has changed over time, varies in different cultural situations, and has never been universally agreed” (Jackson 2008: 20).

“[...] the fact that religions elude straightforward description testifies to the richness of texture and abundance of reality. Traditions such as ‘Hinduism’ cannot be comprehensively and finally described, not because they are not ‘real’, but because they cannot be encapsulated in a single set of words. Our descriptions are not inventions. However, like biographies, with sources edited and crafted by individuals at specific times in particular contexts, they cannot fully capture reality” (Jackson 2008: 22).

It is clear from these examples that Jackson is no anti-realist. There are real religious phenomena “out there” and we may attempt to speak of them. If “constructions” are involved, it is in representing these realities. There are, in the context of this analysis, two axes along which “construction” becomes relevant even after rejecting anti-realism.

First, there is the idea that a constructionist account of the world is somehow fictional. It is this sense that Wright is invoking when he claims that any representation of a religion will be “fragile” or “arbitrary” within the interpretive approach. Jackson counters this by arguing that the representations are not fictions, but “edits” of the world, a world too complex to be encapsulated in a single set of words.

The second claim of construction is that of constructing a sense of a “whole” from the various myriad constituent parts. It is here that the real disagreements become visible. It is also here that Jackson proceeds with his “middle way” full

of caveats and warnings. The confusion becomes complete when it is made clear that Wright *also* accepts that religions have fuzzy boundaries and heterodox adherents. So what is the actual difference between them?

To crack open this dispute, I will take the advice of Nikolas Rose to heart and, look less at what they *mean* with their words, and more at what they *do* with words (Rose 1996). In his book, *The social construction of what?* (1999), Hacking argues that the best way to understand academics that “expose” categories as “social constructions” is that they are involved in a struggle to increase the scope for action. As such, it is a libratory agenda. Even though Jackson is wary of going all the way into the “opposite ditch” of complete deconstruction, it is fair to say that he wishes to increase the scope for action, in other words the freedom, of those who encounter the interpretive approach. The loosening of boundaries may increase the scope of legitimate religious lives. It may also provide new ways of understanding behaviour which was previously seen as anomalous. Finally, it may let non-western and other sub-altern voices regain their dignity as the violence of Eurocentric over-determination of their lifeworlds becomes exposed. Note, however, this freedom includes the freedom to be conservative or traditional.

Both feminist and race-related thinking has been deeply influenced by the notion that “gender” and “race” are not given, but are, in some way socially constructed. And rightly so, it has been a great libratory idea. However, in the next instance, when the political fight gets going, the world cannot merely be re-imagined; it resists and must be worked in and on to effect change. And so,

realism becomes attractive again: “Race”/“gender” is a construction, but racism/sexism is real, realists seem to say. Now, no one likes to be reduced to their agenda. All of these approaches (deconstruction, realism and a middle way) claim that their approach is philosophically grounded rather than political. However, Rose’s and Hacking’s scheme seems to make sense. As advocates of a post-modern religious education, Erricker and Erricker are self-conscious deconstructionists, and they DO see their scheme as liberating children from oppressive, external systems of knowledge. Wright is harder to place. Jackson describes him as a “post-liberal”. In a sense, it seems that he has a conservative agenda, where religions are presented through their orthodoxy – the stories of the religious leaders. However, he argues, not without merit, that it is the liberal position that has the hegemony, and that his point of view becomes a radical challenge to the existing status quo. Nevertheless, there seems to be a close connection between his political and normative thrust and the epistemological underpinnings he argues for.

Jackson seems to think that the most pressing task is to create more fluid understandings of religions. However, to do so completely would leave the analyst without any concept of religion at all. According to Jackson, this will cause other challenges and is too high a price to pay. However, in my opinion, he lacks a specific language for this third way. I shall now call Jackson’s position “B”. At present, his approach is presented as “the good stuff, but not the bad stuff from A and C”. I see the challenge facing all these positions as follows: They are trying to find the a-priori description of the level of stability appropriate to the category “religion”. As of now, the positions point towards

different stances. Postmodernists say that religion is fluid to the point of non-existence. Critical realists say that religions are stable social facts, and interpretivists say that religions exist but are fuzzy and disputed.

At this stage, I suggest introducing an analytical distinction. On the one hand, there is an empirical level of stability. An analyst is likely to find at least some unity within most groups that identify (or are identified) as “religions”. On the other hand, there are the analytical tools to describe these religions. These should not assume stability, but be able to describe it. There may be well-argued debates about how stable or fluid a particular tradition may be, but it is clearly absurd that the level of empirical stability can be found through a-priori philosophising over the term “religion”. There is surely a difference in stability between networks of holism and healing and the millennium-old traditions and hierarchies of the Vatican. On a smaller scale, there may be differences between membership groups within the same religious tradition concerning how narrowly they define deviance, and how harshly they sanction it. These are surely empirical questions. Stability and fluidity of religions can be understood as existing on a sliding scale.

What is needed, then, is a tool which is conceptually fluid and non-essentialist, which can account for various empirical levels of solidification and reification. The real world is, in this analytical scheme, irreducibly complex and fluid, but appears to humans through reifications. Any phenomenon, as it appears to a human being, has acquired some level of solidity. One might say that fluidity is logically prior to solidity, whereas empirically, the opposite is often the case.

Within this scheme it is possible to account for the continuities of religious traditions, as well as the boundary work, the disagreements and the heterodoxies within and across traditions. An important aspect here is that solidification (what is often called social construction) is a material process. It is not an act of imagining. I have always been puzzled by the metaphor of construction coming to signify unreality of some kind. Taking the metaphor seriously I might point out that if something is constructed, that thing has gained real existence. Constructing a house means that now a house really exists where it did not before.

Jackson has the flexibility to present the different traditions in a way that reflects the points that I have just made. However, Jackson achieves this not by the thrust of the theory, but by the many qualifications and caveats. This is the reason, I think, that critics from opposite viewpoints both find the same critique of Jackson relevant: his account of social construction is negative, and lacks its own language, and as such remains a satellite to the main theoretical language developed within the interpretive approach.

At this point it might be prudent to point out that Jackson has a different aim with his work than myself. He has created a pedagogical approach to religious education, one that must remain open enough for various researchers and educators to find their place within it. Epistemological openness is a virtue for Jackson's aim. For my purposes in this thesis, however, I wish to develop an analytical toolkit that allows me to describe the groupness of religious groups. To do this, I need a differentiated social ontology, not one that attempts to fix

the level of stability and solidity a priori. I see my own project, then, as one of many research endeavours within the scope of the interpretive approach, one which might contribute to new thinking about power in representing religion.

Power.

Jackson is acutely aware of the presence of power and its effects in representing religions:

In the context of religious education, there are examples of powerful groups (sometimes government agencies or insider groups) using their power to exclude, marginalise or misrepresent some groups or traditions or to promote the interests of others
(Jackson 2008: 18).

The interpretive approach emphasises the internal diversity within religious traditions. As in the above quotation, this is sometimes presented as sites of contestation, conflict and struggle. It is clear that Jackson is aware of unequal distributions of power within religious traditions and membership groups. The other form of power which Jackson mentions in his work, is the power of the categoriser, also present in the above quotation. This is either the researcher presenting a religion or a religious phenomenon, curriculum writers, or a general approach, often connected to western imperialism. They have in common that they categorise “the other” in ways that constitute harmful misrepresentations.

In both the above understandings of power, there are a number of common points.

Firstly, power is seen as something empirical. There may or may not be power struggles in a group, but Jackson notes that there often are. Secondly, power is seen as 'power-over'. This conception sees power as a scarce resource, which some people have, and others do not.

Finally, power is seen as distorting. This becomes clear in the use of the term, rather than in actual discussion. There seem to have been authentic expressions of eastern religion before orientalist accounts did violence to them (Jackson 1997: 56-57; 2004: 89). Moreover, individual, everyday accounts presented in the context of the believer's work-a-day life are often presented as more authentic than the views of religious authorities. He does not say that these stories represent distortions of the religion. Rather, it seems that the accounts (while sincere) of religious authorities have taken too much space, and thus distorted the overall image of those religious communities. These communities should be better understood as a loose conglomerate of accounts and practices, from insiders, borderliners and outsiders (Jackson 1997: 109-110; 2004: 88-90). Jackson (2008) answers Wright and gives a longer exposition of his approach to power and social construction. In it, Jackson accuses Wright of misrepresenting his position:

[...] he shifts deftly from my regarding power as a factor in the construction of knowledge to its being 'the driver'. In doing so he changes my position from a humanistic, critical perspective to a deconstructive stance. My actual position is that, in analysing a representation of a religion or group, one should be alert to the

interests of those making the representation, and equally alert to voices within a tradition (those of women or children or marginalised caste groups, for example) which may not easily be heard (Jackson 2008: 18 original emphasis).

He then moves on to list a range of instances where research has shown the negative effects of powerful groups defining the content of religious education in various contexts, before concluding:

None of these examples suggests that the representations are entirely or even primarily shaped by power, but all illustrate how powerful bodies might distort or misrepresent material in their own interest (Jackson 2008: 18).

Jackson here seems to think that reducing everything to power is to become wholly deconstructive and postmodern. At this stage an illuminating sentence occurs:

The attention to issues of power in the interpretive approach is intended to provide checks and balances against such loaded representations, not to imply that traditions are ‘arbitrary constructions’ devoid of descriptive content (Jackson 2008: 18).

In this thesis I aim to develop the interpretive approach by introducing a more nuanced concept of power. Compared to the omnipresent caveats and checks and balances in Jackson’s writing, a stronger development of the concept of power would provide the interpretive approach with stronger arguments vis-a-

vis critique from postmodern and critical realist positions alike. I shall not go into too much detail here, but rather refer to chapter 6, especially section 6.4, for a fuller presentation.

Suffice it here to point out two aspects. Power is not only “power-over”. It is also “power-to”. All action, in some way, is the result of the power that resides in the actor. A productive concept of power is closely linked to freedom and agency. In this sense, the contextual and ethnographic presentation of believers is not peeling away the layers of distorting power, rather it is empowering other voices. In the quotations above, Jackson shifts between images of power that accept this view, and images of power as purely top-down and distortive. If representations of religion were explained fully as the result of top-down power-over relations, I would agree with Jackson that this would be wholly deconstructive. However, the inclusion of a productive concept of “power-to” has benefits: the actions and beliefs of the individual, the past and present acts that constitute the membership group, and the historical deposit that constitutes the religious tradition, together constitute “religion”. The concept *is* the sum of the ‘power-to’ of myriads of communicating individuals. In this sense, power is not a distorter of social reality; it is the *workings* of social reality.

The second point is that all actions (and thus all productive power) should be seen as material. Through acting in the world, individuals exercise their power-to by changing the world ever so slightly, leaving it different due to their involvement. The exercise of power, both in the productive and the top-down variant (they may well be overlapping categories), leaves a mark on the world.

The material world offers resistance to these acts, the nature of the resistance depending on the materiality at hand. To make changes in the world, humans have to *work*. Some forms of work make a social phenomenon more stable, whereas other forms of work make a phenomenon more fluid. This is how I use the terms fluidising and solidifying work. These terms offer the analytical means to deal with the power-effects of 'power-over' which Jackson already deals with, as well as a material approach to productive power that does not demand an anti-realist epistemology to support it.

In chapter 13.2 I discuss how my analytical toolkit is applied to my particular case study. Here I evaluate my contribution in relation to the interpretive approach.

4.5 Three academic debates: a summary

In the last three chapters, I have discussed multiculturalism (chapter 2), the Norwegian sexualities literature (chapter 3) and the interpretive approach to religious education (chapter 4). I have pointed out that these three academic fields share a crucial debate, namely the status of groups with identity claims. The debates on multiculturalism deal with identity management at the level of the nation state, and they deal with groupness at a general level. The Norwegian sexualities literature looks at how “Norwegianness” gains its meaning. It tends to argue that sexuality has become a marker of Norwegianness that can be used for both inclusion and exclusion. The interpretive approach presents a strategy for representing religions in the classroom.

All three debates centre on the contrasts between a constructionist and realist understanding of groups with identity claims. The toolkit that I present in chapter 6 for analysing groups with identity claims is underpinned by a material and variable social ontology of groups. I argue that such a toolkit would be a contribution to all three debates. The conceptual vocabulary would need to be geared towards empirical description and include a dynamic conception of power. Such a dynamic conception of power would have to be able to account for both ‘power-to’ and ‘power-over’. One of the great benefits of developing such a toolkit would be that questions that have so far been attempted to be answered a priori can be investigated empirically and described. The solidity of a social group is a variable phenomenon, and should be investigated as such.

This thesis represents my contribution to developing such an analytical toolkit. Part II presented the relevant literatures, and through this the theoretical and conceptual territory in which the aims and questions of this thesis are located. Chapter 6 presents my analytical horizon, the theoretical underpinnings of my approach. Chapter 7 presents my analytical toolkit consisting of three concepts, namely viscosity, boundaries and work.

PART III

CONCEPTUAL

APPROACH

In chapter 6, I present a trio of concepts, namely i) viscosity, ii) boundaries and iii) work. These constitute the conceptual tools that I shall use while describing my case. I call them my analytical toolkit. Chapter 5 outlines a wider theoretical background for this strategy, describing the underlying theories. Much of this is from discourse theory. Chapter 5 describes how I am inspired by previous work, and how I adapt previous work to suit my analytical purposes. I call this the ‘analytical horizon’ of the thesis. Developing an analytical horizon and toolkit directly addresses the stated conceptual aims of this thesis. In a case study structured according to the logic of generalising to a theory (see section 7.3), the presentation of an original conceptual contribution is not just a theoretical preliminary to the analysis. It is a major focus of the work. The same applies here. The main mode of evaluation of this thesis is the extent to which my analytical toolkit enables me to say something original and relevant about the case in hand. The measure of comparison here is the work done by other academics, covered in the literature review. I shall quickly summarise the main points. I selected three topical debates that are relevant to my case. These are the representation of religion in the classroom, understandings of national identity, and debates about multiculturalism. I argued that these three debates are, in some important way, about understanding what constitutes the groupness of groups. Furthermore, the disagreement centres on how these academics understand social construction. My own approach is within a framework of social constructionism, though certainly not anti-realist or non-material.

5 ANALYTICAL HORIZON

5.1 Introduction

The literature reviews (part II) end with a challenge: to properly account for stability within a social constructionist framework. My trio of analytical tools is my attempt to rise to this challenge. My analytical toolbox is a useful, if small, addition to the theories presented in the literature review. The toolbox contributes to an on-going academic effort to account for groups with identity claims. Such accounts should be rich in detail and rigorous in internal consistency, provide good explanations of cultural stabilities, and be innovative and non-obvious. I have argued that two traditions are the main contenders for providing such an account, namely constructionism and critical realism. My analytical toolkit is designed to contribute to a constructionist account that answers important challenges from a critical realist position. My thesis is an attempt to provide a conceptual toolkit as a contribution to the interdisciplinary academic field of religion, education, multiculturalism and identity.

However, the logic of reasoning is broader. This chapter deals with the broader horizons of my conceptual strategy. I try to apply to the case a particular way of seeing the world, a way that is informed by a range of sociologists as well as more interdisciplinary academics.³ I find it sensible to call this the analytical

³ The aim is not to forcefully apply my approach as “better” or “truer”. It is not a critique of the worldviews of the practitioners which work so well in the classroom. Rather, it is to provide an alternative optic which might render assumptions open for reconsideration and maybe new action. The rigour of sociological method should not be seen as a hindrance to creativity, but as

horizon. The three concepts are in a sense an operationalisation of this analytical horizon. This means that if I go through the data I have gathered, systematically applying these three concepts, I should be confident that the relevant aspects of this alternative world-view have been brought to bear on the case.

After presenting the analytical horizon, I shall further unpack the analytical toolbox, going into greater depth on viscosity, boundaries and work. Finally, I shall discuss some benefits and constraints of my approach.

5.2 Ontological and epistemological background

In this section, I am going to present the analytical tools that will be used to relate my data to my research questions, and to generate relevant analyses. At the core of these are a trio of concepts, namely viscosity, boundaries and work. In this chapter, I will present the analytical horizon for these tools. In chapter 6, I will go through them in detail.

Why is it important to present the analytical horizon? It enables the reader to appreciate the richness that social science can bring to a case description, by laying out some of the philosophical ideas that inform the terms that I use. It also makes clear where these ideas are drawn from. This also has the advantage of preventing misunderstandings that may arise because other academic traditions use similar terms in different ways. The term “discourse” for example, is used in a bewildering variety of ways. The point of this background section is

an aid. Creativity is not just a flight of fancy, it is making newness work, and diving deeply into messy data both creates and hones ideas. Hopefully, the rigour of sociological method ensures that these ideas become more convincing, richer, and more resonant to the reader.

to minimise the gap between my understanding of the terms, and the understanding of the reader. Finally, the background should also make clear my own position on some foundational ontological and epistemological questions, which will be useful in evaluating the internal consistency of the thesis.

The fundamental lens for viewing the world in this thesis is inspired by Laclau and Mouffe's book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985). In this book, they lay out a comprehensive theory of discourse (Hagelund 2003; Howarth 2000; Neumann 2001a; 2001b; Torfing 1999; Winther Jørgensen and Phillips 1999). However, in this presentation of the analytical horizon, I will often use different terms and images than they use. However, I shall refer back to the vocabulary of Laclau and Mouffe to make the connections clear. This section will outline more foundational epistemological and ontological questions. In the methods chapter, I shall deal with their tools for semiotic analysis in greater detail.

It may seem strange that, on the one hand, I claim agreement with the instrumental approach to theory as proposed by Kate Nash above, and James Beckford elsewhere. Pragmatists claim that they are wary of theories of how knowledge may ultimately be justified, settling instead for an assessment of analytical utility (Beckford 2003; Nash 2000). However, an elaborate social theory, such as that of Laclau and Mouffe, does indeed make these grand claims. To me, a good social theory enables coherent and original ways of viewing the world. I take a pragmatic and instrumental approach to social theories with grand claims to ontological and epistemological truths. Theories are to be evaluated on the strength of the analyses they inspire. There are some good

arguments as to why Laclau and Mouffe's theory is productive for the purpose of this thesis.

First, there are good examples of practical empirical work that is done within the framework of Laclau and Mouffe, without bothering too much about the philosophical underpinnings. The Norwegian sociologist Anniken Hagelund's (2003) analysis of Norwegian Immigration Policy is one such good example.

Second, the rigours of a systematic approach might enhance creativity. There are, following the thinking of Quine, infinite numbers of stories about the world that fit all the data available to us. Rather than attempting to find the final objective description of religious education in Norway, my study is an attempt to access the considerable creativity that is to be gained from engaging with the constraints established by an original analytical framework. This is especially the case if the alternative framework has tools that are good to think with, but at the same time differs from the taken-for-granted everyday frame of thinking within which most of us live our lives. This creativity and innovation should ideally be possible to translate into new ways of acting, and place new areas of influence within the realm of people's action and influence. Ultimately, the purpose of this kind of analysis is to increase the scope of thinking, action and potential for political participation, basically the freedom, of the various stakeholders.⁴ Even though my own contribution may be modest, the direction in which I want to point is larger.

⁴ This sense of freedom is loosely inspired by the writings of Amartya Sen (1999). It also corresponds to Chantal Mouffe's concept of an agonistic politics (2005).

To present the analytical horizon of my toolbox, I have singled out three aspects that, to my mind, provide a good description of the basic philosophical position of Laclau and Mouffe, even if it does so in different words than they use themselves.

5.3 Complexity reduction

There is a real world “out there”, in which we live and share and understand. This world is irreducibly complex. It is not merely that the universe is really big, or that globalisation involves a near infinite number of interactions. No, it is also that even the smallest of things eludes human description in their fullness. A single blade of grass, if described in its entirety, would exhaust the descriptive efforts of a lifetime. Even the atom and the sub-atomic particles escape exhaustive description. All descriptions are separate from that which they describe in some way, and all descriptions are partial and incomplete. Human being-in-the-world is characterised by continuous complexity reduction. In fact, meaning-making is a process of editing, of pattern making, and only at later stages a process of invention and fiction. We are embodied creatures who act continuously in the world. Complexity reduction as meaning-making goes beyond the classic mind/body division: all our senses are complexity reduction systems even before cognitive processes are involved. Our eyes receive only a certain spectrum of light waves, but not all, and our ears receive a certain spectrum of sound frequencies. The criterion for which systems of complexity reduction are kept is utility. When it comes to the senses and their strategies for reducing the complexity of the world that confronts them to a manageable (but

still vast) array of sensory impressions, it seems that very slow-moving processes like evolution provide good explanations. Those complexity reduction strategies that enable successful action survive. In terms of cultural and linguistic patterns, this links to the American philosophy of pragmatism, which basically sees the meanings of signs established through their use, through speech-acts. Semiotic theorists, like Laclau and Mouffe, also claim that all signs have (in an imagined pre-action state) many possible meanings, which are then reduced to far fewer possible meanings through being performed.

There is a clear connection between complexity and apathy, and thus a similar connection between meaning (i.e. complexity reduction) and action. The multiple opportunities inherent in every sensory experience are not reduced to The One Right Understanding. Rather, the set of possible interpretations is massively reduced when action is taken. The resultant interpretation is often no more (or no less) than our best on-the-spot candidate for complexity reduction. As such, representations are evaluated by virtue of their utility. The tube map for London does not look like London in any recognisable way. However, it would be silly to say it is untruthful. It is a truthful representation of the reality of London, because it enables us to manoeuvre successfully around the big city. It is not divorced from reality. If it inserted fictional lines and ignored stations, it would be less useful.

The usefulness of our complexity reduction strategies allows humans to engage and interfere more or less successfully in the world around them. Our mental categories and concepts are such complexity reduction strategies, and it is these

categories that will be the precise object of investigation. Categories such as “Muslim” or “Christian” – “Norwegian” or “foreign” are such complexity reduction strategies. Furthermore, they are categories that inhabit multiple materialities. Categories are not only mental states. They may become embedded in the human body, as we react viscerally to categories such as beauty or taboo, or as we develop our bodies through diets or training regimes. Categories are also made material outside the individual. They are embedded in other people’s bodies and brains as well as in institutions and physical surroundings. This challenges a Cartesian dualism, and allows for instinctive action, motor learning, and knowledge lodged in different parts of the brain, working in different ways. Categories can be textual, they can be cognitive, they can be enshrined in law, they can be emotional and they may well be taken for granted and embodied to various degrees.

Insofar as a part of the world becomes part of the life-world of a human, it will become patterned and simplified to enable human engagement with the world. Now, this way of looking at the world gives something to realist descriptions. A complexity reduction strategy that seriously misconstrues the object it is trying to grasp will have difficulties in becoming widely shared, as the world will upset and distort any engagement with the world based on it.

However, this way of looking at the world also absorbs many of the insights of social constructionism. Following from the premise of irreducible complexity, the number of possible complexity reduction strategies will always be more than one. In other words: for any given set of data, there will always be more than

one coherent theory that may explain them. Even within the constraints of the real world, there are competing understandings. This competition is infused with power.

One crucial understanding follows from this, which has been mentioned before in a different context: the process often referred to as social construction (though construal is a more precise description) is better understood as a process of editing, not inventing.

Laclau and Mouffe write in a Marxist tradition, and they articulate this phenomenon in a different way, namely through Althusser's concept of "overdetermination" (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 97-98). They claim that, properly understood, Althusser's concept of overdetermination means that all social phenomena, at the moment they appear as phenomena to a human, carry a symbolic dimension with a plurality of meanings. They claim that:

"The symbolic – i.e. overdetermined – character of social relations therefore implies that they lack an ultimate literality which would reduce them to necessary moments of an immanent law. There are not two planes, one of essences and the other of appearances, since there is no possibility of fixing an ultimate literal sense for which the symbolic would be a second and derived plane of signification." (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 98).

In other words, the world, and all signs, comes to us with multiple meanings, and it is through language acts (and other acts) that we attempt to reduce this complexity. It is a question of power to what extent we succeed in making our reductions stick. The London transportation authorities have the 'power-over' to

produce the maps as they decide. They also have the ‘power-to’ (maybe ‘capability’ conveys something of the same meaning) that enables them to produce a map that can be publicly recognised as working well.

5.4 Materiality

It should be clear from section 5.3 on complexity reduction that I seek to establish an analytical worldview that challenges the classical Cartesian mind-matter distinction. (This is difficult to speak of, since even when speaking against this distinction, I find it hard not to use it.) Meaning flows through matter that is not inert or a passive holder, but an integral part of the sign. Likewise, our categories are not only, or even primarily, cognitive phenomena. They are layered through several strata of matter. Even cognitive thinking has a materiality in brain tissue, writing in ink or bytes and speech in mouth movements and sound waves.

Laclau and Mouffe are often, understandably but unfairly in my view, criticised for claiming that everything is discourse. They are presented as extreme idealists, as if they assume that all that exists is imagined forth by actors. Andrew Sayer presents this criticism in the following way:

At worst, on the postmodernist side, we find the flip from the idea of absolute truth and absolute foundations to the other extreme of relativism/idealism. This involves refusing all talk of truth and falsity, denying any kind of relationship between thought and the world, asserting that we do not 'discover' things, but socially or

discursively constitute them and denying the possibility of any kind of empirical test. (Sayer 2000: 68-69).

He then cites Laclau and Mouffe as representatives of this post-modern approach. Several commentators (Howarth 2000; Torfing 1999; Wetherell, Taylor and Yates 2001; Winther Jørgensen and Phillips 1999) have discussed similar critiques. Laclau and Mouffe explicitly counter the realist argument, and they see it as a straw-man attack:

*The fact that every object is constituted as an object of discourse has **nothing to do** with whether there is a world external to thought, or with the realism/idealism opposition. An earthquake or the falling of a brick is an event that certainly exists, in the sense that it occurs here and now, independently of my will. But whether their specificity as objects is constructed in terms of 'natural phenomena' or 'expressions of the wrath of God,' depends upon the structuring of a discursive field. (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 108 original emphasis).*

Objects appear to us as constituted, and there is no other way of grasping these phenomena. However, Laclau and Mouffe are not anti-realist and do not deny that the world defies our expectations, offering resistance to the way we think. However, in my view (and in the view of Howarth (2000)) they do a poor job in defending themselves. The full richness of Laclau and Mouffe's thinking is better understood if the tables are turned. Rather than saying that everything that is material is actually discourse, they make more sense if understood as saying that all that is discourse is actually material. They clearly want to go beyond the

dualism and enter a material understanding of discourse. Now, they do not follow up the theory's compatability with realism in their subsequent analyses. Rather, they speak *as if* all matter were discourse in their subsequent analyses. Furthermore, Sayer's criticism gains weight if seen in a more research-directed context. The actual tools for analysis that they provide, do not give any way of describing the variable materialities of the actual communications that make up the discourse. One might say that they have arrived at a good ontological solution, but they have not provided a good ontic solution. Ontology is thinking about that which exists, whereas the ontic in this case means dealing with that which exists.

This becomes relevant for me, insofar as I wish to study religious education both from "above" and "below". This entails a multi-method approach, integrating the analysis of formal curriculum documents with classroom observations. The challenge now is to find a good way of operationalising the world view of Laclau and Mouffe in order analytically to come to grips with the different materialities of formal documents on the one hand, and classroom interaction on the other.

Here the work of the Canadian educationalist John Goodlad is helpful, with his concept of the many levels of curriculum (Goodlad 1979). In his book *Curriculum Inquiry, The study of curriculum practice* he presents the idea that 'curriculum' is a broader concept than just the formal documents. He proposed that it is useful to think of classroom action as the performed curriculum, the

teacher's understanding of the curriculum as the perceived curriculum, the pupils' understanding as the experienced curriculum, and so forth.

The Norwegian educationalist Geir Afdal has developed Goodlad's framework extensively (Afdal 2006). There is one aspect of Afdal's work that I wish to incorporate with the introduction of Goodlad's scheme into the larger framework of discourse theory. Goodlad speaks of "levels" of curriculum, clearly assuming some form of hierarchy. This seems like a sensible way of understanding power relations: the formal curriculum influences the individual teacher more than the individual teacher influences the formal curriculum. As such, Goodlad claims, the formal curriculum is at a higher level of curriculum than the teacher's perceived curriculum. It is this distinction that Afdal challenges. There may well be instances where influence goes "uphill", even though they are few. Afdal does not have any empirical problems with the image of levels. He is more concerned with making Goodlad's scheme a more powerful analytical tool. Afdal suggests a model where he speaks of domains of curriculum rather than levels. Thinking in this way, it is possible to investigate empirically any relationship between the domains. It does not assume hierarchy. Rather, it explains hierarchy. This makes it a more powerful analytical tool than merely making a-priori assumptions.

With Afdal's modification of Goodlad, we now have a framework that fits nicely with the analytical framework proposed for this project. It establishes one field of inquiry, namely curriculum, but then differentiates a range of materialities in which this social field exists. Curriculum is viewed as a

discursive field with different materialities. This is an image of my field of inquiry that enables a differentiated social ontology. This allows not only for the flexibility of the actors' various interpretations, but also for the stabilities inherent in the material form in which the actors encounter curriculum. Introducing Goodlad structures my field of inquiry in a useful way. More importantly, however, it rectifies what Sayer identifies as the main weakness of Laclau and Mouffe's scheme: namely the lack of ability to deal with the material complexities of the social world.

5.5 Difference

The discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe is based on structuralist theory in the Saussurean tradition, as well as Marxist theory. The theorists see language, and in extension all meaning-making systems, as a set of signs without any literal connection to its references. The meaning of a sign at any given time is determined by way of being distinctive from other signs in the same system. The meaning of the word 'horse' does not emanate from those equine creatures out there. Rather, its meaning gets established through how the word 'horse' is distinguished in a linguistic structure. This structure is twofold. On the one hand the word 'horse' has similar signifiers, such as 'gorse' or 'force'. On the other hand, it has similar signifieds, such as 'donkey' or 'mule'. The meaning of the word 'horse', then, is in a sense the sum of all the distinctions from other terms in the system. It is "fixed" to its real world reference not by an internal logic, but through its use in context (Thwaites, Davis and Mules 2002).

These are not trivial factors. With categories like ‘Muslim’ or ‘Christian’ there are continuous “border struggles” (Beckford 2003) where the use of the category changes over time, even within quite short spaces of time. Furthermore, contrasting the term ‘Muslim’ with ‘Christian’ leaves most people with a different idea of the category ‘Muslim’ than when opposing it to ‘secular’ or, even though there need not be an opposition, ‘Norwegian’. Similarly, the category of ‘man’ will often be articulated differently when opposed to the category of ‘woman’ rather than the category of ‘boy’.

Discourse theory is different from structuralist theory, in that it understands the “fixing” of meanings in terms of power and politics. The exact boundaries of these terms are established by contestation and struggle. The overdetermination of every sign means that there are always competing meanings in the penumbra of usage. Sometimes these competing meanings are clear and definitional, more often they are connotations: a different emotional charge or a change of emphasis. This emphasis on change and politics is one way of distinguishing structuralism from post-structuralism.

6 TOOLKIT FOR ANALYSIS:

In chapter 5 I presented the underlying theoretical horizon for my analysis. However, the analytical background is difficult to apply to data, and unhelpfully complex when analysing the case. This is why I have operationalised my worldview, and performed my own complexity reduction process. Basically, I can ask three questions of the data:

- 1) Where are the boundaries between the categories I am looking at?
- 2) Who is working on them, and what is the nature of this work?
- 3) What is the level of viscosity (speed of flow) in these boundaries?

6.1 Viscosity

The technical term *viscosity* refers to a fluid's resistance to flow. In everyday terms, this is the “thickness” of a fluid, where water is “thin” (and so has low viscosity) whereas honey or tar is “thick” (and has high viscosity). The metaphor of viscosity enables a differentiated social ontology of groups with identity claims.

The metaphor is especially useful in this study as it enables me to discuss the variable extent to which a group with identity claims appears as given and primordial to an individual. The solidity of the group varies in different circumstances. It is this variation in how groups appear to people that underlies the disagreements in the three interlinked debates of my literature review. In

some situations, “Norway” is clearly and solidly present. This is clear when I read through the official curriculum documents that constitute the abstract framework of Norwegian Religious Education. In other situations, “Norway” seems dynamic and intangible. An instance of this might be when a teacher is given the task of upholding and renewing “Norwegian cultural heritage” in a class of pupils born in Norway with a range of cultural backgrounds. I wish to be able to speak about both the solidity and the fluidity of categories, and to develop tools that allow not only for an account of the historical emergence of the phenomena, but also for contemporary reproductions and transformations.

The metaphor of fluidity in social life is not new. Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman has written a series of books based on his idea of the liquidity of contemporary society (Bauman 2000; 2005; 2006; 2007). As far as I can understand, though, this is an attempt to characterize contemporary society in contrast to previous, solid, times. Bauman’s liquidity is ultimately an empirical observation about the world around him, and it is possible for him, it seems, to imagine a non-liquid world.

The sense in which I use the metaphor of flow and fluidity is closer to that of Ulf Hannerz in his book *Cultural complexity* (Hannerz 1992). He suggests that fluidity is a fundamental property of culture. Hannerz suggests that if social scientists attempt to understand human action and meaning in the world as stable and unitary, we will systematically misunderstand the world. This fits well with the theoretical assumptions that underpin the discourse theory approach used here. It is also a starting point for Laclau and Mouffe’s idea that meaning is

unstable until “closed” by human action. This is what I mean when I claim that fluidity is logically prior to stability in my scheme of analysis. However, stability may be empirically prior to fluidity, certainly in the life-worlds of curriculum authors, teachers and pupils. In fact, being in the world is, seen through this theoretical optic, a continuous process of making THIS more stable, rather than THAT.

Hannerz tries to account for this stability in different ways. One strategy is to shift the analytical scale. That which looks fluid up close looks stable from a distance. Hannerz uses the image of the Nile: this great river has been a stable presence for thousands of years. Nevertheless, at the more local level of analysis, the water is in constant flow. Another strategy is to borrow the metaphor of complexity from maths and physics, where random, simple patterns may spontaneously organize themselves into larger, more stable patterns. In terms of the river image, the flow is not just the fast flows downstream, but also the pools and backwaters that remain fluid in nature, but calm and stable in appearance.

The main weakness with Hannerz’s approach is that it makes it difficult to talk about intentional action. If durable and experientially primordial national identification, for instance, is seen as a lull or backwater resulting from random flow of culture, it hides the massive human efforts expended to make the nation a solid feature of reality.

At this stage, I have to make clear that my metaphor appears in two different guises. In many cases, I talk in terms of a dichotomy between “fluid” and

“solid”. In these cases, it is a heuristic device whereby I talk in terms of the end-points of a sliding scale of viscosity. To continue Hannerz’s river metaphor, the national is not a spontaneously organized lull in the flow of a river, but rather a reservoir of cultural stability created by a humanly built dam. Indeed, seeing the cultural resources which groups claim to be their own as a reservoir of interrupted flow, seems a dynamic image to me. The fluid-solid dichotomy is a useful way to simplify some complexities without gross distortions. It is especially useful to analyze temporary *end points* of processes. The relationship between the formal curriculum on the one hand, and the classrooms on the other hand, is an example of how this dichotomy might work. The formal curriculum is a constitutive intervention from above with a higher level of solidity than other curricular domains. It is like a state-built dam in the flow of children’s upbringing and education.

However, it is important to remember that the dichotomized version is merely a simplification of the full metaphor of viscosity. The idea is that expenditure of energy and power changes the viscosity of cultural flow. Human effort and power may partially melt or freeze various cultural flows. In this conception, well-developed stabilities appear as *glacial*. They are solid and imposing in relation to individuals who wish to travel in their landscape, but constantly moving and changing and ultimately in a state of flow.

The image of the glacial reality of established groups with identity claims is, in my opinion, a powerful antidote to the frequent accusation that social constructionist accounts of groupness and nationalism emphasize the *unreality*

of these groups. Glacial flow also indicates the material resistance that seems to disappear in Hannerz's concept of flow and Bauman's liquid modernity.

There is another aspect of this metaphor that is useful to highlight. The sociologist of religion Gordon Lynch claims that religion is 'sticky' (Lynch 2007). He claims that religions, seen as identity groups, are difficult to deal with because they are neither clear-cut choices, nor unavoidable destinies. Rather, religious identifications are 'sticky'. You can disentangle yourself, but it is a messy and time-consuming business. This metaphor is an extension of my own image of variable viscosity. I speak of political rhetoric of religious and national values as sticky in terms of identity, but slippery in terms of substantive meaning.

There is also a political aspect to this sociological thinking. A well-placed criticism of deconstructive and self-proclaimed liberatory academic work in a social constructionist tradition is that the linguistic or non-material aspects of political change are over-emphasized. Too often, the academic contribution ends with "re-imagining" an oppressive structure. Strategic essentialism and some variants of critical realism have, to some extent, been responses to this weakness in many social constructionist accounts. Thinking about social reality as cultural flows of different and variable viscosity is also a way of thinking about social structures within a "doing-," or performative, theory (Butler 1997; 2009; West and Zimmerman 1987). It allows for agency without individualizing responsibility. Furthermore, it allows for the fluidity and complexity of

contemporary social life, but still enables an analyst to argue for a direction of causality.

As a publicly engaged social scientist, I wish to engage with my subject matter. In my case, this is “glacial nationalism”. I would feel ill equipped in attempting to cross a valley in which there is a glacier, using “re-imagining” as the only mountaineering tool. I would feel equally ill equipped if told that the glacier is “really” solid rock, or that I should strategically treat it as solid rock.

The metaphor of viscosity is perhaps the most original claim I make in this thesis. It is meant to enable analysis of a world with variable materialities, an analysis based on a differentiated social ontology. In a sense, it is the operationalisation of the larger controversial field of materiality in discourse theory, as discussed above. However, it does not stand alone, but needs to be understood together with two other terms, more common in the interdisciplinary field of sociology of religion, education, identity and multiculturalism.

6.2 Boundaries

The philosophical and semiotic concept of difference finds its sociological equivalent in the concept of boundaries. I am indebted primarily to the work of Canadian sociologist Michelle Lamont in the way I use this term. In her books *Money, Morals and Manners* (1992) and *The Dignity of Working Men* (2004) she shows with great insight how the categories of class and race are made real through their distinctions against proximate categories. She also details how the classes or races become what they are through the actions that go into managing

the boundaries between different class identifications or racial identifications. However, Lamont's work has a pedigree.

In his classic work *Ethnic groups and boundaries* the Norwegian anthropologist Fredrik Barth (1969) and others argue that ethnic groups are defined, and define themselves, in relation to other ethnic groups. In fact, it is through the work done to distinguish "us" from "them", and the relations between members of "us" and members of "them", that ethnic groups become what they are. According to Barth, groups are not primordially disparate, they do not emerge from a core and then expand until they brush up against other groups. Rather, there has always been cultural contact. Furthermore, this means that ethnic groups cannot be understood as emerging from an essence, but that their primary existence as an ethnic group is made material in the marking of difference from "them".

In my framework, then, groups with identity claims are solidified or fluidized through the boundary work of insiders and outsiders. This applies to the concepts we use to think about groups with identity claims. It also applies to the material realities that institutionalize and embed these groups with identity claims in social life. The sociologist of religion James Beckford (2003) suggests that the study of religion emphasizes the "border zones and skirmishes" between religion and non-religion, and between religions, to get valid social scientific descriptions of what religions do and are in contemporary society.

The concept of boundary work sits well with the overall theoretical and methodological framework of discourse theory as presented by Laclau and Mouffe (1985). It applies to different material domains of discourse, such as

writing, speech, action, building, and law making. It sits well with their emphasis on politics and contestation. It opens up, then, for a model of intra- and inter-group integration that claims to be more in line with the empirical results of my case study than the main alternatives.

I draw on the thinking of Chantal Mouffe (2005) as she argues for an agonistic political discussion. This is a discussion where disagreement is the constructive starting point, rather than a threat. In an agonistic discussion, the participants are not looking for consensus, but neither are they interested in turning disagreement into conflict. Agonism is not antagonism: those who disagree are not necessarily enemies. Difference is constitutive of thought, action and identity, and democratic units must be aware of this. Michael Billig also follows this line of thinking in his book *Arguing and thinking* (Billig 1996). In both their approaches, there is an emphasis on empowerment and personal and political growth through allowing members of democratic societies to engage with those who disagree. The idea is different from that of Habermas, that the end point is some form of rational consensus. The benefit of public argument is the feeling of involvement and authorship in one's own life, and the framework for that life. It is also the chance of developing as a person, and of arguing and discussing with others to develop and hone one's own position. One clear conclusion from the classroom observations was that the classroom is simultaneously a community of disagreement, and a community of action and learning. An agonistic and disagreeing classroom is not an impediment for the pursuit of learning and the personal growth of the pupils. The communitarian dream of a community cohering around shared values is difficult to translate into

contemporary classroom pedagogy. The same is true of the “subtraction stories” of high modern rationality: the idea that if facts are presented objectively, then the accumulated waste and clutter of provincial and multiple traditions and cultures will fall to one side. It just does not translate well to contemporary classrooms.

This case study’s theoretical contribution is the result of an abductive process. However, I have presented the argument according to a logic of application (see chapter 7.3, p. 125). I have developed an analytical voice that connects my research questions with my underlying methodological assumptions, my data, and my findings. So far in this chapter, I have tried to pinpoint what makes my analytical voice useful to answer my research questions. I have presented three major concepts, and I have tried to discuss some relationships between these concepts. Basically, my engagement with my data has led me to the conclusion that they are best understood with the assumption that *groups with identity claims become more solid or more fluid through the boundary work of insiders and outsiders*.

6.3 Work

Again, the work of Michele Lamont is important. By introducing her term “boundary work”, she emphasises how identity management is a task to be done, an active project that can fail or succeed (Lamont 1992; Lamont 2004). I see “work” as a dynamic and action oriented conception of power, which takes materiality seriously. One of the advantages of the metaphor of viscosity is that

it allows the degree of social reality of groups to be seen as variable. Groups with identity claims are subject to constructive and destructive, enabling and constraining forces, from insider and outsider positions, and from above and below. I will use the term “work” to get at the practical aspects of these forces. The concept of work is crucial to the understanding of power that I use for the analysis in this project.

The term has some advantages. First, it emphasizes human agency. Power does not simply appear; power is the result of people’s acts.

Secondly, it is a productive concept of power. It emphasizes the power *to* rather than power *over* (Næss 2005; Næss and Haukeland 2002). This enables us to look at the work done *from below*. The idea that people without much formal power, in my case mainly pupils, still engage in *fluidizing work* allows me as an analyst to come to grips with how pupils have influence and control over their own lives. However, the contrasting concept of solidifying work also allows analysis of power *over*, and some direction of causality. The work of powerful actors shape the conditions of many. The concepts of fluidizing and solidifying work allow me to combine a productive concept of power with asymmetry and causal direction of explanations.

Third, the concept of “work” makes clear that human involvement in the world struggles with matter. Moreover, as embodied beings, our work *is* material. Through working in the world, we continuously change our world and ourselves. Humans act in the world, and this has material effects. It is this engagement with

the variety of materialities that surround us that underlies the idea of groups with identity claims existing at different levels of viscosity.

The connection between the idea of work and the metaphor of the viscosity of cultural flows also has analytical benefits. If groups have various levels of viscosity, and these levels are the consequence of human work, then groups become potential objects for action. Connecting ‘work’ and ‘viscosity’ allows the analyst to look for conscious engagement and intervention of actors at different levels of curriculum. As such, it is an empowering and politicizing concept. Using the example of different levels of curriculum, the formal curriculum appears as solid and ‘from above’. The multiple understanding of pupils appears as fluid, and ‘from below’. My approach indicates that the two levels influence each other, but at different speeds. The institutional power that stands behind the formal curriculum makes the ideas within the document “solid.” They appear as immutable facts for teachers and pupils, and therefore, in a sense, direct the flow of their actions. However, at the same time, the solid nature of the formal curriculum also makes it a malleable instrument for the state. Its solidity makes it directly manipulatable. The dispersed fluidity of hundreds of classrooms filled with the complex life-worlds of thousands of teachers and pupils makes it difficult for the state (or any actor from above) to intervene in the curriculum at the level of classroom action.

In terms of my central metaphor, I will return to Hannerz’s image of cultural flow as a river. If I present to you a snapshot of a river, it is clear that, at any given instant, the solid riverbed controls the flow of water. In my case, the

formal curriculum controls classroom action. Historically, though, it is the ‘fluid’ of everyday human action (agency) that has dug out the riverbed (structure) over centuries. Furthermore, the riverbed can be dug out, dammed or changed – it is manipulatable and amenable to human work and power. Trying to change the nature of the water, on the other hand, is futile. It is too fluid and its power too dispersed for planned, direct intervention. Cultural flows with low viscosity (high fluidity) can be directed externally by human work, but direct intervention from above remains elusive. Again, this seems to me to provide an image of how certain configurations of power both enable and constrain actors, regardless of whether these actors see the field of education from above or below.

My concept of “work” is influenced by the early writings of Karl Marx. He saw human action in the world as our “metabolism with nature,” unavoidable and mutually shaping self and other for the future. It has clear similarities with the concepts of practice, praxis and theories of performativity, in that it emphasizes the processual and productive nature of human action. The term “work” might over-emphasize the degree to which the actors have intentions, or are aware of their own motivations. Much of the ‘work’ I refer to is habitual, routine or banal. There are instances where I use the term ‘practice’ rather than ‘work’, in cases where I want to avoid suggesting that the actors are acting intentionally.

6.4 Conclusions

Chapter 5 presented a broader analytical horizon, giving a wider theoretical background for the assumptions that underpin the analysis in the thesis. This chapter has presented the theoretical toolkit which I intend to use in the analysis that follows. Through deploying it when analysing my case, I will test the usefulness of the toolkit. In a sense, the toolkit represents an operationalisation of the analytical horizon. To be usefully evaluated, the analytical toolkit must be seen in connection with the wider context of the thesis.

So far, I have presented a basic research question: How is religion connected to national identity in religious education in Norway? I have pointed out that in analysing this case, it is possible to shed light on a range of theoretical debates under the broader umbrella of “multiculturalism debates”. In addition to the academic debates concerning multiculturalism, I have selected two relevant literatures, namely a debate concerning the representation of religious traditions in religious education, and a body of literature discussing the connections between national identity and sexuality in Norway. These are all connected in so far as they speak of how groups with identity claims should be understood. My hope is that the analytical toolkit presented in this thesis provides a fresh contribution to an on-going academic effort to develop an analytical vocabulary of groups with identity claims. So far, these understandings and descriptions have tended toward static conceptions that a-priori overemphasise either fluidity or stability. My trio of concepts, viscosity, boundaries, and work, allows for a variable social ontology of groups within the context of specific material and political conditions. Furthermore, it maintains and makes explicit a variable

social ontology whilst enabling a unified analytical voice. This applies even across multiple types of data. Especially the metaphor of viscosity might be a creative and original addition to the theoretical vocabulary, and has the potential for opening up new spaces for creative thinking and action.

I shall now turn to the methods section of the thesis, to give the reader the understandings necessary to evaluate the claims that I make on the basis of my data. Through this, I aim for transparency and accountability in my research and my analysis.

In the next part of the thesis, I explain the logic of research that has structured this study (chapter 8). Then I account for my practical choices in terms of methods (chapter 9).

PART IV

RESEARCH

DESIGN

In this part of the thesis, I present the research design of the project. In chapter 8 I account for the two forms of generalisation that underpin the knowledge claims I make. The aim of the section is to make clear the extent and nature of the knowledge claims that I make in this thesis. Basically, I make limited claims to say anything about religious education in Norway beyond the two schools in which I did my classroom observations. However, I make somewhat stronger claims in terms of the ability to generalise to theory. The different strategies of generalisation are discussed in sections 7.2 and 7.3. It is worth noting that the logic of generalising to theory plays an important part in structuring the presentation of this thesis. It means that the conceptual toolkit becomes relatively more important in relation to the empirical analysis. The remainder of chapter 7 explains why I have chosen this case specifically..

Chapter 8 gives further details of the choices of methods made during the research. The aim of the chapter is to provide accountability and transparency. I explain my rationale for using multiple methods (section 8.2). I present the reasons for my selection of texts (section 8.3). I then present my practical analytical strategy for interpreting these texts (section 8.4). Sections 8.5 and 8.6 detail how I selected and got access to the participating schools. Finally, I conclude the chapter with some thoughts on my role as a researcher during ethnographic work in schools (section 8.7).

7. METHODOLOGY: CASE STUDY AND GENERALISATION

7.1 Intro

This thesis began by asking how religion was mobilised in constructions of national identity. This question was to be investigated using the case of religious education in Norway. The logic of this thesis is that a case study has intrinsic interest for the case in hand, but also the potential for analytical generalisation. This chapter deals with the logic of case study, and why my case is of sociological interest. The following chapters present the analytical toolkit as my contribution to the theoretical discussions highlighted in chapters 2, 3 and 4.

I want to make clear to the reader exactly what my claims to knowledge are in this thesis. What are the limits of what I can claim to have found out about the world? What kinds of knowledge am I trying to develop in this thesis? The first part of this chapter engages with the nature of the case study that I have chosen. Here, I attempt to explain and defend the scope and the nature of the generalisations I make. In short, I claim little knowledge about what the world looks like outside the formal documents I have read, and the two schools I have studied. However, I do claim that engaging in depth with a case can shed light on the analytical tools that social scientists and policy makers use to understand that case. When I say “shed light on” I mean evaluate what other people have done, and, while drawing inspiration from previous work, develop my own

analytical tools, which I then put to the test by applying to the chosen case. I ask myself one key question when evaluating my own work: do my analytical tools enable me to say something original and relevant about the case in hand? I have presented these analytical tools, as well as the broader theoretical horizon they operationalize, in chapters 5 and 6.

Can my case study result in new knowledge about anything other than the curricula and the two schools? I argue that it can, in two very different ways. The following section concerns the modes of generalisation that are at work in this thesis. This is crucial in explaining the logic of my research design. I have distinguished between the art of generalising to a population, and the logic of analytic generalisation (or generalising to theory) within case studies.

The thesis is structured around the logic that Yin (2003; 2009) calls analytic generalisation. Furthermore, this is the basis on which I claim to have arrived at findings or contributions to a larger academic conversation.

On the other hand, there is a further use of case studies. Stake (1995; 1998) argues that the strength of a good case study is the richness of possibilities for identification and comparison with other cases. In other words a good case study offers good tools with which we can think about other situations.. In a sense this is a metaphorical mode of knowledge, where something is called upon by our imagination to clarify something else. It can be argued that it is useful to make metaphorical connections between my case and other cases. This is why I go along with the idea of the *art* of generalizing to the wider world, or to a population.

The primary use of the case study in this thesis is to contribute to a theoretical literature through applying my toolkit to a case and assessing its usefulness. This *logic* of generalizing to theory is inspired by the arguments of Yin (2009) and Nash (2000). However, there is another, less methodologically rigorous ambition that runs alongside the primary logic of generalization. That is the intrinsic interest of the case, and the invitation to identification and comparison to other cases. This distinction between metaphor and rhetoric on the one hand, and logic on the other, is made by Andrew Sayer (2000: 3-4). However, there is one point that I would like to clarify, as it might be a source of confusion: metaphor is an important part of the analytical tools that I propose as relevant beyond my case. So, in one sense metaphor is important for the possibility of generalizing to a wider population. The *whole case* might be seen as instructive and relevant for other cases through metaphorical connections established by the reader. Metaphor plays a different role in the analytical tools that I wish to present as generalization to theory. Namely, the metaphor of *viscosity* is used as a thinking tool, and is presented by me. I will return to the role of metaphor in the analytical toolkit below.

A further parallel here is one established by Nicos Mouzelis (see Beckford 2003: 11; Mouzelis 1995). He distinguishes between two kinds of theory. First, there is theory as “end product”, which says something about the world. Second, there is theory as “tool”, which is helpful to think with. The logic of argument in this thesis is structured in order to develop such theory as a tool. As such I am less concerned with “mapping the forest” and more concerned with “chopping up

trees”, to use the terms of Macnaghten and Myers (Macnaghten and Myers 2004; quoted in Silverman 2007: 63).

Nevertheless, there is merit in a detailed and theoretically informed account of a case. I want to mention these merits, even though they will not have any direct consequence for the logic of argument. Rather, they may come into play if I perform my craft well. Hopefully, I am able to interest people in the case or let the reader draw creative parallels to cases they know themselves. This is part of the art of case studies, and I present the thoughts of Robert Stake below to explain my ambition that the thesis might trigger other thoughts and associations than the ones I pursue more narrowly in my analysis.

Luckily, these two modes of generalisation are not at odds. Rather, they complement each other (see also the related discussion concerning the relationship between metaphor and logic in Sayer 2000). The richer, more detailed and nuanced I make my descriptions of the case, the greater the potential for recognition and inspiration, as well as for useful analytical generalisation.

7.2 The art of generalising to a population:

If I am to ask why I chose this case, and why it sustains my interest, it is because the connections between religion and Norwegianness are of intrinsic interest to me. Religion and national belonging plays on strings that stir emotions, as they have been with me all my life. I also recognise the political importance of religious education in Norway: watching news and friends gives me a hunch that

there is something at stake that is important to people. Furthermore, what goes on in Norwegian schools is of intrinsic interest to all Norwegian pupils, parents and teachers, at least!

Intrinsic interest

For 5 million people, what happens in Norway is of crucial importance. I do not want to understate the importance of this, even though it does not impact on the logic of argument in this thesis. The close and transparent investigation, coupled with informed analysis may open up new spaces of thought and action. This creative goal may have value for individuals, organisations and the state. Stake (Stake 1998: 98) argues that the main factor that distinguishes good case studies is the intrinsic interest of the case.

Resonance

A good case study may inspire the reader to see links and connections to other cases. Again, I am indebted to the arguments made by Stake: "*To describe in sufficient detail to let the reader make comparison without them being set up by the writer*" (Stake 1998: 97). This seems to me to be a fair description of how academics in fact relate to case studies, as opposed to how they claim to relate to these studies: "*[...] the bulk of case study methodology writing has been about generalisations, but the bulk of case study work has been of intrinsic interest* (Stake 1998: 99).

Iterative studies

Another way that case studies can say something about the larger world is to conduct several of them. Luckily, other researchers are doing similar work. As such, this thesis is part of a larger body of work portraying religious education in Norwegian schools as well as in other countries. In a European context, the work done in this thesis draws upon, and may add to, the on-going work of the Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit (WRERU) and the recently finished European Commission funded Religion in Education (REDco) research project (Jackson 2010; Jackson et al. 2007; Knauth, Josza, Bertram-Troost and Ipgrave 2008; Valk, Bertram-Troost, Friederici and Béraud 2009). In the Norwegian context, the University of Stavanger, responsible for the Norwegian part of the REDco project, has co-ordinated some of the classroom ethnography on religious education in Norway (Bråten 2010 Forthcoming; Lippe 2008; 2010 Forthcoming; Skeie and Lippe 2009)⁵. Finally, the University of Oslo research programme Cultural Complexity in New Norway (CULCOM) has also facilitated classroom observation research on ideas of Norwegianness in education. The work of Åse Røthing and Stine Helene Svendsen is particularly relevant in this context (Røthing and Leirvik 2008; Røthing and Mühleisen 2009; Røthing and Svendsen 2008; 2009a; 2010; Forthcoming; Røthing and Svendsen 2009b).

⁵ Bråten (2010 Forthcoming) provides a comprehensive overview over recent empirical work on religious education in Norway. She points to work done by established academics, such as Lied (2004), Afdal (2006), Haakedal (2004), Skoglund (2008) and Dybdahl (2008). She also lists the ongoing PhD research. In addition to Bråten and my own thesis there is also relevant work in progress by von der Lippe, Anker, Stabel Jørgensen and Nicolaisen.

What Stake (1995) calls “the art of case study” is relevant in that I hope that the intrinsic interest, the possibility of resonance and the contribution to a larger body of research may be a part of the reader’s experience when reading this thesis. I will now turn to the logic of what Yin (2009) calls “analytical generalisation”.

7.3 The logic of generalising to theory:

Case studies are useful for evaluating and developing our theoretical tools (Yin 2009). This project’s research design is tailored to draw upon empirical resources to evaluate the analytical utility of previous work, and to suggest ways of developing these. The following section will briefly outline two ways in which a case study may be used to evaluate and develop theory.

Refutation

A bold theory will attempt to say something about the world, and be clear about its assumptions. One way then, to evaluate theory is to attempt to find instances in the world that clearly contradict either predictions or assumptions of a theory. A single critical case study will be enough to refute a strong theory that makes claims to establish necessary and sufficient causal connections (see Emigh 1997: for a discussion of how the tradition of thinking following from Karl Popper and Imre Lakatos still might be useful).

To an extent, I employ this logic of refutation to structure the relationship between the analytical chapters. Chapter 11 presents the discursive field of the

formal curriculum documents. I find here some assumptions that I challenge in chapters 12 and 13, where I apply the findings from the classroom. This structure of argument is to be distinguished from the larger case-logic of analytical generalisation that structures the entire thesis, through applying my analytical tools to a case.

Why do I not employ a stronger logic of refutation for structuring my case study? After all, it is a powerful argumentative structure. This is because the logic of refutation is only partial in most cases,. One aspect of a theory may be seen to be lacking, and so the theory is adapted and improved. Often, the theories or explanations are not so much wrong as inevitably incomplete. The actual practice, then, of an academic community developing analytical tools through case studies, is rarely that of stark refutation, but more often one of application of theoretical tools, followed by an overall evaluation of its analytical utility. Consequently, I shall move on to the logic of argument that I employ in my thesis.

Application

In this thesis, I apply a new set of analytical tools to a case. An important consideration when evaluating the thesis will be the extent to which I am able to use these tools to provide a rigorous but innovative account that answers my research question. The main measure of evaluation is to compare my account to previous accounts. Consequently, I shall evaluate previous accounts, but also assesses the strengths and weaknesses of my own analytical tools.

The logic of application has some rhetorical similarities to the stronger programme of refutation mentioned above. However, in using a logic of application I recognise that several accounts of the same case may be true to data and have sound assumptions. The “test” is whether or not the community of academic peers, user groups and other stakeholders, find the account *useful*.

The Norwegian sociologist Anniken Hagelund puts this well in her discussion of the work of Kate Nash (2000):

“Instead of trying to settle this question [of social scientific truth claims] on this very general and abstract level, Kate Nash argues that there in a ‘postmodern’ political sociology is a scepticism concerning epistemology in the sense of establishing theories of how knowledge may ultimately be justified. Rather, one must see contributions as engaged in a conversation about the better ways of analysing a phenomenon. Thus, the problem of the basis for truth claims can only be “solved” by being worked at in specific pieces of work” (Hagelund 2003: 64).

This quote captures the logic of analytic generalisation in case studies, through application and evaluation of analytical tools. This is the basic logic of generalisation that underpins this research project. It is a pragmatic and instrumental approach to social scientific knowledge.

7.3 Why choose Norway?

Norway is a good “critical case,” especially in terms of the role of the state. There are few countries where the state is so influential both in schools and in

religious affairs. Norway is a particularly good case to show how religion and education are implicated in the identity management strategies of states reacting to global flows of people and ideas.

Furthermore, there is the negative attention religious education in Norway has received from international legal bodies. This involves the criticisms against Norwegian religious education from the United Nations Human Rights Committee in 2004 (UNHRC 2004), and the judgement against the state from the European Court of Human Rights in 2007 (ECHR 2007).

Religious education in Norway is interesting in terms of a state's right to put in place compulsory teaching about religion, and under what circumstances. It is also an example of how a nation-state relates to transnational institutions.

It is impossible to get away from my intrinsic interest in the case, however. I want my study to be a part of an interplay between research and policy, and the end results of this interplay are important to many people, amongst them myself.

7.4 Why choose education?

Education is the state's main legitimate tool to socialise its citizens. It is thus a major player in state strategies for managing diversity. This becomes especially interesting when the legitimacy of the means of the state are questioned and criticised both from Norwegian minorities and from transnational institutions.

Education is a field where people regularly engage with the state. The effects of policy are often direct and hands on, and pupils and parents react accordingly. It is thus a window into reactions to state strategies for managing diversity.

Education is an everyday activity, involving large parts of the day, for most days of the week for most of the year. Symbols, meanings and agendas that are forcefully at play in school are therefore part of the shaping of people's daily rounds. They are involved in these everyday actions with thought, emotions, bodies and actions. As such, education is a better window into investigating the kind of identity formation that this thesis is looking for. Rather than looking at rare rituals or public rhetoric, the classroom is a place where ideas and bodies are shaped. The classroom, in short, is a good place to study the establishment of what Michael Billig (1995) might have called "banal" identities. "Banal" does not mean unimportant, but rather taken for granted and pervasive, well hidden in the foregrounds of our lives.

There are good reasons, then, for selecting Norway and education for a case study into the connections between religion and national identity. However, it is only prudent to highlight some extra-theoretical reasons for choosing to look at religious education in Norway.

Firstly, there has been a vibrant and policy relevant debate in recent years. The outcome of this debate is something that many Norwegians do care about, myself included. The intrinsic interest of the case is clearly a large motivation for its choice.

A moment of self-reflection makes it clear that an interest in this case study emerges from my own experience. The interest in the theme was sparked during my teacher training courses and practical work, and the initial research proposal grew out of that direct engagement. It might even be relevant to the choice of case that I grew up in a Christian home with parents from different countries. As such, both religious identity and national identity are aspects that have been part of my own reflection on identity as far back as I can remember.

7.5 Case study conclusions

There are good reasons for choosing religious education in Norway as a case for investigating connections between religion and national identity. These reasons are intrinsic as well as analytically strategic. Furthermore, there are different ways in which this case study can be of interest beyond the confines of the case itself. The main social scientific gains of this case study are in the improved understanding of the analytical tools with which social scientists and others view religion, national identity and education. This logic is important in determining the research design of the project. Nevertheless, there are other ways of benefiting from a well described and argued case study, and the reader may see the intrinsic interest of the case, and be able to draw parallels to other cases. I shall now move on to describe my methods in greater detail.

8. METHODS

8.1 Methods introduction

In this chapter I outline the practicalities of selecting and gathering my data. There are two forms of data: curriculum documents and notes from classroom ethnography. The first chapter outlines the practicalities of selection and gives an account of how the documents were selected. The same applies to the classroom ethnography: I shall give an account of how I gained access, and the practicalities of gathering the data. This presentation is crucial in order to give contextual transparency to later analysis. The second aim of this chapter is to discuss some of the issues that arise from the practical constraints that everyday life places on the selection and gathering of data. I shall use this space to reflect on:

- 1) The relationship between the document data, and the ethnographic notes as data. This is a reflection on linking data in a multi-method investigation.
- 2) The selection of texts for document analysis.
- 3) The analytical strategy for document analysis. This is an outline of how I utilise the theory of Laclau and Mouffe to analyse the formal curriculum documents.
- 4) The process by which I selected and gained access to the schools that participated in my ethnographic fieldwork.

5) My role as an ethnographer. A reflexive account of how my own presence may have enabled and constrained the gathering of data.

The chapter is meant to provide the transparency and accountability that enables a reader to evaluate the relationship between my data, my theoretical tools, my questions and my answers.

8.2 Multiple methods

This research project aims to study religious education in Norway from “above” and “below.” Studying religious education from above will in this instance mean looking at policies and formal curricula that legally and pedagogically define what religious education is supposed to be. Studying RE from below will mean being present in classrooms where religious education is taught, and speaking (more or less formally) to the actors involved – concentrating on the teacher. “Religious education” is the meeting of these two. It is when the actor steps into the institutional frameworks that she becomes a “teacher” or “pupil” in religious education. But no religious education exists without people filling the institution with life and action. However, here the problem starts. It is difficult to focus on both sides of the coin at the same time. I know that whatever side I look at, the coin also consists of something I cannot see from my angle.

The problem consists in part of the fact that formal curricula and teachers’ behaviour are very different things, even though they are connected in some important ways. Formal curricula are in the world of texts; whereas teachers’ behaviour happens here and now, or there and then. Consequently, I use multiple

methods in this project. Text analysis and ethnography yield different types of data. The reason for using a mixed methods approach is to get a better empirical framework for discussing structure and agency. Another reason is to look more closely at the connections between the institutional prescriptions of religious education and the practical way in which religious education works out. This is important both academically and in terms of educational policy. There is a danger of letting policy documents become a world of their own. There is also a danger of trying to understand identifications and the maintenance of groups with identity claims in terms of their own agency alone. Consequently, the careless researcher may underestimate the importance of the institutional frames that surround the everyday interactions.

However, there are also dangers with multiple method research. The main danger is that it becomes easy to treat different phenomena as similar; to compare apples and oranges. This danger is compounded by the historical circumstance that the methods used for generating different kinds of data often go together with analytical tools. These tools are often informed by disparate philosophical and practical traditions, and it follows that any researcher needs to be very careful to remain internally consistent. Distinct research traditions have seen distinct methods for data collection and tools for analysis evolving together. Combining such different tradition may quickly involve contradictory epistemological and ontological assumptions.

In dealing with this challenge, Fielding & Fielding (1986; see also Silverman 2005) suggest the following check list:

i) Always begin from one theoretical perspective.

ii) Choose methods that will give an account of structure and meaning from within that perspective.

In this project, I give an account of both structure and meaning from within one theoretical perspective, and I spend some time outlining this perspective in the chapter for methodology. I claim that the term “one theoretical perspective” can be understood as a set of concepts that share the necessary assumptions not to cause inconsistencies. I have structured the study using an adaptation of the work of the Canadian pedagogue John Goodlad (1979), and his concept of “levels” of curriculum. Basically, Goodlad rethought the field of education as one curriculum that existed in many levels. It is not that important for this study to copy his exact method of distinguishing between the different levels; it is Goodlad’s general logic that is useful. “The curriculum” exists, following Goodlad’s model, simultaneously as formal texts, as teachers’ understanding of the curriculum, as practical interaction in the classroom, as pupils’ understanding, and at a political and societal level. There is thus both continuity and change between the different levels.

I make a twofold adaptation. First, I adopt the suggestions made by Norwegian pedagogue Geir Afdal (2006). He points out that Goodlad’s model will have a greater analytical utility if the hierarchical organisation of levels of curriculum is assumed to be an empirical question. If the analytical model of curriculum contains levels, then it is a priori decided that the formal curriculum influences the classroom interactions, but not the other way round. According to Afdal, this

is often the case, but it is not a priori so. He suggests a restating of the model, using the terms “domains” rather than “levels”. As a consequence, the researcher can study empirically the way the domains influence each other. This is relevant for me as I try to develop the notion of fluid power.

The second adaptation I make is to restate Goodlad and Afdal’s model in terms of Laclau and Mouffe’s understanding of discourse as material. For the purposes of this analysis, I see religious education as one discursive unit with multiple materialities. Each “domain” represents a material instantiation of the curriculum, in terms of formal texts, acting bodies, memory or cognitive categories, or a more dispersed body of texts, such as media texts about education. Changes in the mode of materiality, and the transformation of meaning as a word or concept moves from, say, text to speech, may be usefully analysed in terms of power. To fully see this link between changes and action, I will use an understanding of power as something that can be both “fluidising” and “solidifying”.

This implicates a somewhat unusual use of Goodlad’s model. The idea of the many levels of the curriculum is often used to highlight the *difference* between the different domains. Goodlad is utilised to remind academics and policy makers that the classroom is different from the documents they make. This way of looking at the curriculum is certainly present in my project as well. However, certainly in terms of my discussion of methods, Goodlad’s framework highlights the *connections* between the domains. Even though the data consist of different materialities, they are to be analysed as one field of meaning. I emphasise the

continuity between the different domains of the curriculum. This allows me to link two disparate sets of data using a single overarching theoretical approach that is internally consistent.

8.3 Choice of texts

I analyse three texts in depth. These are the three editions of the formal curriculum for compulsory school in Norway that were published between 1974 and 2005. I focus on the general part of the curriculum, which outlines the principles that underlie all schooling. As such, I am not looking at the formal curriculum that defines the religious education subject, but rather the legitimisation for teaching about religion in school. This has led me to a closer investigation into the way the curricula speak about *values, culture and identity*. Furthermore, I have chosen an historical approach. This is partly to highlight the impure origins of some of the most important rhetorical devices and formative ideas that are active in the present understanding of religious education. By “impure origin” I mean that some of the ideas that are active today emerged in a different context, as a response to different problems than those faced by educationalists today. Nevertheless, these rhetorical devices and formative ideas have been used continuously, but with shifting meanings. The use of these terms now has an “impact history” which is relevant for understanding religious education today. The second reason for this historical analysis is that it provides a comparative horizon that enables me to highlight the particularity and the newness of certain key ideas and rhetorical devices.

I can now move on to why I only present the development of the general curricula, and not the specifics of the religious education subject syllabuses. The first point I want to make is to distinguish between the presentational logic of the thesis, and the processual logic of the research project. The process of textual analysis included the subject syllabuses, as well as the White Paper (NOU1995:9) that prefigured the introduction of the new religious education subject (“KRL”) in 1997⁶. I also read a wide sample of media texts from 1992 to the present, as well as legal documents surrounding the court cases on the KRL subject. However, because I have tried to present an argument in the thesis, I decided to focus on the following three texts:

- Chapter 1 of the National Guidelines of 1974 (M74)
- Chapter 1 of the National Guidelines of 1987 (M87)
- The Core Curriculum of the National Curriculum of 1997. (L97)

There are some sacrifices involved in this choice. First of all, there is an understandable concern that these introductory parts of the curricula do not inform the teachers’ daily routine in the same way as the subject syllabuses do. A second concern is that by making this choice, I am bypassing the many and important changes that have been made to the subject in the subsequent subject syllabus changes of 2002, 2005 and (even though this was after my fieldwork) 2008. Specifically, the changes made in the later curricula *can* be understood as an indication that educational policy makers are less concerned with questions of

⁶ I give a more extended background to these documents in sections 9.3, 9.5 and 9.6.

identity and cultural heritage than they were ten years earlier (Bråten 2010 Forthcoming; Leganger-Krogstad 2007; Lied 2009; Relaño 2010; Skeie 2007).

There are some reasons in favour, though, and they are as follows:

First, formally speaking, the introductions to the curricula are just as legally relevant as the subject specific syllabuses. The Core Curriculum of 1997 (L97) is still a constitutive document for education in Norway, including religious education. It is also the only place where the legitimisations for teaching about religion are spelled out at some length, along with the fundamental rationale for teaching about values and identity in Norwegian schools.

Secondly, as a sociologist rather than an educationalist, I argue that the core curriculum is a better indicator of the larger political concerns and trends than the more specialised concerns of the curriculum authors. There exists a cluster of ideas surrounding the word “values” in terms of national identity, and it is used to connect religion to both individual and collective identities. Without going into detailed analyses, “the state” is not a unitary actor. On the one hand there are the educational professionals in the department, as well as the directorate, of education. These professionals in the governmental bureaucracy are often seen to represent a move *away* from an emphasis on identity in the curricula. On the other hand, there are the elected politicians in government and Parliament. Whenever issues of identity in curriculum emerge onto the broader scene of Parliamentary politics, the concerns with identity, cultural heritage and values are firmly reinstated. The fact that the Core Curriculum from 1997 has been kept through subsequent educational reforms can be interpreted as an indication that

this document represents a reasonably broad political consensus. As such it represents an interesting source of information about important, politically successful, and maybe even dominant, ways of thinking about values, identity, religion and nationality in Norway. This can be complicated by pointing out that subsequent reformers might have wanted to change the Core Curriculum, but decided not to in order to focus on more practical concerns in the 2005 “Knowledge Promotion” reform (KRL2005). This point might highlight that the consensus is not complete. However, it might also serve to highlight that the reformers themselves considered the political consensus surrounding the 1997 Core Curriculum robust enough that the reformers decided not to challenge it, but rather to bypass it.

Third, there are qualities of form that makes the first chapters and the Core Curriculum better objects of analysis than the subject syllabuses. There is a richer and more associative language in these chapters that allows for greater depth in terms of analysing underlying metaphors and subtle shifts in associations and connotations in some key words. The syllabuses are more clipped, using lists, and they aim at a level of precision that invites another form of analysis. The choice of studying the introductory chapters secures a greater fit between my method of textual analysis and the data selected.

Fourth, there is a sense in which the slower flows of the Core Curriculum might be an equally significant influence on teachers as the latest syllabus. This is more the case in terms of the questions that I am investigating. This last point can be seen together with my earlier point about distinguishing between a

processual and presentational logic. The processual logic of conceptual development during the project was more abductive than the rather theory-driven approach evident in the way I present my argument. The decision to emphasise the values-identity node emerged from the classroom experience. It was a “cluster of meaning” that the teachers were concerned about and which occasionally turned up in the classroom. It was in the first chapters and the Core Curriculum that I found the material that engaged with these questions in the formal curriculum documents.

The argument for starting the historical analysis in 1974 is that this is the first curriculum after the Education Act of 1969, where religious education in the compulsory school was no longer seen as the official baptismal training of the school.

8.4 Document analysis: analytical strategy

I have argued for the selection of particular documents for my textual analysis. In the next section, I shall give a short description of how I go about analysing these texts.

The philosophical underpinning of this project is inspired by Laclau and Mouffe’s thinking about discourse as something material (1985). For the most part, this underlying theoretical horizon is mediated by other thinkers that are more immediately useful. However, the textual analysis is inspired reasonably directly. It is based on the assumption that signs take on their meaning in a larger system of other signs. According to Laclau and Mouffe’s understanding,

the meaning of the word “values” is determined by the myriad of linkages that language users make between the word “values” and other signs. These other signs might be of different materialities: so the word “values” might be linked to certain acts, or to other words, such as “morals” or “stock market” or “identity”. According to Laclau and Mouffe, any sign is fundamentally open, and a sign in this imagined pre-used state they call an “element” (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 105-114). Every usage of the sign is, according to Laclau and Mouffe, an attempt to reduce the potential numbers of meanings in that sign, to the extent that the sign can be used in effective communication and action. Every actual usage of a sign they call a “moment”. All language use (and, by extension, nearly all communication) is a continuous process of making moments out of elements. They use the word “closure to describe the process of eliminating potential meanings of a sign through its usage. All language use is an attempt at closure of signs. Closure can never be complete, but it may come close. The next stage in Laclau and Mouffe’s thinking is that there are always competing candidates for closure of a sign (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 110-114). Which closure becomes dominant is a question of power, and considerable power can be expended to “close” a sign. These processes of closure are also practical and material. Building a school involves choosing certain types of architecture over others, and in the choice of architecture lies ways of thinking about teaching and learning, about hierarchies between teachers and pupils, for instance. These choices solidify certain ways of thinking, and, in the process, fluidise other ways of thinking. In such a way, the results of previous closures are materially present

in the downflow of history. Previous work enables and constrains the scope of possible future choices and closures that actors make.

In practical terms, this means that, in my analysis, I take an historical perspective, and I look at the range of meanings that key terms are given. The first part of the analysis is thus to give a kind of map of the existing possible meanings of key terms such as “values”. A meaning is not only a clean-cut denotation, but a range of connotations with subtle emotional nuances. The next step is then to see if these connotations are clustered or structured in specific ways. Laclau and Mouffe call such clusters “discourses” (1985: 105). A discourse for Laclau and Mouffe is the sum of signs and circumstances that cause a particular element to be closed into a particular moment. An example can be the sign “filthy dog”. Its meaning is not given. Its meaning depends on whether it stands in a pet shampooing discourse, or a racist discourse. Their point that discourse is material entails that not only the words used, but the sign above the pet-shop door, the shelves, the till at the counter, the smell of cat-food and the friendly staff are all part of the pet shampooing discourse. They are all cues that help us close the element “filthy dog” into a meaningful moment. Laclau and Mouffe are often misinterpreted as thinking that the *ideas* in such a discourse somehow *create* the materialities in the objects that also constitute the discourse. This is patently absurd. Rather, it seems to me that here we have a powerful way of understanding how humans act meaningfully in the world. It is not anti-realist, but it is based on the fact that the world is irreducibly complex and that meaning-making is a process of editing, of meaning-reduction. Consequently, there is always more than one way of making sense of the data

the world provides us. According to Laclau and Mouffe, it follows that meaning-making is a political process invested with power. When I am hesitant to use the word ‘discourse’, this is partly pragmatic. The word is used in so many different ways that it is difficult to have even a little confidence that I am communicating approximately what I intend to the reader. Secondly, the extent to which the competing meanings actually cluster is varied. I think that I can be more precise in using terms such as “cluster”, “solidification” and “fluidisation” rather than “discourse”.

My analysis, then, aims at isolating certain key terms over which the disagreement of meaning is particularly intense. Laclau and Mouffe call these “nodes”. The second step is to map out some of the competing connotations and metaphorical investments that are linked to the node that I select. The third stage is to see if there are any patterns or clusterings in the linkages. It is this map of clustered connotations and metaphorical investments that provide the basis for understanding the power struggles and contestations that occur in the classroom, as the formal curriculum is to be “translated” into classroom action.

8.5 Selecting schools

I use the data from two schools in this case study. I call my case “religious education in Norway”, and the schools are selected to bring variation *within* the case. There is an element of Russian dolls in the case-logic of this study, as the two schools are easily understood as “cases” of religious education in Norway. However, in terms of the logic of argument that underpins the thesis as a whole,

it is the *field of religious education in Norway* that constitutes the case. The two schools represent *variation* in terms of key variables that I am interested in, but they also represent a certain *similarity* in other key variables. The choice of schools is related to other key issues in the research design. Of particular relevance is the theoretical approach that looks at *boundary work* as an important analytical tool to understand the groupness of groups with identity claims. As a consequence, I make it easier on myself if I select schools with a minority presence. However, I am also interested in how the dynamic changes in a school that is diverse enough to make it difficult to speak of a clear majority and clear minorities. As a result, Smallsted and Bigby schools were an appropriate duo of schools. The schools do keep statistics on how many pupils have Norwegian as a second language, and this is the closest proxy available to measure some kind of diversity in the schools. In both these cases, variation in first languages happens to co-vary with religious diversity.

Smallsted School had approximately 20% pupils with Norwegian as a second language, and was in a small town in eastern Norway. Bigby school had approximately 65% pupils with Norwegian as their second language, and was situated in the eastern part of Oslo. The schools thus represent a clear variation in terms of a key variable: the religious diversity of the school. They also represent variation in terms of urbanism. However, the schools are comparable in terms of size (approximately 500 pupils in each school), in terms of average income amongst parents, and the fact that both schools are in Eastern Norway.

The logic of sampling changed during the research, though not in significant ways. In addition to the two schools included in the case, I also conducted fieldwork at a third school. This school was in an affluent suburb to the west of Oslo, with a very small number of pupils with Norwegian as a second language (3-4%). There are three main reasons why this sample was not included in the final project. First, during work on the first two schools, an analysis of the boundary zones emerged as a key point of interest. To develop this aspect in a religiously and culturally homogeneous environment turned out to be an ambitious undertaking that would cloud the focus of this project. It became clear to me that this demanded a separate research project, focusing on mediated boundaries, and entering into a critical dialogue with the sociological literature on “whiteness”. The second point is related to the first point: the complexity of the data from the two first schools together with the document analysis, meant that including a third school would add a level of complexity that would leave the project unmanageable within the given time frame. The complexity would both be in terms of the amount of data to be analysed, but also in terms of new analytical aspects that would change the focus of the project. Finally, and more prosaically, my own health suffered during the fieldwork at the last school. As a result, the quality of the data was not as good as that of the data from the two first schools.

This is not to say that the stay at the third school was wasted. It was an interesting environment and many of the key analytical ideas that I want to bring forward in this thesis saw their embryonic form there. I reflected much and contrasted the experiences from the two first schools, discussed with practising

teachers, and wrote the first more analytical notes during this fieldwork. It is interesting to reflect on some of the material and practical aspects of how the practical and physical environment can be conducive of analysis and creativity. So the third school changed its status from data source to analytical incubator as the project developed.

Consequently, I stayed at three schools and I use the data gathered from two of them as the basis for the analysis made in this thesis. This is a reflection on how the research questions and analytical focus developed during the project. It is also a consequence of how these formal changes are entwined with my practical and embodied experiences as a researcher: my health became a factor in this research design choice, as well as the analytical direction of attention during the last fieldwork, which, for reasons not entirely clear to me, continued reflecting on the experience from the two first schools. Nevertheless, the choice of two schools does fit well with the research questions and analytical tools that I use to further my argument in this thesis. As such, the logic of school selection emerged as a practically viable form of purposive sampling. The choice of two schools that are similar in most respects apart from degree of diversity, but where both schools do have a significant number of minority pupils seems appropriate for this case-study.

8.6 Gaining access to schools

The practicalities of gaining access to the schools are important to describe. I contacted the schools, and secured my access, in ways that are relevant to how

my data turned out. The access stories are different in the two schools, and they enabled some field relations, but created thresholds to other field relations in the different schools.

As a background for the discussion, I want to make clear that gaining access to schools was not necessarily an easy process. For practical reasons, I decided to be based in the greater Oslo region. My first strategy was to contact academics who were active in teacher training in religious education at academic institutions in Oslo. They very kindly provided me with a list of schools that seemed to fit my requirements in terms of levels of diversity, distance to travel and so on. The only formally correct and ethical way of contacting these schools was to contact the leadership of the school by phone. I spoke to head teachers and vice head teachers, and presented my project. I was mostly met with polite interest. Beyond that, many schools declined for practical reasons. Some declined immediately; others after the leadership had raised the subject with the teachers. In all three schools to which I gained access, I needed to find a teacher who was enthusiastic enough about my project to recommend it personally to their colleagues and the school leadership. A formal proposal from the leadership of the school did not work.

Smallsted School lies in a small town where I lived briefly during my teenage years. My parents still lived there at the time of the project. I was keen at the time to find a school in which to do a pilot study, a one-week stay at a school before I had finalised my questions and my research design. My parents suggested getting in touch with the teacher who was to become my gatekeeper

(in Norwegian, the term is ‘door-opener’, which seems just as appropriate). At the time, I was not so worried about the informal networks that established the contact, as the intention was to only use the school for the pilot. As a matter of fact, my father met the teacher in question socially before I had the chance to get in touch with him, mentioned that I was interested in getting in touch with the school, and asked whether it was all right to contact him. It was, and I did.

My gatekeeper at Smallsted School was a man in his 50s, with a higher degree from a university. He was also the head of the religious education section in the school, and he presented my project to his colleagues and the school leadership. Soon after, I was invited to spend one week at the school, joining five different teachers in their classes and to conduct three interviews. The teachers welcomed me very warmly during the pilot. They expressed interest in the questions I asked, and invited me to participate in activities in and out of school hours. For instance, I joined the a group of teachers playing floor-hockey twice weekly. At the end of the week, it was clear that the teachers at Smallsted School felt that the issues raised by my project were issues that they felt were relevant to their everyday work-life. I had also established good rapport with the teachers. They were very keen for me to come back and spend more time there. The headmaster also seemed keen, seeing my project as an opportunity for developing the school’s thinking about religious education and cultural and religious diversity.

However, it was also clear to me that, at Smallsted school, I was a part of a social network and a local world where my own biography and family became especially relevant. My parents had been active members of the local

community for nearly 15 years by this time, and they were well known. My father was the Minister of the town's Church of Norway congregation, while my mother worked as a teacher at the other school in the town. It was clear to me that the teachers' awareness of my being the son of the local Minister, and my studying religious education, would be factors to take into account when assessing my data. However, rather than speaking of a bias, it seems more useful to speak of the enablements and constraints that followed from being a local boy. (I do not know whether being the "son of a preacher man" is less of a problematic ascription than being a "multiculturalism-researcher from the University in Oslo," which I think would have been the perception if I had been completely unknown). I shall discuss this further below.

As the start of the school year approached, I was still securing access to other schools and I had an open invitation to Smallsted. I made the choice to do my first fieldwork there, with the consequences this had in terms of reflexivity and adjusting the research questions.

Gaining access to Bigby school happened in a slightly different way. First, I tried and failed to get in touch with schools that were involved with teacher training in religious education. Then, I contacted some academic educationalists and asked instead if they knew of any teachers who might be useful to contact directly in a project such as mine. One of the names provided was the teacher that was to become my gatekeeper at Bigby School. He was also a teacher in his 50s, who had been active in developing the KRL-subject and writing textbooks for the subject. He had been head of religious education at his school until the

time of my project, when the post was taken over by another of the participating teachers. He discussed my project with me, went back to the school and spoke to his colleagues and the school leadership, and they agreed that four teachers should participate in my project. During my stay there, a fifth teacher joined. I arranged a meeting with the teachers, where I presented my project and introduced myself to them.

The contrast to Smallsted was instructive. The teachers were interested in and positive towards the project. However, the sense of rapport and connection was less immediate than at Smallsted School. I will use Erving Goffman's famous terms "backstage" and "frontstage" to describe the difference (Goffman 1990). I entered Smallsted in a backstage setting. It was personal and with an immediate sense of rapport, but with more specific and locally entwined expectations attached to my role. As a contrast, I entered Bigby in a frontstage setting. I was greeted professionally and impersonally to begin with, with fewer and more general expectations attached to my role as a researcher.

8.7 Research role: my presence in the field

I had a different trajectory in the two schools in terms of the roles the teachers attributed to me, and my own self-presentation. I think about this difference in terms of two sets of roles: 'from a Christian background' and 'politically correct researcher'. In Smallsted, the 'Christian' set of roles was immediately assumed, and the role set of the researcher emerged during the fieldwork. In Bigby, it was the 'politically correct researcher' that was assumed from the outset, whereas the

informants only gradually got to know my biography and the religious background of my family. The first role-set emerges from the knowledge that I grew up in a Christian family and as the son of the local Minister. Many teachers at Smallsted knew who my parents are. The religious background of my family was certainly a part of me (and the teachers' expectations of me) as I entered into these fieldwork situations. This was true regardless of what my faith-position was at the time of the project. My own position in relation to Christian faith (lapsed) became an issue on some occasions. Sometimes the pupils asked directly; at other times it came up as a topic of conversation with the teachers. It also happened that I felt that the pupils or teachers were clearly navigating on false assumptions about my faith, so I told them that "I did not believe". Whether this removed me from their mental category of 'Christian', I do not know. Nevertheless, it is an important difference between the two schools that the religious affiliation of my family was common knowledge to the teachers in Smallsted, but not in Bigby. This had consequences for how I was perceived and received by the teachers at both schools. Initially, it seemed as if the teachers were anxious to show that they were "religious enough", and emphasized the good relations they had with the local Church. As the fieldwork developed, and we discussed issues that emerged either from everyday discussion of news and public matters, or from my project more directly, my opinions and political stance seemed to become more important in the role expectations directed towards me. "The politically correct researcher" is my name for this role.

At Bigby School, the trajectory between the two roles was reversed. I approached them through the academic networks of the head of religious

education. Consequently, I was presented as a researcher in religious education and education and multiculturalism from a British university. In a sense, this description is closer to my self-understanding than that of 'Christian', as I have not myself moved away from it. However, I was keen not to be seen as arrogant or evaluative. I asked open questions, and it was easy to appear sincerely interested, for the simple reason that I *was* sincerely interested. Nevertheless, it is clear to me that the teachers were keen to present themselves as knowledgeable and academically sound. It was also clear that the descriptions of the challenges and difficulties that they described as being related to the cultural and religious diversity of Bigby school were stronger and more explicit the longer I was at the school. I interpret this as the research relationship moving beyond a frontstage mode, which activated my "politically correct researcher" role. It gradually moved towards a "thicker", backstage role. As they got to know me, they also got to know my approach to questions of religious diversity and to aspects of my "religious biography". Nevertheless, I was never involved in school life in the same way at Bigby as I was in Smallsted.

At the start of the fieldwork, I also tried to withhold sanctions and moderate my own responses as to what I thought was right or wrong, good or bad, in terms of politics and pedagogy. As the relationships deepened, and as I developed a better sense of rapport and respect, I challenged their opinions more directly and discussed my own thoughts, opinions and viewpoints more openly. For me, this was the most natural way to be a field researcher. My sense of social tact and ethical considerations of equality and symmetry of disclosure made it difficult for me to ask my informants to be open and candid with me, but remain aloof

and “neutral” myself. Initially, it was easy to present myself as interested and eager to learn. I was very keen to avoid, or at least minimize, any sense that I was evaluating their performance as teachers. In a sense, the more I got to know the teachers, the more critical questions I could allow myself to ask without raising their barriers and being perceived as top-down.

Reflections on research role

It is difficult to account clearly for the difference between the two schools. Some of the factors that cause “backstage” or “frontstage” relations are difficult to count or isolate. Some explanation might lie in the nature of the school. I have no real way of distinguishing between researcher effects and place effects. At Smallsted the staff was more stable, and with a greater connection to the school as a part of the local social matrix. Many teachers at Bigby had worked at a number of Oslo schools. It might be said that Bigby related more to a more formal network of institutions through the municipal network of schools, and less to a sense of a distinct local community. As such, any newcomer in the teachers’ common room would be more likely to be the object of friendly interest in Smallsted, and more likely to be assumed to be professional and capable of solving his or her own problems in Bigby. Another reason might be my own biographical embeddedness in the local community that Smallsted school was a part of. Furthermore, it is difficult to say whether joining the floor-hockey game on Wednesdays and some Fridays was a cause or an effect of the “backstage” relationship I experienced at Smallsted.

A word of warning might be useful here. In a sense, a backstage relationship is often portrayed as an ideal in qualitative research. It provides a sense of authenticity and connectedness that allows the researcher to say “I was *there*, I tapped into things as they really are.” There is a sense in which this is true. However, the more professional (but still cordial and friendly) relationship at Bigby made it easier for me to raise political or philosophical issues with the teachers in a way that would be unusual and strained in the more relaxed and seemingly harmless sociality of Smallsted.

Finally, I will record some thoughts about my own presence in the classroom, and note taking. I followed “my” teachers as closely as possible. My primary strategy in defining a role in a class was to follow the teacher’s cues. This meant that I had a range of roles depending on the dynamics of the class, and the teaching style of the teacher. The following list is not exhaustive, but gives an impression of the variation.

I) A passive fly-on-the-wall. I would sit at the front of the classroom to one side, follow the class and take notes in my notebook.

II) A participant in discussions. The teacher or the pupils would ask me my opinion on a subject they discussed and I would answer as honestly as I could.

III) “The expert”. If the teacher didn’t know the answer to a factual question about religion, he or she would ask if I knew.

IV) The assistant teacher. If the class was working on answering questions in their work-books or similar, and the teacher was busy helping one group, I was asked by the teacher or the pupils to help another group with their questions.

V) On some occasions, I was asked to give the pupils an introduction to my own research project and to run a workshop surrounding the questions I was researching.

It is important to note that my primary concern was to establish good relations with the teachers, not to have the same role in all the classes I joined. In terms of the case logic of investigation that frames the use of classroom observation data in this project, I cannot see that there are disruptive researcher effects on these data. This would have been a greater concern if I were attempting to “cover the field” and give a generalizable description of how religious education is done in Norway. This was not my approach. Rather I was attempting to find rich ethnographic data that question and challenge the assumptions about values, nations, religions and identities in the formal curriculum. This enabled me to investigate some instances of how the friction between the classroom and formal domains of curriculum can be worked out in practice.

8.8 Method conclusions

In this chapter, I have presented the nuts and bolts of my research practice. I have outlined some of my research choices, some of the problems encountered along the way, and the rationale for the choices that I made. This provides the research project with the necessary transparency for peer evaluation that

characterises good social science. I have tried to highlight some of the potential weaknesses in the project. These might include i) the change in plan in terms of the selection of schools that were included in the project; ii) the choice of emphasising the general parts of the formal curricula rather than the subject specific syllabuses; iii) the different nature of ethnographic involvement at the two schools and iv) potential problems concerning a mixed-methods project.

I hope that I have provided a transparent account of the rationale behind the choices made. Furthermore, I believe that within the overarching research design of the project, there is a good level of fit between its constituent parts. The concerns raised might have an impact on any ambition to generalise about the state of religious education in Norway. It might also have an impact on the perceived political relevance of the thesis in a Norwegian context. However, the methods and choices made are tailored towards making useful analytical generalisations. This entails developing analytical tools and assessing their usefulness by using them to describe specific instances of religious education in Norway. I cannot evaluate these claims here. This logic of application is the measure against which the thesis should be judged. With this I conclude the presentation of research design and methods. I move on to present the historical and practical background for my case study.

PART V

BACKGROUND

This part of the thesis aims to present the background for the case in detail. It is important to have some contexts to give a richer understanding of the empirical material. Chapter 9 presents a history of religious education in Norway. In addition to providing the reader with an introduction to some relevant elements in Norwegian political history, I also aim to give a reading of the history of religious education that connects the development of the present subject to the development of social democracy in Norway. This represents a different nuance than previous histories of the subject, which tend to connect the history of religious education to pedagogical and religious changes.

Chapter 10 presents the schools. It is intended to give a richer and thicker description of the field than is done the more theoretically focused analysis chapters. However, it is important to note that the information presented and discussed here is not intended for generalisation.

9. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

9.1 Religious education and national identity in Norway: Introduction.

Any understanding of Norwegian identity in religious education would be incomplete without some knowledge of the historical background. The political context of the formal curricula is closely tied to a particular history, a history that is both exemplary and partly constitutive of connections between religion and national identity in Norway. For readers who are not Norwegian (or familiar with Norwegian history) it is crucial to outline some important features.

The background will be divided in two. I will treat the introduction of the new religious education subject as the dividing line. Consequently, I shall first present a history of religion and education from 1739 to 1997. This presentation is largely based on the useful overviews in Haakedal (2001) and Skeie (Skeie 2007; 2009: 221-224). I have also consulted more general work on the history of Norwegian schooling, such as Myhre (1997) and Telhaug and Mediås (Telhaug and Mediås 2003).

Then I shall give a closer presentation of the present subject, the political and legal contexts and controversies, and its subsequent revisions. Gravem (2004) provides the most thorough presentation of the formal curriculum. Leganger-Krogstad (2007) gives a useful summary. Slagstad (1998; 2003), Borchgrevink (2002), Wingård (2003), Hansen and Lindholm (2006), Tuastad (2006),

Trippestad (2003; 2009) and Andreassen (2008; 2009) present various critical points in relation to the new religious education subject.

I want to make it clear that I write this background in order to give a context to the analysis that is to follow in this thesis. As a consequence, I will focus on those areas that inform the points that I will develop. However, this also has the effect of complementing the existing histories of religious education in Norway within the pedagogy of religion. Histories of research on religion and education in Norway have tended to emphasize a divide between a theological and a pedagogical approach to religious education. These have been called the “Asheim” (or “Asheim/Mogstad”) and “Winsnes” traditions (Haakedal 1995; Lied 2006). As such, I am trying to add the dimensions highlighted by political scientists such as Tuastad (2006), Trippestad (2003; 2009) and most importantly, Slagstad (1998; 2003) to the self-understanding of educationalists of religion in Norway.

9.2 Building the state, becoming Norwegian and developing modernity.

The 18th, 19th and 20th Century.

Compulsory education for all in Norway began in 1739. The main focus at this time was on learning to read the Bible and the catechism, as well as an explanation of the catechism written by the Danish King’s theological representative, Erik Pontoppidan. From then on, the pre-modern, dispersed and disparate population of Denmark-Norway had a shared canon of knowledge and

a common authoritative moral and religious code. Religion and education were entwined in state building and streamlining from its very beginning.

During the 19th century new ideas of nationalism grew stronger in Norway, along with many other European countries. Religious education was to play a crucial and instructional role in nationalist politics. It is interesting to note that Norwegian nationalism had, due to its recent history, a dual enemy. Cultural nationalism grew in opposition to Copenhagen and Danish cultural dominance. Political nationalism, on the other hand, had Stockholm and the union with Sweden as its main opposition. In terms of school, there were reforms in both 1860 and 1889. In effect, school became a separate institution from the Church, with wider educational aims, and a greater range of subjects taught. These reforms were the result of political battles and part of a greater struggle: defining the balance of power between the Norwegian Parliament (the “Storting”) and the Swedish King. The Conservative party was an alliance of “the old elites”, representing a curious mix of European high culture and theological conservatism. They were, for the most part, loyal to the King in Stockholm. The Liberal Party was also a mixed alliance. It involved a new elite of intellectual and creative nationalists and democrats, and an emerging mass of grass-roots movements often called the “counter-cultural movements” [motrøyslene]. The three most dominant were the lay Christian movement, the abstinence movement and the language movement⁷. The Liberal Party won the day.

⁷ They advocated (and still do) a written form of Norwegian based on what was seen as pure spoken Norwegian with minimal Danish influence. This is called “nynorsk” (lit. “new Norwegian”) and is used by approximately 20% of the population today. The majority speaks “bokmål” (lit. book-tongue, or book-speak), which emerged through gradually

Haakedal points to how the last two hundred years of Norwegian history must be understood against the backdrop of continuous modernisation, industrialisation and, at least institutionally, secularisation (Haakedal 2001: 88). The 20th century saw the rise of the social-democratic model of high-modern⁸ governance (Slagstad 2003).

The Labour movement emerged as the dominant force on the political left. This movement was initially critical of religious education, but gradually warmed to it. By the 1970s, the Labour Party was a driving force behind keeping state-church connections alive, often using a rhetoric of preserving a *folk*-Christianity which was seen to be under pressure if the church were to be left to itself. This rhetoric is remarkably similar to the rhetoric of the 19th century liberals.

The 1969 Education Act emphasised that its religious education was not to be seen as the baptismal training of the Church. The subject was pedagogical and belonged to the school, not the Church of Norway. The Act also allowed for alternative religious education to those who did not belong to the Church of Norway. When the next National Guidelines⁹ of 1974 were published, there were two alternatives for religious education: the first was Christian Knowledge, a confessional subject in which religious nurture was within the limits of the

⁸“Norwegianising” the spelling and grammar of Danish.

⁸ I use the term “high-modern” as an opposition to, on the one hand, “late modern” or “post-modern” and, on the other hand, early modernity with processes of industrialisation and urbanisation which characterized Europe in the 19th century and the early parts of the 20th century. “High modernity” is not precisely fixed in time, but had its heyday during the decades after World War II. It is characterised by industrialism, urbanisation, a strong belief in planning and standardisation, rationalisation and material progress. My use of the term is influenced by Scott’s book *Seeing like a State* (1998).

⁹ In 1974 and 1987 the government issued nation-wide “guidelines” rather than National Curricula. The difference is largely semantic, but indicates a movement towards greater local freedom and decentralisation.

subject. If the parents were not members of the Church of Norway, they could opt for the new alternative, 'Livssynskunnskap', which can be translated as "Life-views." This alternative subject covered ethics, religions and non-religious philosophies of life. The humanist association was heavily involved in the development of the life-views subject. It was also possible to opt out of religious education completely, a choice made by many Jehovah's Witnesses, for instance. There was often no alternative teaching for these pupils.

The 1974 National Guidelines were seen as radical (Telhaug and Mediås 2003: 206-236). They were consistent on economic equality, women's rights and international outreach. They were also geared towards greater freedom for the local school. These guidelines are the first set of formal curricula that I use in my discourse analysis. They represented a new pedagogy, which was seen as "radical", with emphasis on learning processes, a child-centred approach and an explicit equality agenda (Telhaug and Mediås 2003: 205-268).

The 1987 National Guidelines were in the same tradition. They are significant for this study because it is the first time we find the phrase "Christian and Humanist values" as "foundational" for education in the introductory chapters of a formal curriculum document (M87 14). The 1987 guidelines further solidified the Life-views subject. They also placed a greater emphasis on the cultural heritage and the local context in which the schools were placed. At times the guidelines clearly indicated a communitarian view of learning and identity development. This was combined with an emphasis on local community and

decentralisation of power. Practically, this was solidified with an emphasis on local curriculum work at the school or municipal level.

9.3 The historical background: some analytical points.

There are some core points I wish to make concerning the broader historical development.

The 18th Century was a time of state building. Establishing a shared religious canon was part of this endeavour, which was led by the King in Copenhagen. Religion and education were connected to state building and the streamlining of citizens from the very beginning. Erik Pontoppidan's explanation of the catechism is a crucial part of any explanation as to how a disparate mass of inhabitants came to see themselves as citizens.

It is necessary to understand some aspects of 19th century nationalism to understand the rhetoric of contemporary politics concerning religion and nationality in Norway.

As in many other countries, a distinction developed between the European high culture shared by elites, and the folk-cultures that the nascent nationalists assumed were distinctive. The emerging national idea of Norway was a curious blend of these two.¹⁰ An important part of Norwegian nationalist rhetoric was to connect conservative elites with the "foreign past". Simultaneously, they

¹⁰ The term "folk" and its derivative "folkelig" are difficult to translate to English. It means "people", but has a more distinct cultural connotation. "Folkelig" can be translated as "popular", but in the sense of down-to-earth or the famous "common man on the street". The meaning somewhat resembles the English terms "folklore" or "folk-music".

connected the democratic *folk* to national progress. These became important aspects of Norwegian nationalist rhetoric that resonate, even into the present. The mix of nationalism and enlightenment-inspired progressive thinking seems idiosyncratic and counter-intuitive today when nationalism often is presented as primordial or pre-modern.

This dual nature of Norwegian nationalism has some important implications. As opposed to the nationalisms of greater European countries, Norwegian nationalism sees itself as a liberatory movement from an outside oppressor. There is a range of themes and metaphors that allows nationalist thoughts to seem nearly post-colonial. This runs parallel to a clear Enlightenment strain within Norwegian nationalism. This, I argue, is present in today's debate, and it allows for a range of ambiguous positions vis-à-vis a shared European heritage. Norwegian nationalism is both inside and outside Europe. As such, it is simultaneously and curiously both colonial and post-colonial.

Secondly, and related, is the strong rhetorical sense that "Parliament" represents the people, whereas "government", and especially "experts" and the bureaucracy, oppresses it. Not only was the Civil Service class oppressive, it was also, in a symbolic sense, a foreign intrusion (Danish and/or Swedish depending on context). Various groups of people, such as theologians, academics, bureaucrats and so on, are easily labelled as representing "the old power" – not only oppressive, but also un-Norwegian. This is still a rhetorical position that has effect today.

Third, Christianity plays an important part in both the conservative and the liberal representations of Norwegianness. This is a theme that continues in the relationship between nation and religion in Norway: the state claims to represent the faith of the folk better than a Church that is rhetorically posited as elitist and conservative. In this, there is also a move to present “true” Christian values as being in line with the values of the Norwegian folk, as represented by Parliament. This is very clear in the Core Curriculum of 1997.

The result of this history is that some national political imagery still has progressive and liberal tones to it. This makes it acceptable and in use across the Norwegian political spectrum. It also shows that the connection between Christianity and Norwegianness has a progressive and liberal history, as well as a more recognised conservative history.

In terms of the history of nationalism and religious education in 20th century Norway, I would like to emphasize that the labour movement, and the Labour Party, replaced the Liberal Party as the dominant political force on the left¹¹. As the Labour Party grew during the 20th century, it engaged with the grass-roots movements and social groups that previously had been strongholds of the Liberal Party. There was friction and there were disagreements during the first half of the century. However, after the occupation from 1940 to 1945, the “counter-cultural” groups became an integral part of the social-democratic fabric of the society that the Labour government rebuilt in the post-war years. The Labour government’s attitude towards religion is instructive. Initially, it was

¹¹ The Conservative party still has a major presence, but has recently been challenged by the populist right-wing Progress party for dominance of the political right.

fiercely secular and anti-church. As Labour came to power in the 1930s, it modified its stance to saying that religion was a private affair and no business of the Labour Party. The post-war years represented a gradual warming to religion. In 1975, the Labour Party voted for a new approach to Christianity (Midttun 1995). It argued that the Christian movements in Norway were valuable allies in the battle against market forces and fragmentation of society. The 1975 statement argued that there was a clear connection between “Christian values” and a “societal politics built on solidarity” (Slagstad 1998: 475). However, this also involved a Labour-defined version of “Christian values”. It was carefully worded and Labour gave itself the opportunity to see the Church as an arena for its politics. Not only was the Church seen as a potential ally, it had also become important for the Labour Party that the Church uphold the version of Christian values that the party agreed with. The allegiances went along the century-long lines described above. On one side of the dividing line, the liberal Christians and the idea of a liberal “folkekirke”, a folk-church closely connected to the state. On the other side of the dividing line were conservative theologians.

A closer analysis of this policy-change reveals several things (I use the following sources for this section: Midttun (1995), Slagstad (2003; 1998), Tuastad (2006)). It is clear that, by 1973, the Labour Party no longer saw “the old power” as the major threat. The fragmenting forces of modernity, especially market capitalism and entertainment industries, were seen as a threat to the cohesion of society and the social-democratic project. In the years 1968 and 1975, there was substantial criticism of the Labour administration. It was accused of being top-down and expert-driven, an undemocratic bureaucracy out

of touch with people. This moment is significant, because it is now that the Labour Party starts to see religion, and especially a folk-church based liberal religion with loose ties to the institutional Church of Norway, as an instrument for national cohesion and a tool for governance.

Tuastad argues that the Labour Party's approach to religion can be categorised as "external", "instrumental", "community-based" and "functionalist" (Tuastad 2006: 189-253). However, in addition to all these terms, the Labour Party was now also engaging with Christianity and becoming more positive towards its possible uses. In terms of practical politics, the party wanted to tap into Christianity as a cultural resource which it saw as an abiding presence in groups which otherwise were positive to Labour's social-democratic project. However, the Christian grass-roots were also a national network of well-organised institutions and organisations that affected many people's lives. Finally, the Labour Party saw an opportunity to shape the Church of Norway. Through the State-Church arrangements, government had many chances to influence the Church, most importantly the power to appoint bishops. The Labour Party became increasingly active in using these opportunities to secure what is known as a "folk-church" in opposition to the more conservative parts of the Church. The connecting lines between the various Christian positions and the politics of the Left¹² are remarkably analogous in 1880s and the 1970s.

¹² At this point it might be necessary to make it clearer how I use different terms of political categorisation. "The left" denotes the Liberal party (Venstre) from 1884 to the rise of the Labour party, which became dominant on the left in the 1930s. After the Second World War, "the left" refers to the Labour party (Arbeiderpartiet) and the Socialist party (Sosialistisk Venstreparti). In the 21st century, the Centre party (Senterpartiet - the former Farmers party) has joined a centre-left coalition, and is usually seen as a part of the political left. The Liberal party still exists as a small party placed in the centre-right.

For the purposes of this study, it is important to see how Christianity (and, by extension, religion) becomes relevant to politics across the political spectrum – and that this relevance is closely connected to an understanding of the folk and national cohesion. The identification by the Labour Party between the folk and Christianity is, largely, instrumental. It is underpinned by a functionalist understanding of social cohesion. At this stage, the perceived problem of cultural fragmentation did not appear to the Labour Party as a problem of cultural diversity. Rather, fragmentation was seen as a process within modern capitalist culture. Sometimes it was portrayed as a foreign intrusion; in these cases the villain was identified as Americanisation or the entertainment industry. This fear of cultural fragmentation was only translated to a culturally and religiously diverse society in the 1990s. The connecting lines between a liberal Christianity and the version of nationalism found on the political left are remarkably solid. The connection is maintained through the use of rhetorical and cultural resources that have resonated since the liberation nationalism of the 19th century. Through history, these connecting lines have solidified as habits of thought and speech and have become embedded in structures and construals of governance.

I emphasise this point to make clear some important assumptions that frame my understanding of the religious education subject of today (KRL-RLE). More broadly, these points are also true of a larger political story of connections

I use the term “social democratic” to refer to a wider order of mixed-economy welfare states. In the context of this paper, this would refer to all the political parties in the Storting, with the complicated exception of the Progress Party (Fremskrittspartiet), which is a party to the populist right, but has evolved to include many traits of a social democratic welfare state party. In this wider term, I would include moderate conservative parties in Europe and the Democratic party in the states.

between religion and nationalism in Norway. The 1993 Core Curriculum, and the 1997 reforms (L97)¹³ included the introduction of the new compulsory, multi-faith (but Christianity-heavy) religious education subject. The reforms surprised many with their “return” to Christianity and cultural heritage as unifying factors. A common interpretation, most recently argued by Andreassen (2008, 2009), is that the new subject was mostly the result of the efforts of the Christian Democrats and Christian pressure groups. To me it makes far more sense to place the KRL-RLE subject, and the Core Curriculum of 1993/1997, in the context of the Labour Party’s instrumental and functionalist approach to national social cohesion. Gudmund Hernes, the Minister of Education responsible, is sometimes presented as a break with previous Labour Party traditions. I argue that his work is a continuation of a 20-year old Labour Party approach to Christianity and Norwegianness. Furthermore, it makes sense to see his work, and the KRL-subject, as the continuation of a 140-year old tradition on the political left in Norway. An intimate connection between a liberal Christianity and Norwegianness is a long-standing element in Norwegian political history. This connection can be traced from the followers of the Danish theologian Grundtvig in the mid 19th Century, through the Liberal Party of the late 19th Century to the Labour Party of the 20th Century. Partly, this has been to control and combat conservative Christian voices. More importantly, though, this connection has been used instrumentally, for purposes of governance, nation-building and identity management.

¹³ The core curriculum was written and published in 1993, in time for the 1994 reforms in upper secondary school. However, I do not refer to it separately, as it is also the first chapter of the L97 publication (which confusingly is published in 1996).

It is only within this context that it is relevant to see how Mr. Hernes compromised with the Christian Democrats and religious pressure groups. Andreassen is right to point out this influence, and also how it was solidified by the strong grip that Christian institutions had on the education of teachers of religious education (Andreassen 2008; 2009). However, the core elements of the new subject, and the use to which the subject was put in the wider context of education and identity management, were established in line with a long tradition of the political left in Norway.

9.4 Contexts for the contemporary subject:

Social democracy, globalisation and the religion-values node

Something happened to social democracy in the 1990s. Labour parties across Europe and North America reinvented themselves: they lowered their ambitions of governing the economy, and heightened their ambitions within identity politics. This was the case in the UK with Blair, in Germany with Schröder, in the USA with Clinton and also in Norway. Gudmund Hernes, the Minister of Education between 1990-1996 was explicit in this: in a speech he quoted Karl Marx saying that since the base was recalcitrant, Labour had to rule through the superstructure (Hernes 1991)¹⁴. The 1990s were also the heyday of mainstream

¹⁴ In Hernes' use of Marx's terminology, "base" refers broadly to the economy, whereas "superstructure" refers broadly to what we can call cultural institutions, including school. This speech is very instructive to understand Hernes's project as Minister of Education. He is famous for his elegant and sometimes even ironic style, so some of these highlights are difficult to interpret. I think the best way to understand this speech is a sense of slightly ironic exaggeration, making his agenda overly, even comically, clear for the audience: *"I shall rule the country as one to keep the collected work together. And in that case people can't believe what they want or do as they want. (...) That which is dissolved by a natural infrastructure, we have to counter by influencing the structure of personality. The base is incalcitrant, we have to catch up by shaping the superstructure. It might be that people are what they eat, and that the farmers gaze is*

multiculturalism. Even though this is a truth with many modifications, it is true that western Labour parties embraced a cultural diversity agenda. However, along with this celebration of diversity, there was a concern that globalised capitalism and cultural post-modernism were fragmenting societies. It is interesting, then, to note Eriksen and Stjernfelt's (2009) insistence that nationalism and multiculturalism share the fundamental trait of culturalism. Mainstream multiculturalism and the nationalism of social democracy in Norway share the idea that cultures are largely separate, internally homogenous enough to be stable, and that the individual person's dignity is intimately bound to the respect and rights given to that person's cultural (or ethnic or religious) group. Tuastad identifies a "leftist communitarianism" in the arguments used by some representatives of the political left in the Storting (Tuastad 2006: 237-239). The KRL subject emphasised that all religions should be portrayed "on their own premises". It seems as if the thought was to provide a cultural vaccination of both majority and minority against the superficiality of post-modern life. This understanding is prevalent both in the core curriculum (L97), and in the White Paper that prepared the new religious education subject (NOU1995:9). An alternative understanding is that the formulations that religions should be taught "on their own premises" was a loophole exploited by Christian interest groups: through extending rights to *all* religions, it would still

directed towards the earth. But let us give them some food for thought [or spiritual nourishment], lift their spirit to a shared sphere... For one faith gives one people. It is the thoughts that must be lifted and uniformed if the nation is to hold together. [Jeg skal styre landet under ett for å holde samlingsverket sammen. Og da kan ikke folket tro det de lyster eller gjøre det de lyster. (. . .) Det som oppløses av en naturlig infrastruktur, må vi bøte på ved å påvirke personlighetsstrukturen. Basis er vrang, vi får ta det igjen ved å forme overbygningen. La gå at folk er det de spiser, og at jordbrukerens blick er rettet mot jorden. Men la oss gi dem åndelig føde, (. . .) løfte deres ånd til felles sfære. . For én tro gir ett folk. Det er tankene som må løftes og uniformeres om nasjonen skal holde sammen. (. . .)] (Hernes 1991).

be possible to practise something close to Christian nurture. The documents are written in a way that allows a range of agendas to find some support for “their” point of view. That both secular functionalists and Christian pressure groups found the language of the core curriculum acceptable is best understood as political craft using the fundamental openness of certain crucial discursive nodes in order to create a sense of agreement in the face of substantive disagreement.

As such, the core curriculum is a document that is simultaneously sticky and slippery. It is sticky in terms of identity, but slippery in terms of meaning: it clearly makes claims to Norwegianness, but does not fill this Norwegian identity with anything substantive.

In terms of power, I would again emphasise that it was Hernes and the Labour Party that were in control of this process. I argue that Social Democratic identity management explains the new religious education subject better than assuming a Christian conspiracy.

This shift from economy to identity may be partially explained by large-scale changes at the time. The most important of these is the fall of European communism and the Soviet Union. Connected to this are the amorphous and manifold processes of globalisation. The lower ambitions in terms of governing the national economies were part of the increased flows of capital and products across borders, free-trade agreements, and the power of large international corporations. The higher ambitions in terms of identity management came as a result of increased cultural contact across borders and increased migration. There was a realisation that most countries in Western Europe had significant

immigrant-based minorities, and that they were there to stay. In Norway, where large-scale immigration was confined to the last four decades, globalisation and the emergence of multiculturalism were to a large degree seen as one process.

An important aspect of globalisation theory is that increased cross-boundary flows do not necessarily mean that all places become similar (Appadurai 1996; Eriksen 2007; Featherstone, Lash and Robertson 1995; Hernes 1991). This is effectively illustrated by Robertson's term "glocalisation" (Robertson 1992). Indeed, globalisation is often thought to cause a counter-reaction of local identity building¹⁵. The dual aspect of a culturalist approach, which allows national and multicultural approaches to coexist based on a similar view of culture and identity fits very nicely with the "glocalisation" theory – a dual movement towards both global flows and local particularity. This also echoes with the reflexivity-thesis of Giddens, Beck and others (Beck and Camiller 2000; Featherstone et al. 1995; Giddens 1991). The processes of late modernity and globalisation will, according to Giddens, bring previously taken-for-granted identifications under reflexive scrutiny. A preliminary analysis of the educational reforms of the 1990s is that they represent just such an attempt to make something that was previously tacit into something explicit. However, this needs to be expanded with a more material institutional understanding of integration into Norwegian societal structures. It is historically wrong to say that the politics of national identity was tacit and taken for granted until globalisation. Even during the heyday of the nation state in the post-war

¹⁵ Other theorists point to the same argument, but with different words. Arjun Appadurai talks about "Indigenization" (1996), Ulf Hannerz about "Creolisation" (1996) and Homi Bhabha about "Hybridity" (1994).

decades, “including everyone in the Norwegian project” was on the agenda. However, the idea of what constituted national identification was different: there was recognition that there was a diversity of values and opinions amongst people in Norway. I argue that the role of the institutions in “the Norwegian project” has changed. It used to be one of involving and including as many people as possible - expanding Norwegian institutions. Since the 1990s, the role of institutions has increasingly been to shape the population: to *create* a shared, internalised sense of Norwegianness. Norwegianness has changed from being a foundation for governance to being a project, an aim to be achieved through governance.

It is instructive to look closer at this change. A point that I shall make in my analysis (see chapter 11) is that there has been a shift in the temporal metaphors in the formal curriculum documents when they speak about values. In 1974, values were presented in a future-oriented mode: values could shape future action. In 1993/1997, values were presented in a past-oriented mode. Values should be uncovered and transmitted from the past, so that the pupils could understand who they were. Before I end this analysis of social democracy in the 1990s, it is tempting to suggest that this temporal shift might be a symptom of a larger change in social democracy. It may seem as if the forward-looking progressive project has, in the popular and political imagination, already succeeded. The task for social-democratic parties today seems to be merely to maintain and protect the welfare state. This happens in a wider context where globalisation had limited, or at least was believed to be limiting, the scope for the nation state to govern the economy. Combined with the idea of a state

weakened by globalisation, was the idea that the welfare state needs a fundamental base of societal solidarity. Otherwise, the argument went, people would not be willing to pay higher taxes for common projects. In a sense, the welfare state depended on its citizens seeing themselves as one folk. As we have seen, the Labour Party had (and has) an underlying functionalist understanding of values, religion and cultural heritage: it represented a form of social glue, and was intimately connected to national identity. Religious education was the perfect arena for high-impact nation building.

From World War II until the 1980s, the nation state was expanded by building and expanding infrastructure and institutions, reaching a steadily larger group of people, and integrating them in the institutional systems of the Norwegian state. More and more people became stakeholders in a nation-state project. This was expanded to include health, education, employee rights, social security and so on. It is likely that this systemic integration also had an impact on people's political identity: it seems sensible to be engaged, if given the chance, in power systems where important decisions are made about the future.

In the 1990s three things seemed to happen simultaneously: first, the main pillars of the welfare state were established and made accessible for the whole population. Second, international free trade and a globalised economy made it seem as if the scope for political governance over the economy was radically reduced. Third, cultural and mediatised globalisation made it seem as if previously taken for granted national identifications amongst the citizens were challenged. I argue, along with Tuastad (2006), Trippestad (2009) and Slagstad

(1998), that the Labour Party government responded to this by increasing its hold on various sites that were seen to create and produce ideas, ideologies and identities. Research funding at universities has been centralized, funding for elite sports increased dramatically¹⁶, politics towards the Church became more active, and the large-scale educational reforms were instituted.

The Core Curriculum of 1993 and the KRL subject of 1997 may be the prime examples of this. The nation building of the 1990s is a crucial context to understand the importance of what I call the religion-values node (see chapter 11). National integration was (and is) often portrayed as depending on shared values. Religion is presented as the provider of these values. Connected to this is an increased tendency of governments' values-statements to be presented as pre-political and national – a foundation for politics rather than politics itself. It represents a shift from stating a value as desirable and striving to live by it, to presenting a value as “ours” and asking people to conform to it.

Identifying a move in governance from economy to identity is an analysis of social democracy that has some significant similarities to an interesting analysis of the rise of the populist right. Thomas Frank argues in his book “*What is the Matter with Kansas*” (2004) that the rise of the Christian right in American politics has happened because the Democratic party stopped talking about economics, and started instead to fight for a series of cultural concerns that are condescendingly labelled “politically correct.” Magnus Marsdal gives a similar

¹⁶ This includes the ritual nation-building events such as the winter Olympics of 1994 held in Lillehammer, Norway Johansen, A. (1995). *Den store misforståelsen : "kulturarv" og "nasjonal egenart" i norgesreklame og politisk kultur : en advarsel* [The great misunderstanding: "Cultural heritage" and "national character" in advertisements for Norway and political culture: a warning.]. Oslo, Tiden.,

analysis for the Norwegian context in his book “*FrP-koden*” [The Progress Party Code] (Marsdal 2007): the Norwegian working class do not feel that there is a significant economic difference between the parties of the left and the right. According to Marsdal, the classes that used to vote Labour now feel that the Labour movement is dominated by an elite class of experts and governing bureaucrats. These groups are involved in a top-down introduction of a politically correct way of life. This is similar to what Trippestad calls “commando humanism” (2009).

To end this analysis: in the 1990s the Labour Party found themselves challenged by globalisation and with less room for economic governance. As a response, they turned to finding means to inculcate a set of values seen as national, to ensure social cohesion. In line with what they perceived as deep structures in the history of progressive Norwegian nation-building, the Labour Party presented a tolerant, enlightenment-tinged amalgam of humanism and liberal Christianity as the Norwegian heritage. It is a mild message, firmly put in place and institutionalised.

9.5 The contemporary subject: Implementing KRL

In 1993, the Storting accepted an interesting and important document: The Core Curriculum. It was produced by the Ministry of Education, and was clearly the brainchild of the Minister of Education, Gudmund Hernes. It is an important document, as it sets out the values and educational aims that all education in Norway should work towards. For a policy document of its kind, it is poetic and

literary. It is a stirring document that with great rhetorical skill combines and synthesises many approaches and educational traditions. It emphasises the scientific method, the value of work and activity for human dignity and development, the importance of a shared cultural heritage and the place of religion in this Norwegian heritage.

These themes follow the work of Hernes, and become very clear in the new religious education subject that was implemented in 1997 (L97). In 1995 a commission presented a White Paper to the Storting (NOU1995:9) called *Identitet og Dialog* [Identity and Dialogue]¹⁷. This document presented a pessimistic cultural analysis, arguing that young people at the time were in danger of developing fragmented and diffuse identities, due to the relativistic and fast-flowing pressures of post-modernity (NOU1995:9 p. 34). It presents religion as the stable and durable force in a national cultural heritage that can function to anchor the young people and establish a stable identity. Given this stability, they have the strength to enter into dialogue with people with other identities. It is clear that it is an ideal that people with other cultural heritages go through the same process. The more secure the identities of the actors, the more interesting and productive the dialogue will become. It seems then, that distinct and established minority cultures are not part of the threatening formlessness of post-modern plurality. Rather, they are presented as separate units that share the

¹⁷ The leader of the working group behind the White Paper, Erling Pettersen, is a liberal theologian and a member of the Socialist party (SV). I have read many accounts that place the Pettersen working group in a conservative tradition. This might be because of their cultural pessimism and a false (or at least anachronistic) assumption that communitarianism is a conservative position. However, most of the conservative parts of the Church wanted less interference from the State, not tighter connections. The document is just as much a celebration of diverse cultures and a criticism of consumerism.

same challenges as “us”, and thus entitled to our solidarity. ALL solid cultural heritages (except maybe that of Hollywood) are at risk, according to the authors of *Identitet og Dialog*. They frame Norwegian identity as one of many identities at risk within a larger mosaic of multicultural globalisation. This alleged similarity between minority and majority cultures would be impossible without a culturalist understanding of groups. It would not resonate as well without the specific history of Norwegian nationalism as a progressive fight against a powerful oppressor. With national heritage presented as weak (rather than a hegemonic exclusionary force), it is legitimate for the state to preserve and protect the “place specific” cultural heritage of its territory. I have earlier pointed out how the KRL-subject fits well in Eriksen and Stjernfelt’s description of Nationalism and Multiculturalism as conceptual cousins (Eriksen and Stjernfelt 2009: 298-306. See also chapter 2 in this thesis.). The two -isms share a culturalist understanding of groups and political participation. In terms of formal documents linked to Norwegian curricula, this linkage is first, and most clearly, presented in *Identitet og Dialog* (NOU1995:9 1995).

The White Paper describes a linkage between the rights and integrity of minority cultures on the one hand, and the rights and integrity of the majority culture on the other. This linkage is part of the philosophical legitimization of the subject. A cultural heritage based on Christian and Humanist values is seen as a real entity, an entity with an integrity that it is important to maintain. This is legitimised by extending similar rights to minority cultures. However, the concern for minorities seemed to disappear from the agenda when the practicalities of the subject were to be set out. This was a process of political

consultation and compromise, rather than a principled stand. In the end, 55% of the subject was to be focused on Christianity, 25% on other religions and 20% on ethics and philosophy. Thus, minority pupils were lucky to have 5% of the subject time dedicated to building their identity and self-image. It is worth raising the question of whether the culturalist underpinning of the subject was a way to legitimize spending time on Norwegian cultural heritage without appearing discriminatory.

In terms of the subject, *Identitet og Dialog* suggested that the two alternative religious education subjects presented in the National Guidelines of 1974 and 1987 were abandoned. The two alternatives were to be replaced by one “*expanded Christian Knowledge subject*”¹⁸ (NOU1995:9 p. 4). The working group suggested that the subject should include instruction in life-views and other religions. It seems that the authors of the White Paper suggested a common, confessional subject with rights of exemption from the aspects of the subject that could be seen as religious nurture¹⁹.

It was this version of the subject that was the basis for the hearings amongst religious institutions. Leirvik (2001) and Borchgrevink (2002) argue that this early version of the subject based on the language of *Identitet og Dialog* is part of the reason why religious minorities were so against the new religious education subject: they interpreted the process that preceded the subject as one

¹⁸ “Et utvidet kristendomsfag”.

¹⁹ However, the White Paper discusses the notion of confessionality in some detail, and argues that the subject is “only confessional in a pedagogical sense” (p.4). By this, the authors mean that the version of Christianity which is to be taught *about* is that of the Evangelical Lutheranism. It seems that they did not *intend* a subject of religious nurture, even though the distinction was unclear and maybe lacked a developed sense of political sensitivity.

where the Government wanted the new subject to be as Christian as it could get away with. As such, the dialogue and trust between the government and various stakeholders has been heavily criticised by the Humanist Association, by the Jewish community and by several Muslim stakeholders (Borchgrevink 2002; Leirvik 2001).

When the actual subject was introduced, it was called (in a clumsy but literal translation): *Knowledge about Christianity with orientation about Religions and Life-views* [Kristendomsundervisning med Religions- og Livssynsorientering]. It was similar in content to the subject that had been suggested in *Identity and Dialogue*, but with a different approach to confessionality. Without changing the quantitative emphasis on Christianity, the education department presented the subject as non-confessional, and with severely limited rights for exemption. However, Christianity was still to play a different role from other religions and life-views. This is clearly noticeable in the name of the subject. Notice the hierarchical distinction between “knowledge” and “orientation”. This distinction is not a distinction between confessional and non-confessional. However, it indicates a different level of knowledge and involvement with Christianity. Christianity was now more important than other religions due to its contribution to Norwegian cultural heritage. Previously, at least formally, Christianity had been special in terms of faith instruction. Christianity used to be presented as “true” in a confessional subject with wide access to exemption. Now Christianity was presented as “ours” in a compulsory subject. The provisions for exemption were present, but very strict, in the early versions of the subject.

Furthermore, the pedagogical ideals underlying the subject were inspired by critiques of positivism. The syllabus writers were anxious to make the subject activating and involving – presenting each tradition “on its own terms.”²⁰ For humanists and religious minority representatives, they were presented with a subject that spent over 50% of the time on instruction on Christianity. All instruction was to be active, involving and on the premises of the religion or life-view presented. As a consequence, a majority of the time spent in this subject was to be spent on active and engaging instruction in Christianity. This was not to be nurturing, but Christianity was to be presented as it is understood by Christians. Furthermore, this subject was designed to socially engineer a common national identity, an identity that explicitly gave Christian heritage a role as a stabilising anchor. There were limited rights to exemption. The subject was presented as non-confessional, but there were only minor changes from the confessional subject first suggested, and these changes seemed rhetorical rather than substantial. From the perspective of the minorities, this subject was only “non-confessional” in the sense that the department declared it so. It was not clear to minority representatives that they had been given a better deal (Borchgrevink 2002; Leirvik 2001).

The government was frustrated with the opposition to the subject. As far as they were concerned, they had established non-confessional religious education, a subject dedicated to enhancing tolerance and based on human rights. They saw the subject as a crucial aspect of educating tolerant citizens for the future,

²⁰ This clause was removed in the 2008 version of the subject after complaints from the Humanist Association, amongst other reasons.

citizens who were trained to be knowledgeable and respectful about their own and others' religious traditions.

There were also two research evaluations put in place (Hagesæther, Sandsmark and Bleka 2000; Johannessen and Aadnanes 2000). The results showed that parents, teachers and younger pupils largely enjoyed the subject. Older pupils tended to find the subject boring. From an educationalist's point of view there were criticisms that the subject was too large for the allotted time, the national syllabus too detailed and that the guidelines for exemption were unclear. Furthermore, it was unclear how the different methods suggested should be implemented without violating the rights of parents to decide on the question of the religious nurture of their child. Was singing a song with religious content a religious activity, or a pedagogical device to make knowledge about a religion more alive to the pupil? Could a pupil attend a religious service as an observer, or do school visits to services in places of worship inherently involve participation in that religion? The evaluations also showed that there were tensions between the different documents that constituted the formal curriculum of the subject, where some of the documents were more secular than others. Finally, the evaluations pointed out that the subject was implemented in very different ways across different regions of Norway, reflecting the regional difference in religiosity across the country.

9.6 The contemporary subject: The legal history of KRL and RLE

The new religious education subject in Norway has changed three times since it was implemented.

1. The two evaluations (Hagesæther et al. 2000; Johannessen and Aadnanes 2000) resulted in the first revision of the subject: KRL2002.
2. Criticism from United Nations Human Rights Committee (UNHRC 2004) resulted in the second revision of the subject: KRL2005.
3. The verdict in the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR 2007) resulted in the third revision of the subject: RLE2008. This revision involved changes to the Education Act and a new name, Religion, Life-views and Ethics (RLE) (Lied 2009; Relaño 2010).

By the time the subject was implemented in 1997, there had been a change of government. This was a centre-right coalition, and the Christian Democrats were in charge of education. However, they inherited a subject that had broad Parliamentary support in the Storting. This did not mean that the subject was not controversial. Recognising that this was a controversial issue, the Government asked a Supreme Court judge to give a recommendation on the matter. Judge Erik Møse looked at the new subject in relation to the “object clause”²¹ of school in the preamble of the Education Act and in the Act itself (Møse 1997). He argued that the Government had the precedent of Norwegian legal

²¹ An object clause is the statement of what the “object” of education is, similar to a mission statement, or the aim of the enterprise. In Norwegian: “Formålsparagrafen”.

interpretations on their side and should, technically, be able to win a case brought against them. However, he recommended giving full exemption rights to the subject, because the Government's case was based on a complicated and technical tradition of interpretation of the old Education Act. This Act, and so the whole case, was "easily misunderstood" and was likely to be interpreted differently not only by stakeholders (such as religious minorities and the Humanist Association), but also by international legal institutions (Møse 1997). Møse's predictions were accurate. The Government ignored his recommendation of full rights to exemption. This is not surprising; full exemption would undermine the fundamental idea of a *common* subject that should instil a *shared* identity and create a shared arena. Nine individuals, supported by the Humanist Association, took the state to court over these questions. The Government won in Norwegian courts, but the stakeholders as well as international legal institutions saw the case differently. When the new subject was put in place in 1997, Humanists, Muslims, Jews, conservative Christians and other groups all complained that the subject violated the parents' right to determine the religious nurture of their children (Borchgrevink 2002; Leirvik 2001).

The state won throughout the Norwegian court system.. The Supreme Court held that there was considerable precedence in Norwegian legal tradition when it comes to interpreting the aim of the preamble of the successive Education Acts. The crucial statement was that school should "help the home to give the children a Christian and moral upbringing." Judge Møse had discussed this, and his thoughts proved prescient. According to the Supreme Court, the emphasis of interpretation had been on the "helping the home" part of the preamble.

Furthermore, Christianity should, in the legal context, be understood as a provider of a specific morality, rather than a personal faith. The confessional aspects of Christianity were only relevant *if the parents wished* that the school should help with the religious nurture of their child (Borchgrevink 2002; Gravem 2004: 87-107; Møse 1997).

However, the case was then heard by two international legal institutions. The United Nations Committee on Human Rights (UNCHR) criticised the Norwegian state in 2004. The criticism was in the form of a recommendation to which the Norwegian state was obliged to give a response, but it was not a binding legal order. The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), on the other hand, is a binding court for the Norwegian State, and it ruled against Norway in 2007. It is worth mentioning that both international legal bodies referred to the version of the subject that was in place at the time the case was brought to the Norwegian courts (1997). The subject that was criticised had already been modified by the time the court made its decisions. However, the Government responded to both the UNCHR and the ECHR, and in both cases, the subject was modified.

9.7 The modern subject: The revisions

As a result of these legal concerns, along with the educationally oriented evaluations, the subject has been revised several times. In 2002 the number of learning-points were reduced, the rules for exemption were simplified and the name was modified from “Christian Knowledge with Orientation about

Religions and Life-views” to “Knowledge about Christianity, Religions and Life-views”²². In addition, the Education Department issued a pamphlet that collected all the documents that constituted the formal curriculum of the subject, and gave interpretations and guidelines as to how these should be implemented (KRL2002).

The subject was modified again in 2005 (KRL2005). This was partly in response to the criticism levelled at the Norwegian state from the United Nations Human Rights Committee, concerning the parents’ right to the religious nurture of their children. However, the change was also connected to the Knowledge Promotion reform²³, a change in the syllabus structures for *all* subjects. The 2005 modification involved changes to the Education Act. The rules of exemptions were clarified in the Act: the KRL subject was not a special subject in terms of exemptions. However, the parents (or children over 15 years of age) had the right to withdraw from any instruction in any subject that, in their opinion, was against their religion, or perceived to be the practice of another religion. Pupils did not have the right of exemption from the “knowledge content” of the teaching. The 2005 curriculum was also structured differently from the earlier curricula. Rather than a list of subject areas that should be covered, and a set of methods to be used, the curriculum now consisted of a list of learning targets and basic skills. Pupils’ learning would be evaluated in terms of how far these targets were met and the skills acquired. As a result of this new structure, the

²² From “Kristendomskunnskap med Religions- og Livssynsorientering” to “Kristendoms-, Religions- og Livssynskunnskap”. They were considerate enough to keep the acronym KRL, the most common name of the subject.

²³ Kunnskapsløftet.

formal curriculum no longer stipulated how much time the schools were to spend on each section of the subject. This new syllabus structure was in many ways a preview of the structure that would be implemented in all subjects with the larger educational reform of 2006/2007, the Knowledge Promotion reform. The 2005 curriculum was the version of the subject in place when I did my fieldwork.

In 2008, the subject was modified yet again (RLE2008). This time the change was in response to the legally binding ruling by the European Court of Human Rights, which ruled in favour of the parents and against the state. The changes made to the subject were seen as more drastic. However, they were largely symbolic, legal and technical: only a few of the learning targets were changed, and these were mostly clarifications. The legal changes, however, included language from the ruling into the Education Act itself, insisting that religious education should be “critical, objective and pluralist” (Stortinget 2008).

They changed (or clarified, depending on your point of view) the relationship between the subject and the overall values-statement for all education in the first clause of the Education Act. Finally, and most controversially, they changed the name to *Religion, Life-views and Ethics*²⁴. Significantly, this was the first time there was no mention of Christianity in the name of the subject. These changes were put in place by a centre-left coalition government. The Ministry of Education and Research was, at the time of these changes, led by the Socialist

²⁴ *Religion, Livssyn og Etikk*. They even changed the acronym!

party (SV)²⁵, the smaller government partner to the left of the dominant Labour Party. The government was accused of forcefully removing “our Christian heritage”. However, they were also accused of keeping the Christian heritage by responding to the ECHR ruling with only cosmetic and symbolic changes.

9.8 The modern subject: As it stands today.

My own analysis is that the main change occurred in 1997. The subsequent changes, even the name change in 2008, are adjustments and refinements to the basic shape of the religious education subject in Norwegian state school. Nevertheless, a comparison between KRL1997 and RLE2008 shows that these gradual changes when combined make up a considerable change. Leganger-Krogstad described the 2005 version of the subject as a:

“common, compulsory multi-religious school subject [that] has as its main aim to give knowledge about religions and world views in order to give all students a common frame of reference to be able to function in the Norwegian society. (...) The aim is both to confirm the identity of the individual according to her/his background and give knowledge and understanding that make insightful dialogue possible.” (Leganger-Krogstad 2007:142-143).

Furthermore, I shall add Peder Gravem’s description of the subject (he refers to the 2002 subject in Gravem 2004: 280-379). He claims that it is a subject relying on two main perspectives: first, an aim of “integrative socialisation,” an asymmetrical, but nevertheless reciprocal, exchange between cultural minorities

²⁵ At the time of writing, SV are still in charge of Education and Research.

and a cultural majority. Second, it is a subject that relies on “perspective pluralism as a meta-position” (which he contrasts with other possible meta-positions such as absolutism, scepticism and relativism).

I argue that there are no real changes from these descriptions in the 2008 curriculum. In fact, it seems to me that the changes that have been made are an indication that there is continued political support for a religious education subject that is: i) Non-Confessional, ii) Cultural-heritage based with emphasis on Christianity, and iii) Multi-faith.

In fact, compared to 1997, the aims of the subject in RLE2008 are even more clearly i) from a perspective external to religion, ii) largely positive to the effects of religion, iii) functionalist in their analysis of the relationship between religion and group identity, and iv) instrumental in their use of religion to encourage social cohesion and national identity. In other words, the present subject is very much in line with the stable historical approach to religion that has been typical of the Labour Party.

I say this even though the emphasis on identity has been toned down in favour of testable knowledge and skills. There are at least two explanations for this de-emphasising of identity in the 2008 version of the subject. First, it must be seen as a response to the growing criticism of the government’s use of Christianity for identity management. The binding ruling of the European Court of Human Rights is especially important in this respect. However, a closer look at the Government’s response reveals that the changes do not negate the identity project; they merely de-emphasise (or even hide) it. Rather, the curriculum

authors have tried to clarify the distinction between confessionality and knowledge about religion. They have done this through *adding* that the teaching should be objective, critical and pluralist. The curriculum authors have carefully avoided placing objectivity, critique or pluralism as something that opposes the previously stated ideas of teaching in an engaging and culturally contextualised way. A possible interpretation is that the new syllabus places a greater emphasis on the Humanist aspect of the Christian-Humanist cultural heritage. Nevertheless, it seems likely that the curriculum authors saw these questions as politically contentious (with good reason) and were keen to move on to other ways of developing the subject.²⁶

The other context for de-emphasising identity is the introduction of a new style of curriculum. KRL2005 was influenced by international education management developments. International quantitative comparisons of educational achievements, such as PISA, were influential, and involved an increased emphasis on reaching testable targets and acquiring testable skills (Afdal 2009). This is in opposition to the emphases on process, socialisation and the radical pedagogy of the 1970s, 1980s and even the 1990s. The name of the reform, *The Knowledge Promotion*, indicates a change in emphasis from *learning* to *knowledge*. This context is an important factor in the 2005 and 2008 changes. Of course, the two contexts may work together. The new target-driven style may partly explain why RLE2008 has been seen as emphasising knowledge rather

²⁶ It is difficult to ascertain who lies behind the amorphous term "the curriculum authors". I do not have the data to discuss the relationship between the Directorate of Education, the Ministry of Education and Research, the elected politicians of the government, and the Parliamentarians of the Storting. However, the actual penning of the document was done by the Directorate of Education.

than identity and ‘dannelse’, a term that might be translated as ‘personal development’, or the German term ‘bildung’.

In this case, there is no good evidence that RLE2008 constitutes a radical move away from a focus on identity. The revised subject should not be understood as a political abandonment of the identity management aims of religious education in Norway.

9.9 Conclusions

In this chapter, I have provided a history of religious education in Norway. I have focussed in particular on the relationship between religious education and national identity. The aim of the chapter is for the reader to gain a better understanding of the debates and contexts of the case that I am investigating. Furthermore, I have prepared the ground for some of my later analyses. Of particular importance is the historical continuity of some of the rhetorical tropes of the debate. I have traced several of these to the second half of the 19th century. Firstly, I am particularly interested in establishing a rich historical context for discursive resources that enable a rhetoric that connects Christianity with the values of the political left in Norway, from the Liberals to Labour. Secondly, I give a firm foundation to my assumption that religious education in Norway is best understood as the identity management project of the Labour Party, rather than a Christian conspiracy. Thirdly, I hope that this chapter makes it easier to give sociological explanations for the recent changes in religious education in Norway. When I speak of “sociological explanations”, I am

thinking of explanatory factors such as globalisation and the resulting mismatch between the scope of governance assumed by the State, and the economic means available to the same state.

Having provided the historical background, it is time to turn to a presentation of the schools where I did my ethnographic research. This is important in terms of the overall logic that structures the thesis (see chapter 1 and section 7.2, 7.3 and 7.5). This presentation is crucial to gain the level of ethnographic richness to give the analysis the depth and accountability necessary in order to develop theory.

10. THE SCHOOLS. AN ETHNOGRAPHIC CONTEXT

10.1 Introduction

The ethnographic data in this thesis come from two schools²⁷. Like all schools, they are unique and special places. In chapter 12, I shall give an account of some key instances that happened in these schools. These instances have been chosen specifically to discuss theory. With such a theory-driven sampling within the case, it increases accountability and transparency to provide the reader with a wider description of the schools. An understanding of the situations that I am going to analyse in the later chapters would be weak if the reader did not have some idea of the context of these situations. Mainly, this context consists of the individual school, the surrounding area, and the institutional and discursive system of religious education that the teachers and pupils inhabit. This chapter aims to provide that context. The hope is to provide a richer background for imagining the practicalities of my data and thus deepen the understanding of my later analyses. Hopefully, this chapter will provide a flavour of the field.

I will do this in four sections. The first section gives four accounts of classroom actions. These are structured as a typology of how teachers deal with disagreement in the classroom. The second section briefly presents the schools and their surroundings. The third section summarises what I see as the main

²⁷ Though I collected data from three schools. See section 8.5.

differences between the two schools. The fourth section summarises what I see as the most interesting similarities between the schools.

In doing so, I also hope to achieve some bonus effects. First, by structuring the accounts of classroom action in this chapter effectively, I hope that these vignettes may provide added depth to the more detailed analyses of chapters 12 and 13. Secondly, the accounts are inevitably shaped by my background understandings of the field. Many of these background understandings come from reading academic literature about the field, and are thus probably shared (to some degree) by others interested in the pedagogy of religion in Norway. I have tried to highlight those issues that speak to academic debates. However, an important caveat must be made. This chapter does not make any claim to generalisations. If there is any interest in these data, it is in the intrinsic story they tell, not that they say anything about how the KRL/RLE teaching happens in other schools. As such, they may have value only as small pieces in a larger patchwork of iterative studies of Norwegian classrooms, such as von der Lippe (2009; Lippe 2008; 2010 Forthcoming) as well as Bråten (2010 Forthcoming).

10.2: Four vignettes from classrooms: dealing with disagreement.

As I sat in the different classrooms, I encountered a range of teaching styles. In the following section, I want to present four vignettes from my classroom notes, two from each school. To focus the “taster” from the field so as to make it more relevant to my research questions, I have structured the presentation around strategies for dealing with disagreement in the classroom. In this way, these

vignettes have a double function: they aim to give the reader a sense of context and a richer understanding of the field, and they are also intended to provide relevant instances that may inform the more detailed discussion in chapter 12 and 13. Disagreement is a helpful tool for investigating classroom action, as it focuses the analytical intention on how a community that disagrees can become a community of learning. This is interesting for at least two reasons. First, it provides a microcosm of larger democratic processes: management of disagreement is at the core of the democratic dynamic that transforms a community of disagreement into a community of common action. This is similar to the idea of an agonistic political discussion, presented by Chantal Mouffe (2005). Secondly, it provides interesting instances of a relevant process for my discussion: how individual opinions may or may not become a marker of group identity, in the context of cultural diversity and identity politics (Billig 1995; 1996).

By “disagreement” I refer to a conflict of opinions or values in the classroom that cannot be resolved by adding more information or by clarifying the terms. It is a substantive disagreement. I use the word “disagreement” rather than the word “conflict”. This is because “conflict” implies a depth of emotional involvement that may or may not be present. In fact, my data indicate that many of the substantive disagreements were treated by pupils with a sense of detached, but accepting, humorous mocking of the other’s opinion (“Well, you **WOULD** say that, wouldn’t you”). Value differences may or may not be seen as important or fundamental, and often they are not seen as very important in the classroom.

I shall present four “strategies” for teaching.

- 1) Presenting the facts
- 2) Facilitating personal sharing
- 3) Leading discussions
- 4) Creating consensus

These are not “types of teachers”. The teachers I observed switched between these strategies, applying different strategies for different situations. There were also other strategies that have similarities with these. However, this short presentation is a good basis for later analysis, and gives a broad sense of the types of teaching that were prevalent in the two schools during my fieldwork.

The following text-boxes are edited reports based on my field notes. This is the case for all grey-shaded text-boxes in this thesis.

Example 10.2 a) Presenting the facts

I followed the teacher “Trine” through a teaching module about *values and choices*. This was in the 10th grade in Bigby, so it was a religiously and culturally diverse class of 15 and 16 year olds. The teaching module lasted 4 weeks, and was focussed around three powerpoint presentations given by Trine: one about gender identity and sexuality, one about abortion and contraception, and one about relationships and forms of cohabitation. The powerpoint presentations were largely about giving factual information. They presented the legal frameworks, historical developments, statistics and definitions of key terms. The end of the presentations often had a more normative conclusion, like “*if you are a real friend, then sexuality surely doesn’t make a difference!*” or, about abortion: “*avoid the difficult choice, use contraception!*” Several times during the presentation, Trine gave information about present day Norway. The

information was usually given as statistics, but was sometimes presented as common-sense assertions. Her body language during presentations switched between two modes. One was presentational, where she stood sideways referring to the screen and the room in equal measures. The other was conversational, where she faced the class directly and answered questions or elaborated on a point just made in the presentation. “Fact giving” and “explanation/interpretation” were keyed by the teacher’s body language.

During the powerpoint presentations the pupils occasionally asked questions for clarification. Sometimes they offered their agreement to what was said. I did not hear any critical remarks from the pupils towards the teacher’s presentation. The lessons that followed the presentations were organised as group discussions on the topics that Trine had presented. In this forum the pupils *did* present other points of views than those of Trine. Mostly, these differing points of view represented more conservative approaches to abortion and gay and lesbian partnerships.

Example 10.2 b) Facilitating sharing

This example is from an 8th grade class in Smallsted, with pupils aged 12-13 years. The teacher “Ottar” has prepared his very first teaching session in the KRL subject, and the class is new. Some of the pupils know each other from primary school, but certainly not all. Ottar is standing in front of the class, leaning against the teacher’s desk in a way that signals a relaxed attitude. He has asked the class some questions about what they enjoy, what they think is important to be happy. He asks a question, waits for some responses and then asks the students individually to share with the whole group. He then comments quickly with a positive comment before he asks the next pupil with a raised hand. A large proportion of the pupils are active.

At some point Ottar says: *“We shall continue to ask and ponder, but this time I want to change the direction of the conversation towards God... What are your first associations when I say “God”?* The pupils give a whole range of disparate associations: light, power, an old man, that which is kind within us, beards, crosses, a kind of power in ourselves and in nature, and so on. Ottar continues: *OK, now we have an idea of how this class imagines*

God. Calm, a power-being, kind and knows everything, can have different names... Let us now, for the sake of questioning and reflection, imagine that God exists. What would you ask God?"

Some pupils want to know how things were before everything was created, others how it is to be so old, or what they can be reborn as, or whether grandmother is doing OK. Basically, the class presents a vast range of religious and philosophical thought, sometimes at odds with each other, and certainly from a range of religious traditions. Throughout it all, Ottar stands in front of the classroom, always focussing on the speaker. Sometimes he comments, sometimes he asks the pupil to elaborate.

Example 10.2 c) Discussion

This lesson was in another 10th grade class in Bigby. This class was also doing the module *values and choices*, just like the class detailed above under the name “presenting the facts”. The teacher “Abdi” arrives in the classroom, deals with some housekeeping issues before turning to the blackboard and writing the following questions: “*SHOULD WE: 1) Save the life of a prematurely born baby? 2) Shorten the time before death, if the dying person so wishes?*” Abdi asks the pupils to create a large space in the centre of the classroom, and all stand up. As the class focuses again, he says: “*All those who agree that they [premature babies] should not receive help, they stand on this side of the classroom. All those that think that the baby should live at all costs, stand on the other side.*”

First, six pupils go to the “let the baby die” side. However, when they see that they are in a minority, four of them go back to the other side leaving only two. Abdi intervenes and sends some of the pupils over to the “losing” side, so that the sides are somewhat even. Then he says: “*No one is bad or evil even though they have another opinion than you do. Both sides want the best for other human beings. This is an ethical dilemma, not a question of good and evil. This is only role-play. The opinions given here do not need to be the opinions we hold in other circumstances.*” Then the debate between the two sides starts, as the pupils try to find reasons for their position.

Example 10.2 d) Creating consensus

The teacher “Tollef” has used social science and KRL-classes to show Richard Attenborough’s movie “Gandhi” to a 10th grade class in Smallsted. As the example begins, the movie is over, and Tollef is asking the pupils what role religion played in the movie, and in the liberation of India. This part of the lesson develops into a debate between one of the pupils and Tollef about the role of religion in society. The end of the debate went like this:

Pupil: ... *but how is it possible to be so stupid? It [religion] is only old stories and fairy-tales! How can people think that it is important today?*

Tollef: *Well, many religious people see it differently. They really experience that their faith is relevant and important today...*

Pupil: *Well, what people do with themselves is their own business, but it shouldn't have anything to do with other people, and it shouldn't have anything to do with children... like those that deny their children blood transfusions. You can't say that that is nice, you know... you can't say that that is nice!*

Tollef: *The argument against that is that it is scary when the state starts telling people how to raise their children. That can be scary as well.*

Pupil: *But when religious people start to tell me what I should do, that's wrong!*

Tollef: *Weell, yes. ... But maybe we can agree that it is stupid to mix politics and religion?*

The pupil agreed to this. The atmosphere in the classroom, which seemed pretty tense to me, loosened. I asked Tollef about the exchange as we walked back to the teachers’ workroom. He told me he wanted to end the debate because he wanted to “*get on with the lesson*” and because “*I know that some of those that don't say that much are more religious, and I was afraid that they would be hurt*”.

Dealing with disagreement: analysis

In all the cases above, there were disagreements within the classes. Sometimes these disagreements were hidden, sometimes they were spoken. In both cases, much of the teachers’ action can be understood as the management of

disagreement. I hope these vignettes may stand as examples to give a flavour of the field, as well as to present a useful focus for the observations and analyses that follow.

There is also a theoretical reason for this choice. Emphasising situations where the class clearly worked as one unit, even though disagreement (not conflict!) was present, enables a sociological analysis of classroom solidarity and micro-group cohesion that does not rely on sameness. Even though I do not develop these instances further here, it gives support to an argument which runs through the thesis. The idea that disagreement is a constitutive part of groupness is inspired by the arguments of theorists such as Chantal Mouffe (2005) and her idea of an agonistic public sphere, as well as Michael Billig's arguments in his book "Thinking and Arguing" (Billig 1996).

10.3 Differences between the schools

In the section that follows, I will pinpoint three differences between the two schools. One aim is to make the distinctive character of the schools clearer, thus giving relevant and place-specific context to the analyses that follow later in the thesis. A second aim is to show some of the variety of my case sampling, making my method choices somewhat more transparent for the reader. I want to emphasize that these schools do not represent anything beyond themselves. They are not meant to represent "multicultural" vs. "monocultural" schools; they are not meant to represent "city" vs. "town". It is the particularity of the schools that I want to highlight in this section.

Local connection

There was a clear difference between the two schools in how they related to the local community. In Smallsted, the boundaries between the school and the town were clearly perceived as fluid and indistinct. This is clear on the institutional level, where the leadership of the school has regular meetings with stakeholders in the town, both official and within the civil society. The leadership met regularly with the political leadership of the municipality and with the police, and they had connections to the local parish of the Church of Norway, to local sports clubs and music groups, and so on. Apart from these institutional ties to the local community, it was clear that the way in which “problems” and “issues” were discussed and talked about was in terms of the school’s place in the local community. If I asked questions about challenges the school faced, for instance in terms of discipline, teachers would often answer that this was not specifically a challenge for the school, but for the town. Also, if the town was seen to face challenges, it was natural that the school thought about its role in meeting them. I was in many ways challenged by this, certainly in terms of method. Would I be better off doing a longer, more immersive piece of fieldwork taking in the wider context? Rather than comparing schools, it seemed that I needed to understand the entire local community to really get to grips with what was going on in this school. The school seemed “a place to be”, and a part of the larger working of the town.

I did not get this feeling at all at Bigby. The institutional links with the local community were in terms of practicalities of using the local library and

swimming pool. Otherwise, the relevant institutional context was the wider network of other schools in Oslo. Sector seemed much more important than geography in terms of how the world was differentiated. The teachers and the school leadership treated the local surroundings as a given, a black box which presented the school with new pupils and new pedagogical challenges every year. Rather than a place to be, the school seemed like “a job to do” for the teachers, and part of a pedagogical vision rather than a local community.

Normalcy

There was a clear difference between the schools in their image of “the normal pupil” (Hauge 2004). Basically, religion and ethnicity were not criteria that measured normality at Bigby School to any extent. At Smallsted, however, there was an idea that the “normal” student was white and of Norwegian origin. I am not with this implying that the individual teachers at Smallsted were discriminatory against minorities. Of course, the issue here is with a double meaning of the word “normal”: this may shift between a statistical and a normative connotation. However, at Smallsted, teachers would be at pains to point out both the benefits and the challenges of having minorities in the school. They were also keen to discuss how to “deal with” this in the best possible way, to maximise the benefits, and minimize the challenges of having minority students. It was clear that this situation was contrasted with a time without many minorities. Interestingly, teachers rarely spoke about the classroom situation when discussing this. They spoke of discipline problems during break-time in the school-yard, and also outside school. There was talk about the “Kurdish

gangs”. Some teachers were anxious to point out that they distanced themselves from these kinds of generalisations: *they* knew (they emphatically claimed) why so-and-so was hanging out with the wrong people, and they emphasised how it had nothing to do with culture. Others were anxious to point out how culture *did* matter, and how kids who were great in class became troublesome when they were with “others from the same culture”, especially boys. Both these positions, I think, are the teachers’ attempts to make sense of experiences that they find stereotypical, without being “racist”. However, I do find it interesting that I often heard the teachers talk about minorities *as groups* in terms of discipline and break-time, but *never* in the classroom.

At Bigby, on the other hand, the students were so diverse that there seemed to be no point of gravity around which to centre a sense of “the normal” pupil – certainly not in terms of ethnicity, nationality, culture or religion. Rowdy behaviour (and there was quite a bit of this!) was seen as a discipline problem, and not as a result of culture. Teaching in Norwegian, when this is the second language for a large portion of the students, was seen as part and parcel of teaching, and not as an additional burden. This does not mean that the school was any softer than Smallsted; it was just as strict in terms of discipline.

So what can explain the differences between the schools? One aspect might be the point of reference for the school. Smallsted had many teachers who had themselves been present through the increased diversification through migration. The mono-cultural point of reference was a lived reality. Another aspect might be how the school was far more involved in the local surroundings. To the extent

that pupils were in trouble with the police *outside* school hours, this became an issue for Smallsted school, whereas Bigby did not seem to have these contacts outside the school in the same way. However, the main difference, I think, is in terms of numbers and diversity. There comes a tipping-point where looking at the world in terms of (normal) majority and (special case) minorities just has too much friction with experienced reality. It seems to me that Smallsted was just below this tipping-point, and so seemed to deal with a large proportion of ad-hoc “special cases”. They dealt with this by highlighting all the positive aspects of the special cases before mentioning the challenges. At Bigby, diversity was not so much celebrated as taken for granted.

Status of religious education

There was also a difference in the status of religious education relative to other subjects within the two schools. At Smallsted, several of the teachers who taught the KRL-subject did not have any educational training for this, and it was a subject that was often given to the contact teacher for any given class. The argument was that it was a good subject in which to deal with issues and problems in the class, and to discuss these in the light of ethics. To some extent, there was an expectation, not so much among the teachers of religious education, but from the leadership and the other teachers, that KRL was a time that was suited for general pedagogical work on well-being within the class. Pulling in the same direction was a frustration among the teachers that KRL was especially prone to “losing hours”. “Losing hours” refers to when the school engages in teaching outside the usual subject-specific context. This could be

sports days, concerts or plays that visit the school, projects like charity fundraising, or cross-subject projects. Some of the scheduled lessons had to be cut to make place for these extra-syllabic activities. The teachers at Smallsted felt that KRL was cut more often than it should. The teachers found it paradoxical that the KRL-subject had such a high profile in public life and political debate, but such a low status and profile in the everyday life of the school.

This was different at Bigby. There was not the same connection between being the contact teacher and teaching KRL. Maybe this was because the teachers were, to a greater extent than in Smallsted, organised in teams, so that no one teacher had responsibility for one class. Also, I saw fewer “lost hours”, and the religious education-teachers did not feel that KRL lost more hours than other subjects. One reason for this was that Bigby seemed to have fewer out-of-class activities. Of course, another possible explanation is that the diversity of the school makes a multi-faith religious subject of special interest and relevance.

Finally, another reason for the relatively high status of the KRL subject at Bigby is that Bigby had a few key teachers that had given the subject a high profile within the school. One of the teachers was a textbook author, and another textbook author had been at Bigby but had recently moved. To an extent, this is an effect of my sampling. My access was through the local teacher training college in Oslo, where I asked the academic staff whether they knew of any practising teachers who might be especially interested in my project. However, the teachers themselves highlighted the implicit value of KRL in a religiously diverse school.

However, at both schools, I had the impression that the KRL-subject was enjoyed by that the teachers involved, and most of the pupils did so as well. On the whole, the subject was seen as relevant and interesting.

10.4 Similarities between the schools

In the section that follows, I point out some similarities between the two schools. Again, this is to give some background that may make my analyses and methods more transparent. It is also to give a richer understanding of some features that might characterize the subject in several other schools. It is inevitable that this section reads as if there are ambitions towards generalization. Admittedly, I am writing this section about similarities in terms of generalizations, but this is a heuristic strategy. By presenting these aspects, I am able to give background, transparency and richness to my analyses in later chapters. This in turns makes these analyses more firmly grounded methodologically. I am aware of the anecdotal nature of these vignettes. However, these observations might also be of interest to readers who seek to accumulate an iterative corpus of classroom-based observational data about the KRL-RLE subject²⁸. The aspects I highlight are informed by the academic and political debate surrounding the KRL-RLE subject.

²⁸ These people might be interested in the work of von der Lippe (2008, 2009 and 2010 Forthcoming) as well as Bråten (2010 Forthcoming).

Mode of teaching: Secular and Post-Christian.

The teaching of the subject was secular. Regardless of the religious identification of the teacher, or the composition of the class, there was no religious nurture. The “tone” of the teaching, I would say across the board, was external to religion, but positive to religion as a phenomenon. By “secular” in this case, I mean that no one religion was privileged in terms of truth. However, Christianity was privileged in terms of the formal curriculum, and this was also a part of some of the teachers’ understanding: that Christianity was a part of a specifically Norwegian cultural heritage, and the KRL was a subject with a special responsibility for inducting future citizens to this cultural heritage. They argued both from the point of view of an inherent value in continuing a specific Norwegian heritage, and from the perspective that any pupil who did not have this knowledge would be denied access to privileges and full participation in Norwegian society. Teachers in both schools shared these lines of argument. It seemed to me that the teachers were firmly in favour of what some of them called “the KRL-project”. Only one teacher reluctantly said that he missed the old, confessional system. However, he emphasised that this was a personal opinion - the teacher missed being able to teach more directly in terms of faith. At the same time, he claimed that the new subject was more appropriate for today’s situation.

Apart from being privileged as cultural heritage in the formal curriculum, Christianity had a different dynamic from other religions in both the schools. This is the second reason why I say the religious context is “post-Christian”. I

will illustrate this with a description of my first lesson with a 9th grade class at Bigby. The following text-box is a report based on my field notes.

Example 10.4: Counting religious identity

It is my first meeting with this new class. We are in the school library, and the teacher calls for everyone to sit down round the central table. The teacher suggests that everyone introduces themselves, and so they do. The teacher then says: Since Lars has studied history of religions, maybe we can find out what kind of religions we have here in the class? How many Muslims? (13 raise their hand, about half the class.) How many Hindus? (One boy raises his hand.) Any Buddhists?" (No one raises their hand). After a while the teacher says, "Well, maybe me..." A pupil asks: "Are you a Buddhist?" The teacher answers: "Well, no, not really. But I like Buddhism very much." After this, the class continues.

Interestingly, the teacher does not ask how many are Christian. As I get to know the class, two of the pupils later self-identify as Catholic. I shall not speculate over the teacher's intentions, or even if there *were* any intentions behind the omission of Christianity. However, this instance was not exceptional. On the contrary, it was typical for my data. Whereas Muslim, Sikh, Hindu and Buddhist identities were openly given and taken, Christian and Humanist identities were *latent*: never attributed to a person by others, and only rarely claimed by the person involved. There were three exceptions to this case among the approximately 300-400 pupils I met. Statistically, I would expect far more Christian pupils. The three exceptions were all connected to what I could call "pseudo-ethnic" religious identities. By this, I mean that all three self-

identifying Christian pupils stressed that they belonged to a Christian community by virtue of their family or roots. One was of Brazilian origin, one emphasized that her family were Norwegian Catholics and had been so for generations, and the third emphasized that the Karen people in Burma, of whom she considered herself a member, were Christian²⁹.

I must emphasise that this is the result of *my* observational data. Talking to the teachers, it is clear that many of them had a different perception. It is difficult to know whether this is a regional variation typical of Eastern Norway, a random result of my sample, a pseudo-ethnicized idea of religion and belonging, or perhaps that “coming out” as Christian was a high price to pay socially, and sanctions were active outside school. At both schools, the teachers were keen to emphasise that in their class there was a safe space, and the opportunity for everyone to share their religious thoughts if they so wished. They did not really believe that there existed a large but silent group of Christian students afraid to “come out”. To the extent that I can use my own sense of social awareness and sensitivity to such atmospheres as a guide, I have to say that I would agree with the teachers. Certainly, if a student clearly and proudly presented him or herself as Christian, I cannot see that this person would have been sanctioned by fellow pupils. One of the teachers at Bigby emphasised that the presence of the openly religious Muslims meant that it was easier for Christians to be open as well.

²⁹ The case remains mostly the same if I include the third school, with some exceptions. First, I decided to find out if there were any Christians, so I braved what I felt was a taboo, and asked the teachers directly if they knew if any of the pupils were active in Christian congregations. I followed up on this, and asked some of the pupils directly, in private, about whether they were active in any Church. Three pupils were. Finally, on one occasion, a pupil criticized a fellow pupil after a presentation. She was criticized for using a Christian web site as her source, rather than an “objective” one. He argued that the presenter was letting her Christian background get in the way of a neutral presentation. Afterwards, the teacher was angry with the boy who made the criticism, for disturbing the “safe space” of the classroom.

Religiosity was widely accepted at Bigby School, he claimed. This might well be the case, but I did not see any of this during my fieldwork. I think this is surprising enough to warrant some thought.

Out of a group of nearly 400 pupils, *no one* self-identified as evangelical Lutheran Christian - the tradition which is presented in the formal curriculum as an integral part of Norwegian cultural heritage. Why? Well, first, I might well have a sample that includes far fewer Christians than the national average. In other words, it might not be the case of Christians “in the closet” but a case of very few self-identifying Christians. I think this goes some way in explaining what was going on. But I do not think it does justice to the situation. Other explanations might be that Christianity is “uncool”, or that Christianity (as opposed to other religious identities) is seen as a private matter.

In any case, I argue that the subject, as it appeared to me, was clearly non-confessional. However, Christianity played a special role in the subject in two ways. First, Christianity is specially emphasised in the curriculum. Secondly, Christian identification was treated with special care in the classroom. The label “post-Christian” captures this seemingly paradoxical position of Christianity in the KRL-subject.

Teacher co-operation: an aspect of Professionality

I was impressed by the quality of the teaching at both schools³⁰. The teachers were competent, and good at playing to their own strengths. However, I want to make a point about what I shall call ‘professionality’. I am creating my own understanding of this term, but I talked to the teachers about it, and it resonated with them. In this understanding, professionalism is what the teachers *share*. It is contrasted with what the teachers consider to be “their own turf”. Professionality is the area of their work where they communicate with each other by virtue of being fellow teachers. In both schools, the teachers were professional in terms of pedagogy and care, but “masters of their own turf” in terms of subject knowledge. This means that if a class was particularly difficult, or a pupil was having a rough time, the teachers would call on each other and discuss the issue as colleagues. They pooled their pedagogical competence, and clearly saw this as an area where the whole (the pedagogical competence in the school) was greater than the sum of the parts (the competence of the individual teacher). This was not the case in terms of knowledge about the topics that the teachers dealt with. I do not mean that the teachers did not prepare themselves adequately, or that the teachers lacked knowledge. My point is rather that this was clearly seen as the domain of the individual teacher. Not only knowledge about religion, but also strategies for teaching religion³¹ were decided by the individual teacher. To the extent that I saw teachers co-operate, this was in laying out a plan as to what

³⁰ At one of the schools, the headmaster told me that the pupils were telling him that my presence made the KRL-lessons better, because of the teachers’ improved performance.

³¹ In the Norwegian context this would be called the didactics of religion. In the UK, the word didactics seems to have a narrower sense of traditional rote learning, and negative, old-fashioned connotations.

topics should be taught at which time during the semester, in an attempt to be roughly in sync. Both schools had teachers who were seen as “experts”. They were sometimes approached with specific questions, but this happened rarely. When I spoke to teachers about this, they tended to agree. Bigby teachers told me that they had had religious education-teacher meetings more regularly in the past, but that they did not have time these days. This might be related to understaffing in the school. It might also be, as one teacher indicated, that the school made a push to improve their religious education a few years back, and felt that this had succeeded, and that now other areas needed more attention. Nevertheless, the teachers agreed that they shared pedagogical challenges, but not substantive subject-specific challenges. Furthermore, several teachers told me that this was the case in all subjects, with the possible exception of the three subjects with national and international tests. These are Maths, Norwegian and English.

The textbooks

One final aspect that needs to be pointed out is that all the teachers, and all the classes, used textbooks most of the time (for more about the use of textbooks in KRL/RLE, see Bråten 2010 Forthcoming). For many teachers, the textbook *is* the subject. This does not indicate that the teachers are not creative or varied in their teaching. The books were used in a variety of ways, from traditional reading and answering questions in class, and individual written work with the assignments outlined in the book, to using the art and story resources in the book, or letting the contents of a section of the book become the basis of a class

discussion. Nevertheless, the textbooks were a greater part of the teaching in both schools than I had anticipated. This is especially so because the aims-based curriculum (KRL2005) structures the teaching more clearly than the list-of-knowledge-based earlier syllabuses. Textbook authors are still in a position where they have a huge influence over how the curriculum is understood by teachers and pupils. I read the two different sets of textbooks that were used by the schools. It is possible that I would be closer to the perceived and experienced curricular domains of teachers and pupils if I had done a closer textual analysis of the textbooks. However, I chose not to do so, as I am interested in the relationship between policy and practice. Formally, the textbooks have no role in that relationship. Nevertheless, it is a clear finding that religious education-teaching in my data, was heavily, but creatively, reliant on the available textbooks.

10.5 Conclusions

In this chapter I have given a sense of the field of study, so as to provide context and some “flavour” of the classroom ethnography. This gives the reader a greater sense of the range of issues and everyday questions that inform the teaching of religious education in Norway. I have provided some examples of classroom action, structured as four teacher strategies for dealing with disagreement in the classroom. I have presented some differences and some similarities between the two schools from which I draw my ethnographic data. Through this presentation, I hope that I have achieved some by-products as well. The discussion of differences and similarities might be of anecdotal relevance to

broader debates within the pedagogy of religion in Norway, in terms of presenting ethnographic findings. However, I must insist that the examples and generalisations presented in this chapter do not have any ambition to speak beyond the data. The closer analysis chapters that follow DO have a more ambitious analytical aim.

At this stage, I conclude the presentation of background. I have presented both an historical and an ethnographic background for my case. In terms of the overall structure of the thesis, this part has provided the richness and detail necessary to give the reader a chance to understand the following arguments in their geographical, political and historical context. Furthermore, the analyses that follow, as well as the evaluation of the analytical toolkit presented in chapter 6, gain some of their strength from the extent to which they make sense of a complex and rich reality.

The next part of the thesis is the analysis. As I outlined in chapter 1 and section 7.5, the analysis is crucial for the logic of the thesis. It is in the presentation and discussion of my empirical findings that I deploy the analytical toolkit. As such, part VI of the thesis outlines the results by which the thesis should be evaluated.

PART VI

ANALYSIS

Whereas the previous sections have presented the historical and ethnographic contexts of my case, I will now turn to detailed analysis of the data in terms of my research questions. Chapter 11 is a discourse analysis of a set of formal curriculum documents (see section 8.3).

The aim is twofold. First, to outline what I see as the State's identity management strategies. Second, identifying and outlining forms of thinking and arguing that might be culturally available for teachers and pupils also at the time of classroom observation. Consequently, chapter 11 not only presents findings about Norwegian educational policy, but also a background for understanding the classroom interactions presented in chapters 10 and 12.

Chapter 12 presents and analyses some instances of classroom interaction. They are collected from my ethnographic notes, but presented in a lightly edited mode for ease of understanding and anonymity. I focus on instances where the classroom action shows some form of friction in relation to the understanding in the formal curriculum documents. Friction is not the same as clear breaches of intentions. Rather, these instances illustrate how the formal curriculum documents, and the ideas in them, represent one of many sources of meaning and interpretation for the actors. It is a source with certain modes of power invested in it, and this becomes evident in interesting ways in the data.

During the analysis I deploy the analytical toolkit that is developed in chapter 6. In chapter 13, I return to the academic debates about multiculturalism, Norwegian sexualities and religious education presented in chapters 2, 3 and 4. In this final analysis chapter, I evaluate the extent to which the use of my

analytical tools in investigating the case of religious education in Norway, represents any development in relation to the analytical strategies already represented in the literature.

11. DOCUMENT ANALYSIS:

VALUES, RELIGION AND IDENTITY IN THE FORMAL CURRICULUM

11.1 Introduction

In this chapter I shall focus on the concept of “values”. It is clear from my material that the concept of “values” is a crucial node in connecting religion and national identity. Now, this may not come as a surprise to anyone who has followed political rhetoric in the context of cultural and religious diversity. I shall use the term as an organisational device, as an empirical nutcracker, to get to some more non-obvious findings.

At the beginning of this chapter, I shall present what I call the main story about values in the formal curriculum. After that I shall present the counter-argument, the alternative story about values in the formal curriculum. That is the broad-brush analytical level.

I shall then change the scale of investigation, put on my analytical magnifying glasses, and get into a two-part textual analysis based on the ideas of discourse analysis presented by Laclau and Mouffe (1985). The scheme of Laclau and Mouffe, as I see it, invites the analyst to look closely at three aspects. First, signs (in my cases, words), that are studied are assumed to be *overdetermined*. This means that there are competing interpretations available to the teachers and

pupils. Second, investigating the links of equivalence, or how words gain their meaning through being connected to other words. Third, investigating the “chains of difference”, or how words gain their meaning by being contrasted to other words. My adaptation of this, involves investigating the two first aspects within the text. The chains of difference, however, are the topic for the ethnographic analysis. I see the “chains of difference” as the contextual usage of the signs in question. It is only in the classroom that the use of the signs are fixed enough, or become solid enough, to enable the sounds of speech to become effective social actions.

The first part of the textual analysis is to establish a “web of meanings” around the term “values” in the context of religion in education. I shall do this by going through the formal curricula in chronological order, each new curriculum adding a layer of meanings to an expanding web. The older meanings live on next to new meanings. This section will produce a picture of the complex, interweaving, potentially oppositional, meanings that teachers and pupils have at their disposal. These meanings are available to them as rhetorical/discursive resources when they go about their various everyday businesses in school. The underlying theoretical assumption is that a politically contested linguistic term gets its meaning from its relation to surrounding terms by means of chains of equivalence and chains of difference (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). I shall be mostly descriptive in this phase.

The second part is to examine in even closer detail, some of the ways in which the different meanings are connected to the “values-node” by the curriculum

authors. I shall first concentrate on links of equivalence, which in this case takes the form of understanding the structures of micro-metaphors within terms (Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Lakoff and Johnson 1980). This will be mostly done in terms of investigating “boundary work”. What is the potential field for language users for making implicit or explicit contrasts between their different understandings of crucial terms? In Billig’s terms, what are they arguing against (Billig 1996; Hagelund 2003; Laclau and Mouffe 1985)?

I turn now to a quick summary of the two main stories told about *values* in the formal curricula documents from 1974 to 1997 when the present core curriculum was introduced.

The main way of connecting religion and values in the formal curriculum.

The meanings of the term “values” have shifted from ethics to identity. In the 1974 curriculum, the rationale for teaching about values in school was concerned with helping students to make ethical decisions about right and wrong, good and bad (M74). “Values” were understood as something concerning the actions of the individual. In the curriculum of 2005,³² the rationale behind teaching values had changed. Schools should now teach about values so that pupils may understand who they are (KRL2005 ; L97). “Values” are now understood as something connected to community, identity and social cohesion. The term “values” might, of course, refer simultaneously to something

³² This is the curriculum that was active at the time of fieldwork As far as I can see the present curriculum does not change the points made here in any significant way.

concerned with ethics and something concerned with identity. The interpretations might not be mutually exclusive. I present as a significant finding in my thesis that there has been a shift in in the formal curriculum in the emphasis in the meaning of the term “values,” a shift from ethics towards identity.

The relationship between religion and values, however, has not changed during the same time-span. The authors of the curriculum consistently presented religion as an important, maybe the most important, source for such values. However, with the shift in meaning in the term “values”, the *use* to which the authors put religion has also changed. In the 1974 curriculum, the authors presented religion as providing the resources for living a good life. In 2005, religion is, to a much greater degree, presented as providing resources for identity management. Knowledge about religion is presented as knowledge about the identity of the adherents to that religion. It is primarily religion as heritage and tradition that is presented as relevant. Personal faith and face-to-face religious communities are not so much presented as a relevant part of teaching about religion as a source of values. Finally, identity is presented primarily as group membership. This might be why there has been a long political battle concerning which traditions should “own” the foundational values of the nation. I would like to “make strange” the fact that when Norwegians have publicly discussed the values upon which the country supposedly is “founded”,. they have not discussed *what* these values may be, but rather where these values come from. I find in my data the recent emergence of a cluster of meanings surrounding the word “values” that I label “communalist”.

The most interesting finding about religion and values in my analysis of the formal curriculum is a move *away* from ethics *towards* identity.

The competing way of connecting religion and values in the formal curriculum.

However, the original ethics-and-action meaning of the term “values” does not disappear from the texts. The curriculum authors still connect the term “values” to terms of action and ethical consideration. Sometimes it seems as if there is some internal tension in the curriculum text, where “values = ethics” and “values = identity” appear as contradictions. At other times they are written as if the two meanings may co-exist. Finally, the authors sometimes write as if the two understandings mutually support each other.

I will quickly outline some of the characteristic features of the values-as-ethics cluster of meaning. When the authors write about “values” and connect this to words of action, values are presented as the property of an individual. They present individual betterment and development towards maturity as increased reflection and development of values. This usage of the term “values” tends to go together with a kind of moral universalism. This does not mean prescribing one set of values that all the world should hold, but in claiming that it is a mark of personal integrity for a person to stay “true” to her individual values. Consequently, a person should act according to her values regardless of which cultural context she should find herself in. Individuals are not beholden to any

set of values by virtue of identity. If traditions are important in this way of writing about values, then these traditions are seen as the giants on whose shoulders the individual stands. In this way, it is also possible to perceive history as a journey towards better values, a progressive ladder of human maturity.

How does religion relate to this understanding of values? Religion is initially presented as a motivational factor for living according to these values. In this way, nurture of personal faith is very much a part of the early curricula. However, in the later curricula, this aspect does not seem to be reckoned as part of the remit of school. When a person wants to argue for secularism, the “ethics” part of the values meaning-web is activated. An aspect of this “values-ethics” node, is that the connection between religion and values lies in the diverse private sphere of personal motivation to action, rather than in the induction into a cultural group that makes the values “live”. Consequently, it should not be the business of a compulsory religious education subject in school. The competing story about religion and values is one that is reminiscent of enlightenment philosophy.

I shall call this a high-modern story about values and religion.

11.2 Outlining the meaning web.

I shall now go into further detail, to give an impression of how the word “values” appears in formal curricula. In this section, I make a map of the web of meaning that is the backdrop for actors’ usage of the term. I do this historically,

starting with the 1974 curriculum, and ending with the present one. I concentrate on the first chapters of the 1974 and 1987 curricula, and the core curriculum that is still in use. The task for this section is to outline what other terms and sets of terms are textually connected to the term “values” in the data material. The methodological underpinning of this approach follows the assumptions of Laclau and Mouffe:

First, the meaning of a word is constituted by its relationship to other signs in the same system. I am especially interested in the connotational and metaphorical connections in the surrounding text that work to carve out the precise and transient meaning of the word.

Second, there are always more available meanings than one. Each time a word is used, some of the potential meanings are included and others excluded. This process of continuously shaping the available meanings of a word for future language users is, according to Laclau and Mouffe, a political process.

This section maps out a space of available metaphors and connotations that exist around the word “values” in the formal curricula. The following sections will go into more detail on the nature of these connections.

Values in 1974 curriculum.

The main statement concerning the aim of teaching about values in Norwegian education, is as follows:

Excerpt 11.2 a)

Grunnskolen skal som helhet bygge på de etiske grunnverdier som er forankret i kristendommen. Det ansvar som skolen på denne måten er pålagt, gjør det til en plikt for skolen å forsøke å vekke og styrke elevenes sans for verdier av etisk art. Alt etter deres alder og modenhet må skolen forsøke å hjelpe dem til å se at det i livets ulike forhold bør spørres om hva som er godt og ondt, rett og galt.	Basic schooling shall, as a whole, build upon the ethical foundational values that are anchored in Christianity. The responsibility that is laid upon school in this way makes it a duty for school to try to awaken and strengthen the pupils' sense for [appreciation of] values of an ethical nature. Considering their age and maturity, school must try to help them see that, in the varied circumstances of life, it should be asked what is good and evil, right and wrong.
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(M74: 10, my translation.)

The authors of the 1974 curriculum firmly connect “values” to ethics and action. Ethics is connected to “values” both through basic collocation, but also grammatically, as an adjective in the noun phrase “ethical foundational values”. Teaching of values is linked to individual development and maturity. Also, the authors present “*good and evil, right and wrong*” as the relevant terms of evaluation of questions of values. These might seem obvious, but later curricula also include “ours” and “theirs” as relevant terms for evaluating values. It is worth noting that values are hardly connected to identity in the main statement about values in education. It does mention Christianity, and I shall deal with this point shortly.

However, before I deal with the connection with religion, I will present another example of how values are connected to individual action.

Excerpt 11.2 b)

Målet for skolen må være at grunnverdier som sannhet, redelighet, rettferdighet, troskap og nestekjærlighet virkelig blir verdier for elevene og dermed bestemmende for deres livsholdning og livsførsel.

The aim for school must be that foundational values such as truth, honesty, fairness, loyalty and loving-thy-neighbour really become values for the pupils, and thus decisive for their attitude to life and how they live their lives.

(M74: 10, my translation.)

In this excerpt, the authors present a substantive set of values. The aim for school is presented as inculcating these values in pupils, so that they become decisive for their action. It is worth noting the absence of “benefits of belonging” when the authors argue for the inculcation of these values.

So far in this section I have presented data which give a hint of the tone and setting of what I call the values-as-ethics, “high-modern”, aspects of the values web of meaning. My analysis shows that this high modern aspect dominates the presentation of values in the curriculum of 1974. A counter argument could be made at this stage by pointing out the mention of “Christianity” in the first excerpt. Surely this is pointing to a tradition that “owns” a set of values? Does not this disrupt my neat story of an original ethical understanding of values, to be complemented and partly superseded by an identity-based understanding of values in later curricula?

This might be so. There are certainly hints in my secondary material that a communal understanding of Christianity in Norway as cultural heritage was part of political debate at least as early as 1963 (Folkeskolekomitéen av 1963 and

Sørheim 1965). However, even if this usage of Christianity can be seen as an embryonic form of identity-based usage of the term “values”, this is not the dominant feature in this document. Rather, religion (in this case Christianity) is presented as a tool for better living. In the subject-specific syllabus for the subject “Christian Knowledge”, the aims include giving “*pupils understanding and respect for religious and ethical values*” and to “*contribute to strengthening the development of character and the moral sense of the pupils*” (M74: 80). I argue that the implicit “other” of Christianity in this case is not so much alternative religious or cultural groups. It would seem that the way values are articulated as “anchored in Christianity” in M74, addresses a perceived threat of the shallowness and chaos of modernity and materialism. In its historical context, the use of the term “values” in M74 is better understood as a call to *the serious life* than an inculcation of a religiously defined “us”.

The term “values” triggers a range of connotations in the context of Norwegian religious education. This range of connotations constitutes the field of meaning for the term “values”. I will now present the first level of the web of connected terms that make up the term “values”.

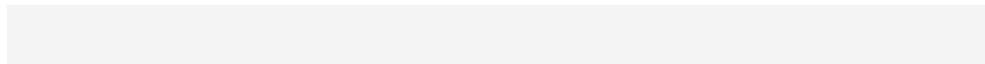
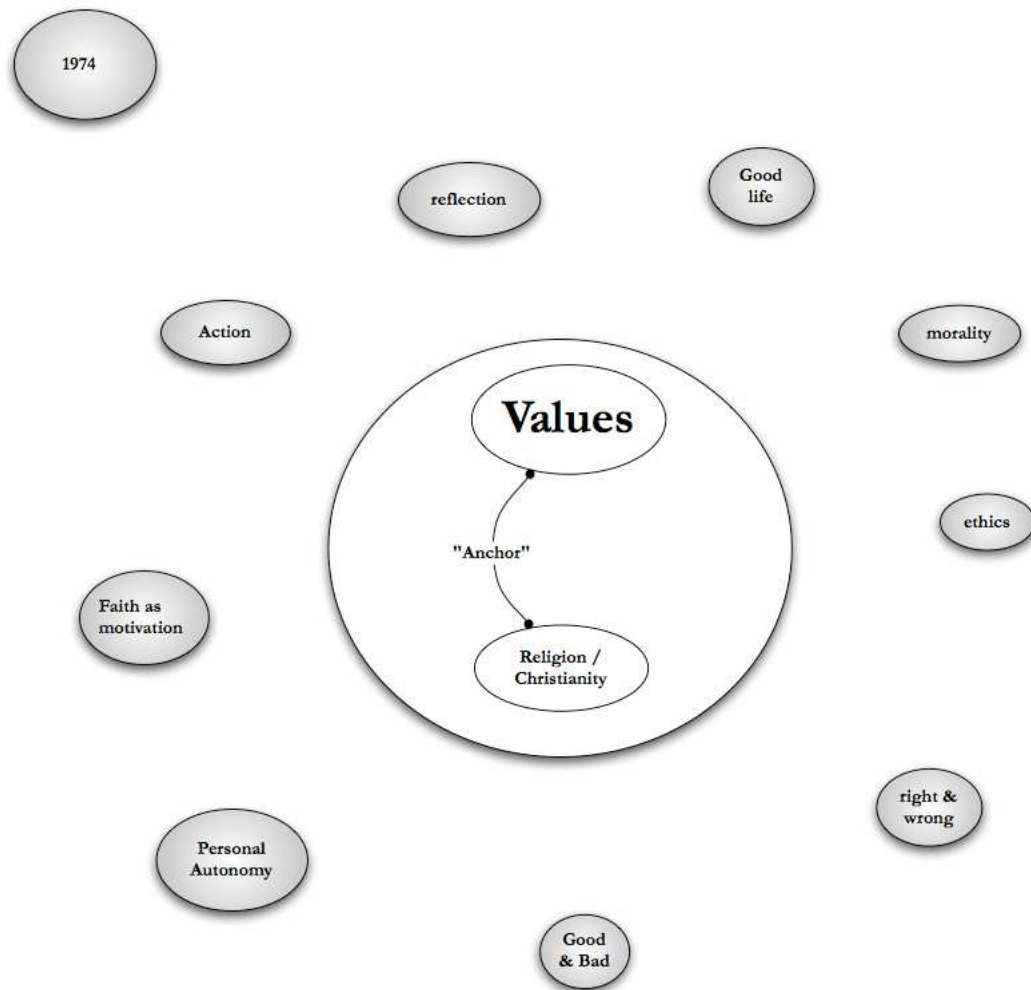


Figure 11.2 a) M74



The illustration shows the crucial connection between religion and talk about “values” in the centre, connected with the metaphor of “anchorage”. I have placed a range of surrounding terms around the “values” node, but I have not yet discussed the nature of the linkages. I turn now to the curriculum of 1987. The authors of this curriculum clearly write about values in a different way. It is at this stage that the communalist construal of “values” enters the stage, connecting “values” with “identity”.

The curriculum of 1987.

The first sentence in the relevant section reads as follows:

Excerpt 11.2 c)	
Skolen skal i sin undervisning og virksomhet bygge på grunnleggende kristne og humanistiske verdier.	School shall, in its teaching and activity, build upon foundational Christian and humanist values.

(M87: 1st Chapter.)

The most evident change from the 1974 curriculum is the inclusion of humanism as a source of foundational values. The preliminary document of 1985 did not include humanism. There are two other aspects of this values statement worth noting. Firstly, the adjective “ethical” is no longer attached to the noun phrase “foundational values”. Secondly, the relationship between the relevant religious and philosophical traditions has changed. Values in M74 were “anchored” in a tradition. In M87, the relationship between the tradition and the values in M87 is

adjectival (“Christian and humanist values”). This constitutes a more direct linkage through description or ownership of those values. The language use connecting “values” and the origin of these values has subtly shifted. However, even if the shift is subtle, it indicates a significant change in how the term “values” may be understood. Consequently, it also indicates a change in the role of religions and life-view traditions in thinking about social integration. In the 1974 text, values are construed as ethical. The anchorage in a religious tradition provided a rhetorical bulwark against shallowness and materialism, as opposed to othering other religious traditions. By 1987 the focus is more on which traditions own Norwegian values. Note also the ambiguity in how the two values-traditions are connected. Is school to be based on values that appear in both traditions? Or in values that appear in at least one of the two traditions? Or are they one tradition with dual roots?

These curriculum texts are complex documents, with many authors, and subject to political discussions and compromises. Just three paragraphs below the introductory passage analysed immediately above, both “ethical” and “anchorage” is used. There is certainly much of the high-modern conception of values in M87. The sentence following the opening values statement provides an instructive example:

Excerpt 11.2 d)	
Disse verdiene er på en særlig måte knyttet til Kristen tro og moral, de demokratiske ideene, menneskerettighetene og vitenskapelig tenkemåte og metode.	These values are, in a special way, bound together with Christian faith and morals, the democratic ideas, human rights and scientific thinking style and method.

(M87)

Note the continued mention of Christian faith as relevant to the anchorage of values, and also the universal scope of the ideals that are listed. I am in no way arguing that the high-modern conception of values disappears, merely that it is accompanied with a new way of looking at values and social life. The third and fourth sentences of the values section illustrate this clearly.

Excerpt 11.2 e)

Den sum av erfaring og innsikt som i vårt folk er nedlagt i tro, sed og skikk, kunst og diktning, vitenskap og teknikk, og i samfunnsinstitusjonene, står sentralt i den kulturen som kommer til uttrykk i arbeidslivet, i organisasjonene og i de folkelige tradisjonene som er knyttet til lokalsamfunnene i bygd og by, er også en sentral del av den erfaring skolen skal formidle.

The sum of experience and insight that in our people is laid down in faith, mores and folkways, art and fiction, science and technique, and in the institutions of society, stand centrally in the cultural heritage that the school shall carry [lead] forward. The culture that is expressed in working life, in organisations and in the popular traditions that are connected to the local society in countryside and towns is also a central part of the experience that school shall communicate.

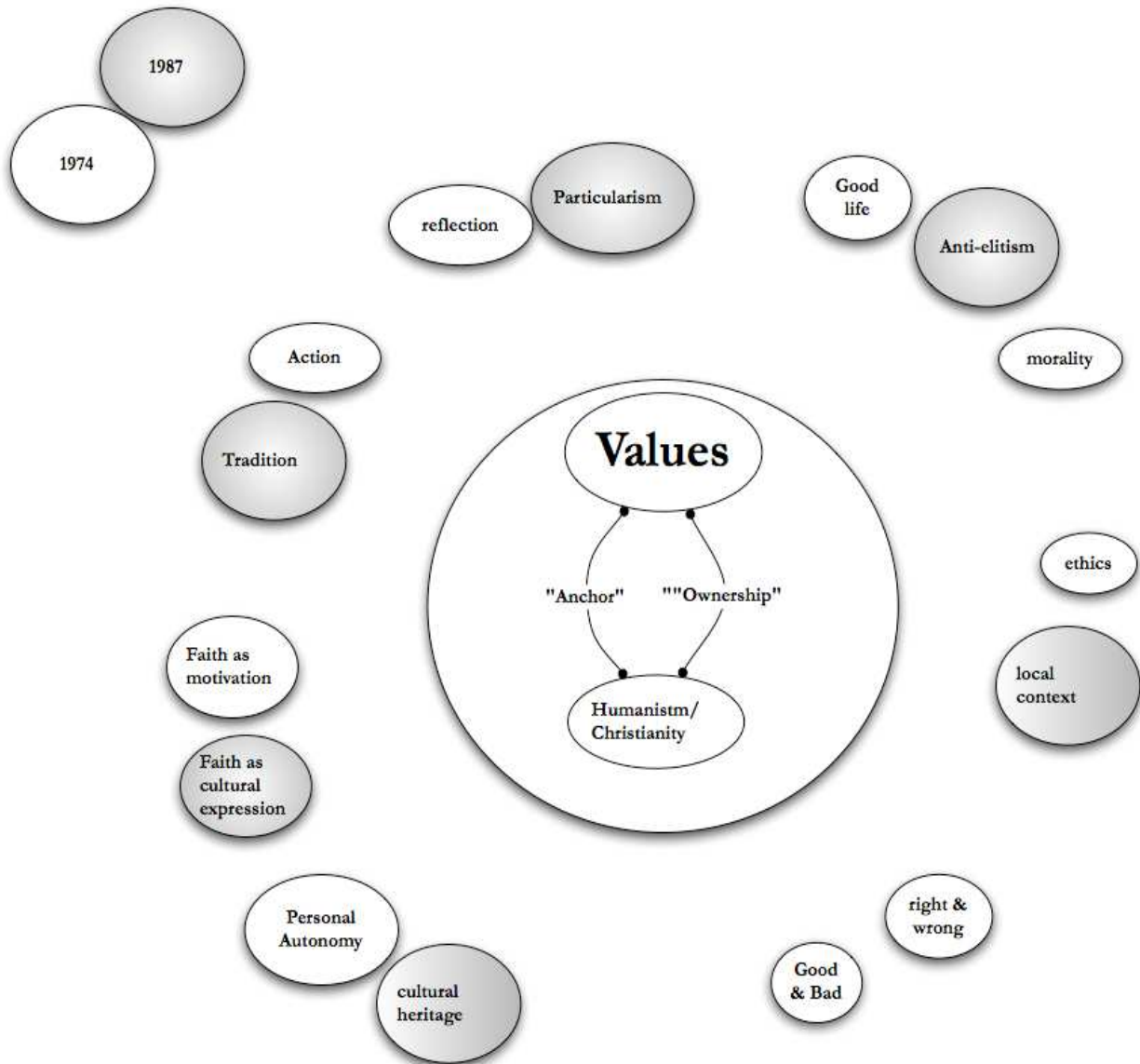
(M87: 14, my translation.)

The excerpt does not mention values at all. It is concerned with culture instead. Nevertheless, it is a substantial part of the first paragraph of the “values” section of the first chapter of the curriculum. The curriculum authors are clearly using local folk-culture and the everyday activity of life as a richly contextualised and embedded backdrop for the realisation of the desired values. The authors are, to an extent we did not see in the 1974 document, emphasising the particularity of the local context within which people enliven their values. “Values” is not only seen as something that expresses itself from the depth of the individual. It is also something that exists in the webs of actions that connect people in the face-to-face encounters of everyday life. Furthermore, it is clear that “values” is used in connection with a concept of “culture”. Before I draw the second web-of-

meaning map, I want to make a note of the mention of “our people” here. This is a focus on particularist Norwegianness that was absent in the 1974 curriculum. This particularism consists of “a people”, a “cultural heritage” and an “experience”. Now, looking closer at what terms are connected to this Norwegianness, it is possible to recognize how it is connected to concepts such as labour, the local culture, and the folk- and popular culture. The specific history of Norwegian progressive and tolerant nationalism outlined in chapter 9 becomes an important backdrop for analysis. In this light, the invocation of Norwegianness, “folk” and cultural heritage is best analysed as a statement against elitism: the authors are connecting values and cultural heritage with the perceived grass roots of Norwegian society. Even though the document, as opposed to the 1974 curriculum, deals with minorities in Norway, it does so in a way that makes it difficult to interpret these statements of Norwegianness as statements of exclusion and majoritarian boundary work.

Below follows the next stage of the web of meaning connected to “values”. The first layer, identified in the 1974 curriculum, and still present, is in white. The new aspects are added in a darker colour.

Figure 11.2 b) M74 – M87



The 1993/1997 curriculum

Something happened to social democracy in the 1990s. I outline a large-scale political and historical backdrop in chapter 9. This is very clearly the case in the L97 curriculum. This document, together with the 1995 White Paper *Identitet og Dialog* (NOU1995:9), has the clearest examples of an identity-based understanding of values. Nevertheless, the ethics-aspect is still present. In fact, there are some explicit efforts to combine the two understandings. I shall include a longer excerpt to give a sense of how this mix of values, cultural heritage, religion and ethics looks. Then I shall quickly point to what has been added in the 1997 curriculum. In square brackets I have placed my alternative translations, where I feel that some metaphorical nuance has been missed in the official English version.

Excerpt 11.2 f)

Oppfostringen skal baseres på grunnleggende kristne og humanistiske verdier, og bære videre og bygge ut kulturarven, slik at den gir perspektiv og retning for fremtiden	The education shall be based on foundational Christian and humanistic values, and should uphold [carry forward] and renew [build out] our cultural heritage to provide perspective and guidance for the future.
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De kristne og humanistiske verdier både fordrer og beforder toleranse og gir rom for andre kulturer og skikker. De begrunner den demokratiske rettsstat som rammen rundt jevnbyrdig politisk deltakelse og debatt. De framhever nestekjærlighet, forbrødring og håp, vektlegger muligheten for fremgang gjennom kritikk, fornuft og forskning, og betoner at mennesket selv er en del av naturen ved sin kropp, sine behov og sine	Christian and humanistic values both demand and foster tolerance, providing room for other cultures and customs. They buttress rule of law and the democratic state as the framework for equal political participation and debate. They emphasize charity, brotherhood and hope, promote progress through criticism, reason and research; and they recognize that humans themselves are a part of nature by their
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sanser.

bodies, their needs and their senses.

Den kristne tro og tradisjon utgjør en dyp strøm i vår historie - en arv som forener oss som folk på tvers av trosretninger. Den preger folkets livsnormer, forestillingsverden, språk og kunst. Den binder oss sammen med andre folkeslag i ukens rytme og årets høytider, men lever også i våre nasjonale særdrag: i begreper og bekjennelser, i byggeskikk og musikk, i omgangsformer og identitet.

The Christian faith and tradition constitute a deep current in our history – a heritage that unites us as a people across religious persuasions. It has imprinted itself on the norms, world view, concepts and art of the people. It binds us to other people in the rhythm of the week and in common holidays, but is also an abiding presence in our own national traits: in architecture and music, in style and conventions, in ideas, idioms and identity.

Vår kristne og humanistiske tradisjon legger likeverd, menneskeretter og rasjonalitet til grunn. Sosial fremgang søkes i fornuft og opplysning, i menneskets evne til å skape, oppleve og formidle.

Our Christian and humanistic tradition places equality, human rights and rationality at the fore. Social progress is sought in reason and enlightenment, and in mans ability to create, appreciate and communicate.

Samlet gir denne sammenflettede tradisjon uvisnelige verdier både til å orientere livsførselen og til å ordne samfunnslivet etter. De fremmer uegennyttig og skapende innsats, og de tilskynder rettskaffen og høvisk handling.

Together, this interwoven tradition provides us with unwithering values both to orient our conduct and to organize our communities [organize societal life]. They inspire selfless and creative efforts, and encourage honorable and courteous behaviour.

(L97: 1st chapter)

The emphasis on contextualisation and embedded values in the 1987 curriculum is clearly developed here. So are the connections between values and ethics,

especially in the poetic line of encouraging “honourable and courteous behaviour.” The concept of cultural heritage is now to be found in the opening sentence. I emphasise four aspects of the document.

First, concepts of community, togetherness and groupness in the 1997 are connected to a national level. These connections were largely absent in M74, and mostly connected to local communities in M87. This is further solidified in the overall structure of the curriculum and syllabuses. The national curriculum of 1997 was far more detailed in all subjects, allowing far less local variation, than the two previous “National Guidelines”. It is evident in how the authors connect the word “values” to national institutions and democratic processes. Finally, in the above quotes, and in many other places in this core curriculum, the authors use a plural voice:

- *“**our** cultural heritage”*
- *“... a deep current in **our** history, a heritage that unites **us** as a people...”*
- *Christianity is presented as an “abiding presence in **our own** national traits.”*

Second, the core curriculum of 1997 has far more abstract agents than the 1987 and the 1974 documents. In all the paragraphs in the long excerpt from L97, “values”, “faiths”, “heritages” and “traditions” are the agents of the sentences. The authors have consistently structured their writings so that these abstract

entities act on humans, rather than the other way around. In the previous documents, the authors always connect statements about how religion, values and traditions are to be understood with how this should affect the school or the pupils. Compare the following sentences:

1974: “School should emphasise making ethical values alive so they may constitute ideals for the pupils through meeting people in the past, the present and in fiction.”

1987: “The sum of experience and insight that in our people is embedded in belief, practices and habits, art and poetry, science and technique, and in the societal institutions, are central in the cultural heritage that school shall carry forward.”

1997: “The Christian faith and tradition constitute a deep current in our history – a heritage that unites us as a people across religious persuasions. It has imprinted itself on the norms, world view, concepts and art of the people.”

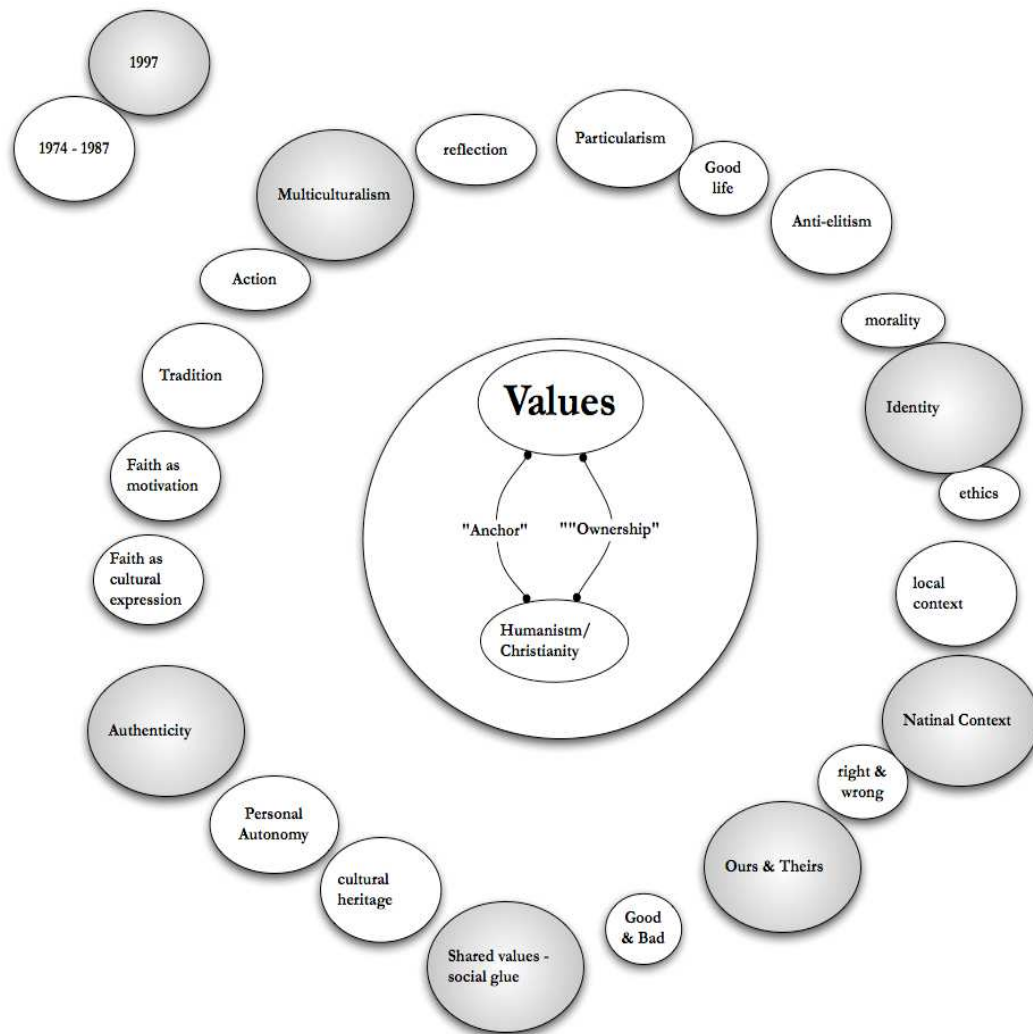
One thing is the emerging focus on religion as societal glue. More important for this analysis is the fact that in M74 and M87, people and school act on cultures and values, whereas in L97, it is the other way round.

Third, as a combination of the first and the second point, “values”, “tradition” and “religion” are connected to various terms signifying a community that is no longer construed as face-to-face. As we shall see later in this chapter, the authors of the 1997 document construe social cohesion as a challenge, a *problematization* (Hagelund 2003). ‘What is the social glue of our society?’ becomes an implicit problem to be tackled. I also show how religion is construed as a potential solution to this problem.

Fourth, the authors of the 1997 curriculum consistently relate their writing to a context of cultural diversity. This is an integrated part of how key concepts such as “values”, “religion” and “culture” are used in the text. In contrast, this was nearly absent in the 1974 curriculum, and more of an add-on in 1987. Consider the sentence “Christian and humanistic values both demand and foster tolerance, providing room for other cultures and customs”. A major concept in the curriculum, and also very present in “*Identity and Dialogue*”, is that there is no real contradiction between emphasising one’s own cultural or religious particularity, and respecting, tolerating and learning from other positions. In fact, the relationship between particularity and tolerance is presented as if a secure cultural identity is a prerequisite for effective interaction with what is construed as “other cultures”. The message of the educational policy documents of the 1990s seem to be that you have to know who you are yourself, before you can understand others.

At this point, I am approaching a more complete picture of the web of meaning surrounding the “values” node. I have marked the additions in a darker colour. Different sizes of bubbles are arbitrary.

Figure 11.2 c) M74 – M87 – L97



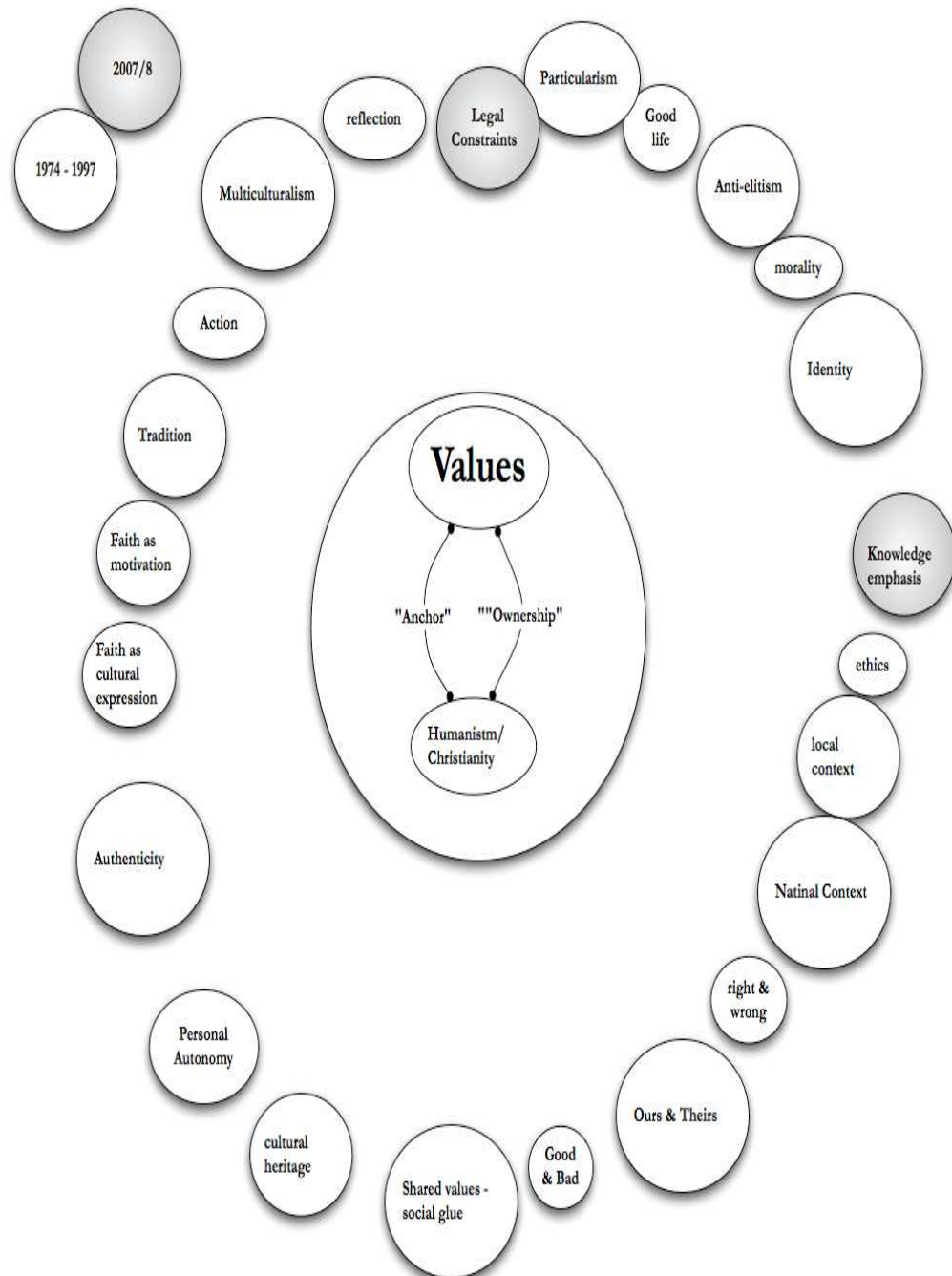
After 1997.

1997 is the last core curriculum, and it is still in place at the time of writing. It was passed in Parliament unanimously, and has not been changed since, even though there have been several reforms in school since then. However, the field of Religious Education has not stood still since 1997. The religious education syllabus that was active when I was doing my fieldwork came in 2005. Its authors were responding to a harsh critique of the new subject, and also by international criticism, at that stage from the United Nations Committee of Human Rights (for a summary of these developments, see Skeie 2007: as well as section 9.6 in this thesis). I think it is fair to say that the mid-1990s were the apex of the focus on identity in the educational field. However, it was still very much an active discursive resource for actors at the time of research. This is evident from my interview data, from newspapers at the time, and especially in the discussions surrounding a new education act, with a new “values clause”. I have discussed the media debate preceding this education act in a previous article (Eriksen 2008a). Finally, there has also been a pressure on school from the international comparative testing regime, first and foremost the PISA tests. This has been followed by an increased emphasis on knowledge and basic skills.

Two interesting aspects of the present subject have emerged since 1997. They are increased constraints from the legal system, and, separate but not unrelated, an increased emphasis on knowledge, neutrality and objectivity. There is an interesting tension going on here that is relevant also to wider academic debates about multiculturalism. The language of communitarian pedagogy and the

language of human rights law seem to be in tension, even though they both seem to strive for inclusion and respect for minority pupils.

Figure 11.2 d) Final web of meaning. M74 – M87 – L97 – RLE2008



This final figure illustrates how the term “values” is a multifaceted discursive resource, with a variation of connotations and usages available for actors in the educational field. These connotations may be triggered and utilized. In fact, the in-the-world meaning of the term is solidified through this usage.

In the next section of this chapter, I go deeper into some aspects of the internal structure of this web of meaning. I do this according to the discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe, by first looking at “chains of equivalence”. There are several ways of achieving such linguistic equivalences. I concentrate on metaphors. After investigating the chains of equivalence, I shall look more closely at “chains of difference”. Here, I will be looking at the conceptual boundary work that the curriculum authors achieve using the “values” node in specific ways. The main technique for this is problematisation. In particular, I shall ask the question “what is the implicit *problem* that is addressed in this text?”

11.3 The metaphorical structure of the values-node.

Looking for chains of equivalence.

In this section, I consider the micro structure that constitutes the construal of some of the terms and concepts that are closely connected to “values”. The analytical strategy is inspired by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) in their book “Metaphors we live by”. However, it is integrated into the larger framework of Laclau and Mouffe, by considering metaphors as a tool for creating what they call “chains of equivalence” (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). Metaphors work by the

concept of A being like B, and are a crucial way of connecting terms through language use. I shall consider the following concepts: 1) the self; 2) identity groups; 3) religion; 4) time.

The self.

The selves of the pupils are written about *as if* they were buildings. Values are, in all the documents analysed, connected to the individual selves through understanding them as “foundational” [“grunnleggende”]. What are the authors doing when they articulate the relationship between “values” and the “self” as similar to that of an edifice and its foundations?

First, they present selves as something precarious, a project that might fail. The authors write as if *stability* is the precondition of a successful self.

Second, the image of a foundation implies something unseen. A good foundation does not draw attention to itself; it merely gives stability to the more visible structures it supports. The curriculum authors write as if foundational values do their work below the radar of consciousness and public visibility. This makes it easier to present the relationship between values and the self as pre-political, rather than political.

Third, a foundation can be both something built to endure, and something natural or pre-existing. This flexibility allows different users to use the term in their own, unique ways. In some instances, teaching about foundational values is

presented as similar to an archaeological exercise. The roots of “our” stability are to be uncovered and found. In other instances, teaching about foundational values is the hard work of constructing lasting dispositions in the pupils.

Finally, a foundation has an ambiguous relationship of internality or externality in relation to the edifice it supports. Is the foundation a part of the house, or is it something external to the house, on which the house proper rests? When the foundational values are presented as something external to the self, then there tends to be an emphasis on the potential for values being *shared*. This ambiguity is also something that actors use flexibly in writing and action. It also constitutes the micro-building-blocks of the different clusters of meaning. Seeing the foundation as *within* the self tends to be part of the values-as-ethics cluster of meaning. Seeing the foundation as *outside* the self, tends to be a part of the values-as-identity cluster.

Identity groups

When groups are presented as having identity claims, the curriculum authors tend to use *container* metaphors (Pinker 2002). This is more prevalent in the 1987 and 1997 curricula than in the 1974 curriculum, where the authors are more concerned with “personality” than with “identity”. I shall now try to detail some characteristics of this container metaphor.

First, a container is a clearly bounded and discrete unit. The authors do not speak of overlapping identities, and fuzzy edges are presented as possible, but undesirable.

Second, there is an ambiguity in whether speaking about the container refers to the container itself, or that which it contains³³. This can be clearly explained when it comes to the grammatical use of the crucial term “culture.” Some nouns are countable, such as “loaf” or “drop”. Other types of nouns are not countable, such as “bread” or “moisture”. The noun “culture” is ambiguous: it can be both countable and non-countable. If something is “culture” in a non-countable form, then it tends to refer to the content of the container. The same is true if the term is used as an adjective: “cultural”. If “culture” is used as a countable noun, as in “a culture”, or “Norwegian culture” or “our culture”, then it refers to the container. Again, this ambiguity is part of the micro-level structure of the separate clusters. A finding in my analysis can be formulated as follows: The values-as-ethics cluster tends to be found in the analysed texts together with an articulation of “culture” as *contents*. Conversely, the values-as-identity cluster tends to be found with an articulation of “ culture” as *container*.

Third, a container can be used, treated and manipulated as a singular object. This is so regardless of whether or not the content is homogeneous or diverse. In fact, container metaphors are effective in stabilising for language use otherwise heterogeneous categories. Whether or not a language interaction allows terms like “culture”, “tradition”, “religion” or “nation” to be used as acting subjects in a sentence, the extent to which these entities may “do” things, seems to be dependent on the optic through which they are seen. Paradoxically then, in my material, it is when identities are *worked on*, and when they cease to be taken for

³³ I am inspired by Steven Pinker’s analysis of container metaphors in his book “The Blank Slate” even though the context is different.

granted, that they are presented as if they have a metaphorical outside and are written about as if they were unitary. This is relevant in trying to get a good analysis of the relationship between the high modern and the communalist story. I shall return to this in chapter 13.

Fourth, identity groups are presented as “superselves”. This is the most important point. The “culture-as-container” metaphor shares crucial structural similarities with the “self-as-edifice” metaphor. They are imagined in space in very similar ways. In fact, as the authors write the curricula, there is considerable slippage between the two levels of identity. Very often they present identity groups as “superselves”, as though such groups were individuals writ large. One consequence of the use of this linkage is that the authors present identity groups as if they have values as their “foundation”. This usage draws on the structural similarity between the metaphors of “container” and “edifice”. When the curriculum authors write about “culture” or “heritage”, this is often connected to an emphasis on the sharedness of these values; on value consensus.

Religion

Religion is presented as *deep*. In my data material, this idea of depth is ambiguous in two ways. Depth is written about, at different times, as something *internal* or *external* to the individual. Depth is also written about as alternately *active* or *passive*. These are not mutually exclusive.

The authors use several metaphors of depth, which in their different ways combine or compete to fix the active construal of the term “religion”. The image

of “anchorage” is often present. Anchorage is an externalising metaphor, which combines depth and stability with a sense of being surrounded by fluidity. A later metaphor is the 1997 expression that “[t]he Christian faith and tradition constitute a deep current in our history – a heritage that unites us as a people across religious persuasions.” This time, the tradition is made more fluid, through the use of the image “current”. It nevertheless illustrates a use of the metaphorical structure of religion as depth. “Religion” is mobilised to stabilise a construal of social cohesion. To “stabilize a construal” is then similar to going from a social construal to a social construction, to use Sayer’s terms (2000). The inherent premise is that cohesion revolves around sharing something deep. At this stage I shall only state that this can be problematised. Perhaps social cohesion is about shared “shallowness,” such as hearing the same radio jingles and watching the same game shows. Perhaps social cohesion does not need to be about sharing at all? Perhaps it can be structured around some fundamental axes of disagreement that we use to categorize members of my community of disagreement? It is equally plausible that national groups are constituted as much by their debates and differences as by their similarities. It could also be problematised by pointing out that for many of the pupils in my material, religion was neither completely absent nor particularly important. One possibility is to interpret this as ‘fuzzy’ or ‘latent’ religion. These concepts seem to me to “save” the conception of depth. However, is it an oxymoron to imagine religion as a surface phenomenon for many pupils? Why not imagine that some students have a clearly defined and unambiguous relation to religion, but

religion is simply not that important to them? My data from fieldwork suggest that this may be a reasonable interpretation.

The “deep-and-active” metaphor for religion, suggests that religion is like some kind of activity-producing motor. This is conceived of sometimes as an internal engine, with action emanating naturally from the inner essence of the individual. Here, the metaphor of depth is the *core* – that which is deepest in something that also represents its most real nature. The existence of such a core is a constituent part of the Enlightenment conception of self, the tradition in which I have placed the “high modern” story of values in education.

Time

The “values” node is also structured in terms of how it is used together with various conceptions of time. Values can be seen as being forward into the future, or looking backwards. The general patterns in the data are as follows. When the term “values” is connected to ethics and to action, “values” is metaphorically structured as future directed. If person A holds value p now, then action z will follow in the future. When “values” is connected to identity and belonging, the term is structured as directed towards the past. If person B has tradition y, then value q follows.

Connected to this is the high modern notion of “progress”. This is more clearly present in much of the secondary material, even though the absence of “progress” is conspicuous in the texts. Also, I shall present several classroom interactions that make use of the notion of progress. The basic idea is that, as

history moves on, values improve in some unitary way, towards a platonic idea of the shared, objective Good. Humanity in 2009, in this construal of “values” is seen as further up the ladder of morality than humanity in the Middle Ages. This is historically connected to a conception of “civilization” and a special sense of moral universalism. I shall return to a brief account of feminist, and especially post-colonial critiques of this temporal construal of “values”. This may or may not be connected to an idea of distinct and discrete identity groups. Cultures may be presented as owners of values, which can be seen as not comparable and impossible to judge from the point of view of another culture. However, the idea of cultures and progress can also be combined. We then get a spatial and temporal understanding of progress, where some groups are presented as further up the moral ladder than other groups.

This last conception is rarely found in texts. However, the conception of values existing on a continuum of time does exist in the data. This understanding of the connection between time and values is often found in the fieldwork data.

I have now presented some examples of how connections of equivalence are made between terms. This is a major way in which unstable terms such as “values” are filled with meaning through language use. I shall now move on to analyse the conceptual boundary work done in the writing of the document.

I have shown that there is the potential for flexible usage in most of these terms. In technical terms, I have presented a thumbnail sketch of a potential discursive field of meaning. As I move into analysing classroom action, I show that these diverse meanings can be understood as resources for the users. They can then be

analysed in relation to my research question. Their actions are then seen as practices of stabilisation or fluidisation of any given conception of a term.

11.4 Conclusion

So far in this chapter, I have done two things. First, I have created a web of meaning centred on the term “values”. In this web, I mapped out a range of meanings that in significant ways shape the connotational field that constitutes the meaning of the term “values”. Second, I investigated *how* the elements in the web of meanings were connected with each other. I did this by looking closely at the metaphors that the authors of the formal curriculum texts used. A logical next step in a research method that followed Laclau and Mouffe’s scheme would detail a web of *difference* as well. To do this using text-data would involve the close reading of a vast number of texts surrounding the National Guidelines and curricula, and is beyond the scope of this study. I have performed a media text search and read the 800 or so newspaper texts that were directly relevant to religious education in Norway since 1992. This forms a background for my analysis. Nevertheless, an important assumption in the philosophy of meaning and language that underpins this study, is that the meaning of a sign is delineated by the sum of its difference from other signs in the same communicative system. It is instructive and necessary to give an analysis of the boundary work involved in the various usages of the term “values”, and the usages of other terms surrounding the “values-node” in the formal curriculum texts. In the terminology of Laclau and Mouffe, this is called the chains of difference.

I pursue another strategy for placing the webs of meaning, and the chains of equivalence that bind these webs together, in the context of their use. I do this by way of classroom analysis. The two chapters that follow will analyse the *uses* of the categories that have been outlined in this chapter. I focus on the categories of *Norwegian*, *Muslim* and *Values*. The two first are treated as instances of the more general categories of *national groups with identity claims* and *religious groups with identity claims*.

These analyses will build directly on the findings made in this chapter. These can be summarised as follows: Around the term “values” there is a complicated, internally contradictory and politicised web of meaning. This web has two significant clusters. One cluster connects the term “values” with ethics. The other connects the term “values” with identity. The second cluster becomes more significant in the later curricula.

I further investigated the metaphorical structures that link the terms in the web of meaning together. I identify some key metaphorical figures that can be used flexibly, which I present as some key dichotomies. The main issue is how categorical generalisations deal with representing a body of disparate “events” as “corporate identities”. Examples might include how a large variety of people, thoughts, symbols and practices may come to be referred to as, say, “Islam” or “Christianity”, or how a range of different opinions, actions, symbols and feelings can be referred to as (our) “values”.

The key dichotomies I highlight are:

Container / Content

Surface / Depth

Internality / Externality

Past / Future

An example can be that a self or a culture are like EITHER a container OR the contents of a container. Another might be that the legitimization for teaching about values might be found EITHER in the past OR in the future.

In the following chapters, I show how the metaphorical structures are *used*, and are relevant in terms of construing and constructing the real and the imagined sense of agency amongst actors. They are also relevant in explaining how certain categories have *boundaries*. These boundaries are subject to continual *work* which people engage in. The effect of this work is that the conceptual (and material) categories become either *solidified* or *fluidised*. I have shown that there exist multiple and contested meanings surrounding the term “values”. This contested field of meaning is relevant for understanding the dynamic of “making up groups” with identity claims. These groups may, to variable extents, become part of the lifeworld of teachers and pupils in Norwegian schools, both psychologically and materially. Within this fluid field, some meanings rise to prominence, whereas others are temporarily hidden. The term “values” is simultaneously prominent and elusive. This ambiguity in the term “values” constitutes the field in which I analyse the fluidity *or* solidity of politically relevant construals of the term “values”.

In the final analysis chapter, I restate my findings in terms of these analytical tools. I look more closely at the *boundaries* that are drawn, the ways in which the curriculum documents constitute *work*, and the resultant *viscosity* that, in this analytical optic, characterizes the social reality of groups with identity claims.

12. CLASSROOM ANALYSIS

12.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I examine examples from my data that create frictions with the formal curriculum. I build on the findings of chapter 11, and relate these to my data from classroom observation in two schools. I present examples where the practicalities of classroom action undermine certain assumptions that underlie the formal curriculum texts.

First, I examine examples that create friction in relation to the understanding of groups as cohering round past values.

Then I examine examples that create a similar friction in relation to the understanding of groups as proceeding in linear progress toward the realisation of values in the future.

Third, I argue that it is relevant and interesting to analyse groups with identity claims in a way that assumes that all the “building blocks” of identity are “banal”. By “banal” I mean that the building blocks are not inherently “deep”, neither in history, nor in culture: rather, they are commonplace and materially present. We forge our identities from the material that our everyday lives make available to us. This does not mean these identities are unimportant, or that they do not, or should not, have a large impact emotionally for the individual. Neither does it mean that no groups with identity claims can trace their history far back. However, by treating the building blocks of identity as “banal”, it is possible to

understand how schools can make identities seem natural. Indeed, I argue that teachers and pupils largely already do this. This is in contrast to culturalist explanations. This analysis is in line with the programme of returning to sociological analysis when explaining groups with identity claims outlined by Carter and Fenton (2009). The only difference is that, where they seek to return to a macro-sociology to replace culturalist explanations, I use techniques inspired by a tradition of micro-sociology following the Canadian sociologist Erving Goffmann. My trios of concepts represent my contribution to this effort.

The fourth part restates these examples *as if* they were interpreted by an individual fully steeped in the conceptual framework of the formal curriculum.

The chapter concludes by returning to my three analytical concepts of viscosity, boundaries and work. I explain how these concepts enable better descriptions of how identities are worked on in the classrooms, as well as the complex effects that the curriculum texts might have on this identity work.

12.2 The boundary work of a Norwegian Muslim identity.

Three Examples from the classroom:

Example 12.2 a) Eid

The example is from an 8th grade class in Bigby school. It is just after Eid ul-fitr, and the class are having presentations about Islam. One group consists of two girls, one “Muslim” and one “Norwegian.” (These incongruous categories are the ones used in everyday life... tellingly.) The Norwegian girl presents a set of facts about Eid ul-fitr, why it is celebrated, what the Arabic means etc. The Muslim girl then gives a description of how they celebrate Eid in her family. Interestingly, the Norwegian girl refers to “Allah” throughout, whereas the Muslim girl refers to

“God.”

Now, one of the boys is the son of a central figure in one of the big mosques in Oslo, and he has been very active in the lessons about Islam these past few weeks. The teacher is very happy with this, as he is usually not the strongest pupil, and this way he has the opportunity to shine in class. He certainly positions himself as the authority on Islam among the pupils, even though about half the class have a Muslim background. In the beginning of the lesson, as the Norwegian girl presents her facts, he raises his hand and makes several claims along the lines of:

-“In Islam, we celebrate Eid by [x, y and z]. It is a bit like how you celebrate Christmas.”

The teacher asks: “Who do you mean by “you”? We are many religions in this classroom?”

- OK, the Christians celebrate Christmas.

As the Muslim girl tells the story of how they celebrate Eid, it is clear that this boy wants to make it clear that “most Muslims” do it another way.

The teacher says that it isn’t his turn, he can tell his story later. By the end of the lesson, his claims are considerably more moderate: “At our place, we celebrate Eid like this... [goes on to explain].

Example 12.2 b) Muslim with dad

This example is taken from the 9th grade in Bigby school. It is a Friday, and only about half the class is there. This is not surprising, since it is Eid ul-Fitr this weekend. However, there are some pupils that self-identified as Muslim who are present. One of the pupils says: “Well, I know there are several who actually are celebrating tomorrow who aren’t here today. The Asians are, like, celebrating today, the Africans tomorrow... I mean, I’m half Muslim, but when I’m not living with my dad, I don’t celebrate Eid.”

As the class ends, and we leave the classroom, the same pupil approaches me. “You know, not everyone who has got time off today is celebrating Eid today.. “ I ask: “well, you say you’re half Muslim, why haven’t you taken the day off?” She replies: “Weeeell.. I *am* a Muslim, but I eat pork and like, especially when I’m with mum. Dad is the Muslim, so when I’m with him it is different.” And with that she is interrupted and runs off with her friends.

Example 12.2 c) Muslim without believing?

This is the 8th grade at the Bigby School. First let me quickly add some background to the different pupils, which may be relevant to understand the situation.

Pupil 1 has a Norwegian-sounding name and “looks Norwegian.” I didn’t know his father was from a Muslim background.

Pupil 2 comes from a Pakistani family, and I know that his family attends a Barelwi-Mosque. As a shorthand I will say that Barelwi tends to focus more on personal devotion than Deobandi, which is often portrayed as more concerned with scriptural orthodoxy (Vogt 2005).

Pupil 3 I did not get to know very well. She is marked as Muslim by wearing the hijab in class. She is from a Pakistani family.

Pupil 4 is from a Muslim family, and arrived in Norway only some years ago without prior schooling. The teacher spends a lot of time and effort with this pupil, as he is a challenge both in terms of learning and in terms of behaviour.

The teacher, ”Tomas,” starts the lesson by writing on the blackboard. He says: “Now you have worked two lessons with the question ‘what is Islam?’ We are going to get some bullet points up on the blackboard.” On the blackboard he has written a set of categories: community, actions, faith, art and emotions.

Tomas encourages contributions from the class, and places different contributions in different categories. In the areas where he doesn't feel the class has contributed enough, he adds in important elements himself. So, under the category "actions" he goes through the five pillars of Islam. Under the category "faith" he talks about the Qur'an for a while, until one of the pupils says:

Pupil 1: "Do all Muslims actually believe in God? I mean, like in Christianity there are many who like come from a Christian background, but they aren't Christian because they don't believe in God... Whereas a Muslim... just *is* a Muslim.

Tomas: Well – it is a bit different in Christianity, maybe, because there is a big emphasis on the personal choice, whereas Islam maybe has more focus on actions – that they need to be done...

Pupil 2: But you need to believe to be a Muslim! There are many who believe without going to the mosque! One has to believe in God

Pupil 3: But it's about family! Many Muslims want to believe, because it is easy to do what the parents and the role models do.

Pupil 1: My dad says he BELIEVES in Allah, but he doesn't pray, and he says that he isn't very Muslim.

Pupil 4: ... but your family eats pig, like.

Pupil 1: I am Christian in a way, like, from home... but I don't believe in God, and then I'm not a Christian – but is it like that in Islam as well?

Pupil 4 starts to say something, but the teacher stops him.

Tomas: "This is all very interesting, but we really have to get on with the lesson, if we are to go through the points I want you to know." He then continues asking questions, writing bullet points on the blackboard and explaining the concepts and words as he writes them down.

12.3 The boundary work of a Norwegian Muslim Identity: Analysis

Introduction

These three examples illustrate how the boundaries of the category “Muslim” were worked on by teachers and pupils. There are actions within these examples that work to make the category “Muslim” more solid, and other actions that work to make the category more fluid. In addition, there are preconditions that structure these situations. These structures shape the available space for actions, and provide various “tools” for actions by the teachers and pupils.

The first example shows how a Muslim boy attempts to claim status as an authority on Islam within the classroom. As a consequence of being challenged by co-pupils who describe different Islamic practices, he modifies the scope of his statements twice. From “In Islam, we celebrate Eid like this...” via “Many Muslims celebrate Eid like this...” to “At our place, we celebrate Eid like this...”.

The second example shows a girl with a Muslim father and, presumably, a non-Muslim mother. She is not in doubt as to her own Muslimness, but challenges the extent to which the expectations of Muslimness apply to her. She also points out how the school’s regulation of a day off in connection with Eid may be used strategically by pupils. She seems to assume a sliding scale of Muslimness. Consequently, some pupils are “worthy” to be absent at Eid, whereas others are

being opportunistic. Regardless of their Muslim label, they are not, in her opinion “really” Muslim enough to warrant a day off for religious celebration.

The third example shows a classroom discussion in which the boundaries of the category of “Muslim” become the topic of conversation. The start of the lesson is an example of blackboard-led organization of facts about Islam, and presented with an objective distance to the material. This is clearly ‘facts’ on the level of group orthodoxy. I want to point out that the discussion between the pupils is about facts about Islam and Islamic practice as well. Nevertheless, there is something threatening and destabilising about this discussion. Pupil number 4 seems to be directing personal attacks at pupil 1. The teacher interrupts and returns to the classic school-y presentation of facts in a distanced mode and a group-level scale. In doing this, Tomas achieved calm in the classroom, and prevented abuse and maybe bullying. It has to be said that Tomas was interested and encouraging in the beginning of the exchange. In this excerpt we see both the fluidising range of opinions and practices concerning this, but also the solidifying sanctions and institutional frameworks.

Held together, these three examples give some insight into how it is possible to explain the shape, usage and impact of the concept of “Muslim” within Bigby school, without resorting to an idea of sameness or shared values. It even suggests that the idea of a “core” of Islam is not so much a shared minimum that defines the group. Rather, the notion of a shared core for Muslims is used by pupils and teachers. The idea of internal coherence, sharedness and a “core” to the concept of “Muslim” exists, but not as a reference which echoes the *meaning*

of the notion. It exists as a disciplining device with sanctions connected to it. On the one hand, teachers manage a syllabus of knowledge about religion, concentrating on shared elements, and with the power of the known sanctions of the schools such as grades. We shall return to the numerous ways in which this basic pattern is disrupted, but here I present the starting point for analysis. Furthermore, some pupils claim to be custodians of knowledge of “the core” of Islam: what is included and excluded in the concept of “Muslim”. Consequently, competing versions of this knowledge exist in the classroom.

The “values as identity”-cluster of meaning that was found in the formal curriculum does not seem to have a referent in the classroom reality that I observed. There is a mismatch between the different domains of curriculum in this case. I have used the category of “Muslim” to illustrate this here, but I could equally have examined the concept of “Christian”. It would have taken more space in the thesis to unpack, because Christianity was never spoken of in the same direct way as Islam. In my data, it was difficult to see that the term “Norwegian” gained its hold on the conceptual world of pupils and teachers by way of referring to a shared core of values.

This does not mean that the “values as identity”-cluster found in the formal curriculum texts did not also exist in the classroom. However, even though this main conclusion stands, there are more nuances in these excerpts, and it would be one-sided to end the analysis at this point, crucial though it is. I shall therefore unpack the examples in greater detail.

Analysis of Example 12.2 a) Eid

There are at least four standpoints in relation to Islam in the Eid example. First, there is the outsider pupil's view, presented by the Norwegian girl. She treats this as a school-task, maybe with curiosity and interest, but with no identity at stake. Second, there is the teacher's view. He is to teach the pupils in accordance with the formal curriculum. Unavoidably, he has his own understanding of what this formal curriculum should look like in the classroom. Third, there is the Muslim girl presenting her story of how Eid is celebrated in her home. Finally, there is the Muslim boy who clearly feels that the girl is telling the "wrong" story of Eid-celebration, and wants to correct the impression by referring to the orthodoxy of his Mosque. The interesting point to be made here is that the "school-task" version of Eid presented by the Norwegian girl is closer to the orthodoxy of the Muslim boy than the description of practice at home given by the Muslim girl. So can the real Islam stand up please? Actors who advocate textual orthodoxy as well as those that tell stories of heterodox practice, make the claim that they are presenting "facts" about religion. Again, which one of these versions that is allowed to "stick" as facts, is decided by a process that involves authority, and the interplay of solid and fluid power.

In this case, the teacher's authority creates a setting where the Muslim boy moves from presenting his version of the Eid celebration from a generalised assertion, through a quasi-statistical assertion, to a story of family practices. Now, the most normal way for teachers to present facts about religion was at the level of general statements about a group. The teachers reproduced this

underlying organizational principle of religious practice, but not without hesitation. They presented facts about religion with plenty of caveats and statements like "... not everyone does it like this, but nevertheless...". This solidifies a particular understanding of how the concept of "religion" and "religious group" is structured. This understanding is in line with the self-understanding of many religious authorities upholding a form of orthodoxy within a religious tradition. It is possible to see traces of this "school-y" understanding even in this Eid-example (example 12.2 A p. 260), where the focus is on the fluidising processes. This can be seen in the knowledge available to, and seen as appropriate for a religious education presentation, by the Norwegian girl. In this example, the solidifying action comes from a pupil, the Muslim boy. In other words, group-level orthodoxy is presented from "below", by a pupil that assumes authority but then relinquishes some of it. It is the teacher who allows the more heterodox and personal practice-oriented facts to emerge and become school-knowledge rather than private knowledge. The power-laden institutional setting may therefore work as a fluidising force. I am not saying that things usually happen in this way. It is merely an observation that shows that not all fluidising process are from below, and not all solidifying processes are from above. This is relevant in relation to modifying Gerd Baumann's (1996) understanding of dominant and demotic discourses in people's constructions of groups with identity claims. Though Baumann does explain how a dominant discourse may be articulated "from below", it is difficult to use his framework to deal with a demotic discourse "from above".

My data challenges the relationship between dominant and “from above” as well as demotic and “from below”, that Baumann’s scheme relies on.

Analysis of example 12.2 b) Muslim with dad

The fuzzy boundaries of Muslim identity become abundantly clear in the example of the girl who says that she is a Muslim, but eats pork when she is with her (non-Muslim) mother. It is enough to note that this example also makes it difficult to maintain a culturalist or quasi-ethnicist explanation of groups with identity claims. Specifically, it is difficult to see how the understanding of values-as-identity has any role in the practical doing of identification. The values-as-identity-node *refers* to an empty set, but is *used* in various ways in the policing of the boundaries of categories such as “Muslim”.

However, it is very relevant to pursue a point further that was only partly investigated in the Eid example. The institutional framing of the situation by the school, representing the state, has an important impact in structuring the active identity work of the pupils.

Who can stay home at Eid and not be sanctioned for it? This is a question that is made possible by the school rules concerning time off for religious minorities to celebrate festivals. According to the girl in the example, several pupils who are not religiously active, but are able to identify as “Muslim” and have that identification stick, can take the day off. The school rule of time off during Eid for Muslim pupils appears to the pupils as solid and institutionalised, outside the reach of their influence. From the point of view of the school, they want to carve

up the world in a way that renders school life predictable, “legible” and governable. School exercises its solidifying power in producing a framework. The fluidising power of the pupils is constituted by the myriad ways in which they are able to deal with the framework of school. This is an example of how the solidified sediments of previously taken decisions shape the pupils’ and teacher’s space for choice, action and identification. Power that appears to be as solid is the context of choice for the individual, and this is true also for modes of identification with groups with identity claims.

The pupil in the example seems ambivalent towards being in school during Eid, when other Muslim pupils are taking the day off. On the one hand, it seems to me that she would like the day off. On the other hand, an easily available interpretation of her mood is that she is proud of her own integrity. She may feel that her claim to Muslim identity does not have sufficient “sticking power” to let her take the day off without receiving sanctions, formal or social. The category “Muslim”, in the classrooms of Bigby, cannot be understood without understanding the institutional frameworks that saturate the boundary work of identification. In this case, the school’s rules make the category “Muslim” clear-cut and material: either you are at school, or you are not. This is an instance of how institutional power works to solidify the boundary between “Muslim” and “non-Muslim”.

Understood correctly, this fits with the framework of Laclau and Mouffe (1985). They are often misunderstood to the effect that they think that linguistic or mental categories are more real than the material world. This example illustrates

how linguistic categories are profoundly material and enmeshed in power relations. Furthermore, this example makes it clear that a Baumann-inspired analysis has its limitations. I give more attention than Baumann to the solidifying power of institutional surroundings. These institutions appear as something outside the limits of the pupil's power to influence. Yes, the boundaries are fluid and flexible, but only to those who can muster enough power to shape the flow.

In the mixed-parent example, the girl is not challenged in her claims to a Muslim identity. However, in the example where Pupil 2 asks if you need to believe to be a Muslim, his tentative claim for a Muslim identification is met with a variety of responses in the classroom.

Analysis of example 12.2 c) Muslim without believing?

In terms of facts and boundary work, Pupil 2 turns to the teacher to provide facts about Islam that can help him in deciding where the lines of Muslim and non-Muslim should be drawn. The responses from the class are fluid. Of the three Muslim students that respond, one emphasises personal faith, one emphasises family connections, and one emphasises practice. All of these statements are presented as facts about Islam. Even though they are not mutually incompatible, they are presented in opposition to each other in the classroom. The teacher eventually cuts through the debate and wishes to restore order and a blackboard-ordered presentation and categorisation of elements of Islam. This example is clearly about boundary work, both at the conceptual level, and at the level of

personal identification. Are you a Muslim if you don't believe? Is "being Christian" about belief, whereas "being Muslim" just something you are?

In terms of "fixing" the concept of Islam and religion, we see again that both the teacher and the peer have an opportunity to both solidify and fluidise the interactionally accepted idea of what "Islam" might be. In terms of solidifying the concept of a fact, Tomas is making it clear that the appropriate facts for a school setting are the distanced and group-level facts.

The question from the pupil that started the exchange was clearly introducing what can be called an "involved fact" at the individual level, one that challenged the "blackboard facts". "I am a Muslim" is an involved fact, whereas "Muslims believe in one God" is a blackboard fact in this context. Pupils in my data are able to challenge blackboard facts presented as generalisations about groups. Presenting involved personal facts seems to me to be an example of the fluidising power of pupils.

This example illuminates one important issue concerning how authority and power become part of the fixing of terms. Classroom situations are messy and impure. Facts are used for other things than disseminating information. In this case the teaching of facts is used to restore order in the classroom. The teacher's context of authority, keeping the classroom quiet and preventing bullying, has important consequences for how facts about religion are fixed in the classroom. The more involved and personal the information becomes, the greater is the danger for pupils to feel bullied or discriminated against. Teachers are, by virtue of the power imbued in their institutional role, the custodians of the concept of

“fact”. By this I do not only mean which propositions are true or not, but also what kind of statements may count as factual knowledge. The way facts about religion are presented is not only a way of viewing knowledge; it is embedded in the teachers’ roles, and the authority of that role. This may be managed in different ways. We can contrast the examples of “Muslim without believing?” (example 12.2 C, p. 262) with “Eid” (example 12.2 A, p. 260), and see that in one case the teacher is solidifying an understanding of facts as statements that describe group-level generalisations. In the “Eid” example, we see a teacher that fluidises this blackboard-understanding of facts about religion. He uses his authority to solidify personal and involved statements as “facts about religion”.

It is worth further investigating this instance of “fluidisation from above”. A closer look at the teacher in the Eid example is instructive. After class he said that when he was a younger teacher, he would not have had the confidence to let so much of the class be led by the dispute between the students. He claimed he now had the authority to reinstate order in the classroom at any time, and could allow himself to let the personal and the involved become a greater part of the classroom action. Many teachers saw personal pupil involvement in the topics under discussion as an aim, but also as a luxury. This was a happy end point! This happy state might occur if you as a teacher were able to “get past” the presentation of “the material” and keep order in the classroom. This is an insight that gives considerable nuance to the idea that school provides a solidified account of groups with identity claims. As such it represents another challenge for a researcher using a Baumann-inspired mode of analysis. It seems that the figures of authority do not see a contradiction between what would be called the

dominant and the demotic discourse. Rather, they are organised hierarchically. It might be paradoxical, though, that the solidified understanding of religions, the authoritative one, is presented as lower on the hierarchy of knowledge, but still more important to impart.

One interpretation of the above examples is that when teachers use facts as distanced information and in terms of group orthodoxy, they are using solidifying practices to simplify the world. This resolves the apparent paradox of teachers who aim for fluidised knowledge, but spend their time on solidifying teaching. Solidified power is not more powerful than fluidised power, but the products of solidified power have the properties of increased order, controllability and predictability. Pupils can more easily DO things with highly structured and condensed knowledge. Coherent units are easier to act upon. When the fact-statements in the classroom become individual and pupils become personally involved in them, this is not so much wrong as chaotic and unmanageable for the teachers (such as Tomas, who saw how Muslim pupils sanctioned other pupils' statements of fuzzy identification negatively, and returned to the "safety" of blackboard-style facts). Personal statements that might make more fluid the knowledge presented, becomes "matter out of place" in the school context. Solidifying power, then, is partly the power to order the world in such a way that it can be acted upon. This corresponds with the underlying methodological assumptions that underpin this entire project: the construal and construction of a social world should be understood as a process of editing the irreducible complexity that the world greets us with. We humans must simplify the world to make it liveable, to make the world our own. This

understanding has consequences for understanding knowledge: The closer to the world our fact-statements come, the more they will be dispersed and disorganised. I have called this state “fluid”. However, as fact-statements become more organised and centralised, they increase our power to act in the world. Quantitative analysis has its power from its high degree of organisation, not necessarily from its closeness to the world - I would say that ethnographic work has the upper hand in that respect (see Becker 1996: 59). This is also why natural science aims at parsimony in its explanations.

This has some consequences for understanding the role that religion is given in the construction of national identities. Let me assume that the KRL/RLE subject is to be understood as the Norwegian Government’s attempt to use religion instrumentally to create or maintain a sense of national identity. In that case, it is not surprising that the formal curriculum documents seek to establish identity categories that are clear-cut and easily managed. However, the world offers resistance and friction to the categories that are used to enable humans to work in and on the world. So far I have shown how the most prevalent understanding of Norwegianness in the formal curriculum does not correspond to any identifiable phenomenon in the classroom. The idea that groups with identity claims cohere around shared values can be found in the formal curriculum as a cluster of meaning that I have called the “values-identity”-node. I have used examples concerning the work surrounding the category of “Muslim” to argue that people perform their belonging to groups with identity claims in ways that do not employ the values-identity node prevalent by the formal curriculum.

I shall now move on to discuss the second major understanding of Norwegianness prevalent in the formal curriculum. This is connected to the “values-ethics” node, and can be described as a cluster of ideas inspired by the Enlightenment, including notions such as “progress”, “universal values” and “objectivity”.

12.3 The boundary work of a Norwegian enlightenment identity.

An example of sex education.

I shall spend some more time on the example 10.2 a) “presenting the facts.” This insight into the sex education in one of the classes is restated here:

Example 12.3 a) Presenting the facts

I followed the teacher “Trine” through a teaching module about *values and choices*. This was in the 10th grade in Bigby, so it was a religiously and culturally diverse class of 15 and 16 year olds. The teaching module lasted 4 weeks, and was focussed around three powerpoint presentations given by Trine: one about gender identity and sexuality, one about abortion and contraception and one about relationships and forms of cohabitation. The powerpoint presentations were largely about giving factual information. They presented the legal frameworks, historical developments, statistics and definitions of key terms. The end of the powerpoints often had a more normative conclusion, like “*if you are a real friend, then sexuality surely doesn’t make a difference!*” or, about abortion: “*avoid the difficult choice, use contraception!*” Several times during the presentation, Trine gives information about present day Norway. Usually the information is given as statistics, but sometimes as common-sense assertions. Her body language during presentations switches between two modes. One is presentational, where she stands sideways referring to the screen and the room in equal measures. The other is conversational, where she faces the class directly and answers questions or elaborates on a point just made in the

presentation. “Fact giving” and “explanation/interpretation” are keyed by the teachers body language.

During the powerpoint presentations the pupils occasionally asked questions for clarification. Sometimes they offered their agreement to what was said. I did not hear any critical remarks from the pupils towards the teacher’s presentation. The lessons that followed the presentations were organised as group discussions on the topics that Trine had presented. In this forum the pupils *did* present other points of view than those of Trine. Mostly, these differing points of view represented more conservative approaches to abortion and gay and lesbian partnerships.

The Teacher “Trine” presented powerpoint-shows with information about Norwegian statistics on sexual orientation, history, the wording of laws, and definitions of terms. The presentations were summarized with more normative statements. During the presentation lessons, no one raised critical points or disagreements.

I noticed subtle differences in pose and stance in Trine during that lesson. She switched fluidly between talking to and talking with the pupils. While talking to the students, she would stand sideways, referring to the powerpoint screen, hands in front of her: a professional, slightly formal stance. At times, she would relax into an aside, a comment, and explanation, responding to a question. At this stage, she would face the class, maybe lean towards a desk. Her hands were freer.

I specifically noticed a turn of phrase that Trine used several times. This was making a statement about “Norway, today”. Sometimes, it was in relation to specific statistics: “In Norway, in 2007, there were X % divorces.” There were

also more general statements, such as “In Norway, today, most people would accept that a teenage girl had an abortion.”

In both her practice and her interview, Trine is very clear that she does not want to make these ethical questions run along religious or ethnic boundaries. Her teaching is information about how these matters are in Norway, and a clear statement of what kind of behaviour Norwegian School wishes to see in its students. As such, she presents a “high modern” account of her subject matter, where talk about values concerns ethics, not identity.

There are several points to make here. Firstly, this is a clear example of how fact-claims are presented with authority by the teacher. Second, school-y fact-statements have props that signal to the pupils that the statement is meant as a fact-claim. These props materially solidify the ‘factness’ of the statement. In this case the powerpoint is such a prop, but also the posture and pose of the teacher’s body clearly communicates shifts in the modes of knowledge that are being handled. Third, it is worth noticing how facts presented were used to support the normative conclusions reached at the end of the lessons. These were all what I would call relatively liberal norms, such as openness towards homosexuality, contraception and the sex-life of 15 year olds. The emphasis was on mutuality and being careful not to hurt other people. Trine put all the bells and whistles of her authority into advocating these norms, including props and the institutional trappings of school. The success of this authority is illustrated in the fact that other opinions, though present in the classroom, were postponed to the next lesson, which was clearly planned to be a session for discussion. I shall return

later to how this might relate to a high modern approach to knowledge and ethics. However, in terms of this section of the discussion, I would like to use this example of using facts as an instance of solidifying practice from above. Trine performs her role so that the institution of school speaks its truth to the pupils. What is being solidified then? I would argue that several elements are brought together here. The authority of the teacher, the contents of the facts presented, a high-modern approach to facts, rationality and ethics and, finally, the norms that are advocated.

12.4 The boundary work of a Norwegian Enlightenment identity: Analysis.

The above example illustrates well an ambiguity in the use of “facts”. Trine presents the facts to the class in a style and tone of distance and objectivity. However, it becomes clear in later conversation and in the interview that this is not just information, but is part of a normative argument in which Trine is engaged and involved. She also interprets the curriculum so that she sees this as a normative position that Norwegian school holds in relation to its pupils.

I have previously considered the circumstances under which the description of the individual practice of a group member counts as a fact-statement about that group. Conversely, I have looked at the circumstances under which group generalisations count as fact-statements about that group. The same mechanisms should be taken into account when trying to understand *normality*. There is an ambiguity in relation to statistical normalcy and normative normality. Statements such as “in Norway, in 2008, most people do X” is a fact-statement.

Whether or not it is also an implicit “ought” and under what circumstances, is a difficult question, and I shall return to it below. This is relevant in understanding how teachers and pupils can do the boundary work of group formation by using the values-ethics node as I have described it in the formal curriculum. Within a high-modern mode of thinking a group is powerfully solidified if it can be described “objectively”. In this context ‘objectively’ seems to mean ‘at the level of group generalisations’ or ‘from an implicit eagle’s-eye view devoid of interpretation or involvement’.

In this context, it means that the teacher, Trine, is attempting to present objective facts. My argument is that, given the assumption that the pupils’ ability to check whether these fact-claims are true is limited, their status as “facts” is constructed through other means. It is through the use of props, posture, voice and institutional expectations that certain types of statements from the teacher are likely to be treated as “facts”. I use the image that some fact-statements “stick”; they are accepted as facts by the pupils, whereas other fact-statements fall to the ground. Consider a situation where the teacher asks a question of the class. The answer to the question would have the form of a fact-claim. None of the pupils know the answer for sure. If a nervous pupil attempts to answer the question with a fact-claim, it would be easy to cause this statement to fall to the ground in the eyes of the fellow pupils. The point is that what “sticks” as fact is situationally determined. Furthermore, the ability to make a fact-claim stick is an ability imbued with solidifying power. Only certain *kinds* of statement are allowed to function as a fact in any given situation. The Eid example was a clear example of this. The teacher enabled individual stories of how Muslim pupils

celebrate Eid to become relevant “facts about Islam” in the classroom setting (example 12.2 A, p. 260). It is also the case in the example about sex-education (example 12.3 A, p. 276). However, in this case, it is slightly different. It is the concern over how normative a statement may be, and still be allowed to “stick” as a fact.

Trine presents the fact-claims as information, devoid of interpretation. However, as more facts are presented to class and a normative element added, it becomes clear that the lesson is not only presenting information. It is also selecting and editing this information in a way that implies an interpretation of the information. Of course, all information will always be interpreted. The point here is that a certain interpretation follows Trine’s presentation of facts. It seems to follow that a liberal normative stand is the natural consequence of a set of facts. For instance, the fact-statement about suicide rates amongst gay and lesbian youth is followed by the plea to be homopositive. In terms of my analytical tools, this is an example of a solidifying practice from above.

However, there are dangers here. I am especially interested in the figure of speech which takes the form “In Norway, in 2007, most people do X”. This has the form of a fact-claim. However, all the things that most Norwegians do were, from context, clearly something that Trine values as positive. I do not think that this is Trine’s intention. Nevertheless, I find it relevant to interpret this in the light of the high-modern metaphor of time and history as *progress*. There is an Enlightenment tradition of thought that emphasises moral progress and development. This is a widely used cluster of meanings, and it is only necessary

to look at how the world is divided into developing and developed countries to see that it is a cluster of terms and meanings that is easily adapted to nations. The specification of Norway may, in a similar vein, tap into the idea that different societies are at different rungs on the ladder of moral progress and development. For the users of this trope, Norway is located near the top of this ladder. ‘We’ are leading the world towards a brighter, more rational and social-democratic future. In the history background, I have traced how a democratic nationalism does see history as the story of a national climb up the ladder of development and the nation as the vehicle of progress. There is a democratic touch in the Norwegian version of this near-universal story: by removing the oppressive elites and thus uncovering the true common sense of the *folk*, Norwegians can achieve rational and national progress. Norwegian nationalism might be rare in this manner: it is a post-colonial nationalism that was shaped in the context of getting rid of a foreign, more powerful rule. At the same time, Norway is a western country, complicit in the unequal global development and benefiting from Europe’s history of colonialism. Nevertheless, the slippery link between statistical normalcy and normativity becomes easier to understand. The argument seems to go something like this: If most people in Norway, today, find something morally right, then the implicit rhetorical powers of notions such as “progress”, “civilisation” and “rationality” act to solidify this moral claim.

I want to emphasise that this was not Trine’s intention. However, reading both theory and the newspaper coverage in my background data makes it clear to me that this Enlightenment reading is an available discursive resource for teachers and pupils alike. The argument is that liberal values, such as homopositivity,

gender equality, anti-racism and mutual consent as the only restriction on sexuality, are seen as shared by the majority of Norwegians, and that this places Norway at the vanguard of the moral development of the world.

The paradoxical shift here is that the emphasis on universal values becomes the marker of Norwegian particularity. The disinterestedness, the objectivity and the neutrality become signs of Norwegianness. Paradoxically then, teachers, pupils and syllabus writers become very involved, particularist and partisan, in defending “our” Enlightenment tradition from conservative encroachment, increasingly marked as ‘foreign’. This, I believe, is the structure behind the seemingly contradictory claim that “our” (insert western country) values are universal, whereas “their” values are parochial. The usage of facts in a “high modern” mode can be turned around to become a powerful but paradoxical mode of boundary work, creating a real boundary along the distinction “rational – irrational” “fact-based vs. Tradition/religion-based” and “progressive – conservative”.

This also shows that even though I have separated two distinct clusters of meanings surrounding the term “values”, this is an analytic separation. They may be combined in new ways. Language is flexible enough to do this. The use of the notion of universal values to define a particular national identity is, in a sense, a mixing of the two clusters.

The above example, then, highlights a crucial ambiguity. Two processes may be occurring simultaneously. On the one hand, actors use facts as a part of truth seeking within a framework of universalist disinterested ethics. On the other

hand, the same fact may be interpreted as a part of an involved, particularist boundary work that aims to draw boundaries between ‘majority’ and ‘minority’ in Norway. Some pupils might interpret Trine as she wants to be interpreted, as ethnically and religiously neutral. Others might draw more heavily on available discursive resources that place her statements in a context of progress and a national civilizing process. Indeed, in most pupils, both these potential interpretations are likely to have some intuitive or emotional traction, along with a vast range of other reactions and interpretations. Again, the framework of Goodlad (1979) is useful. The fact within the curricular domain of teacher’s intention might be one thing. The same fact within the curricular domain of the pupils’ understanding is likely to be understood in many different ways. A teacher’s statement, for instance, often appears to the pupils as something solidified, from above. They would have to muster considerable work to challenge it; it would be an “upstream battle”. However, the teacher’s statement would be refracted through a wider web of potential interpretations, the myriad pre-conceptions and positions of the pupils. As such, a solidified bit of knowledge, a “fact”, has an impact and makes a difference. There is power to shape and construe the world which *does* lie in the ways in which the formal curriculum influences the classroom. However, the impact on individuals is beyond the scope of my data, and in any case is a hugely complex and dispersed phenomenon. Here it is enough to point out how pupils’ reception will often be a fluidising element. In the same way, the ambiguities of interpretation will probably not appear as a choice between interpretations for the pupil. It is not a clear-cut situation. I think the pupils are perfectly able to see the teacher’s non-

discriminatory intentions, and take the information at the level it is intended. However, they are simultaneously becoming part of a specific language usage, and getting familiar with the cultural resources that are being used in struggles for identity management.

At this point, I argue that there are a variety of cultural or discursive resources available which can aid the pupils in their interpretive work. I have presented them as two separate choices.

It is possible to analytically zoom in at a sub-individual level of curricular domains. Imagine, for instance, such entities as ‘the taken for granted curriculum’ or ‘the emotional curriculum’. Now, it might well be that the teacher draws consistently and intentionally on one such cultural or discursive reservoir at the domain of conscious action. Simultaneously, however, other domains of curriculum, such as “habit” or “pre-conceptions” may be constituted by slower-flowing processes. In these sub-reflexive curricular domains our learning is informed by cultural and discursive resources from a range of different sources. Actors may be conscious of their actions, but not necessarily fully aware of the cultural and discursive sources of their actions, nor the consequences of these actions.

This way of thinking about learning in different sub-individual domains might be useful in discussing the possible effects on the pupils of the instance I described in example 12.2 C (p. 262). The different information received about Muslim identity from the teacher and from the bully will both impact on the

pupil, but might be active at different domains. These domains could be imagined as the reflexive curriculum and the emotional curriculum.

12.5 Boundary work and identity: Discussion.

I have tried to select and analyse examples of classroom activity that provide friction to the ideas and assumptions concerning identity that are present in the formal curriculum. The idea that groups with identity claims cohere around a core of shared values has been dismissed. It does not stand up to scrutiny in the face of my data. Nevertheless, the idea of shared core values is an active part of the reality it describes incorrectly; it is a near-mythical discursive resource for identity boundary work. I have also analysed the competing, or at least co-present, understanding in the formal curriculum, which connects values to ethics and right action rather than identity. I have pointed to how this understanding of values is slippery. It must be interpreted in light of a complex, messy and contradictory history. Part of this history is an Enlightenment story of national liberation, which in Norway's case is curiously both post-colonial and Eurocentric.

I am not trying to discredit the teaching of values in schools, even though my analysis shows that it can be misconstrued and misunderstood. I am examining the micro-sociology of identity boundary work, and how relevant categories are made more fluid or solid. Rather than mapping the woods of religious education, I am trying to chop up the trees and look at their structure (Macnaghten and Myers 2004; Silverman 2007). My main point is that the building blocks of

identity are not what they seem. Group members are often assumed to be eager to present the (alleged) foundations of their own groups as something grand and significant. My data can not say whether or not individual group members are eager to present their groups as having deep foundations. However, I argue that a government with nation building ambitions do have just such an interest. Certainly, the curriculum authors used this strategy to give their identity group great depths in time. Each group member hopes that by being a small part of a community with great depth, they give depth to their own selves.

My main argument in this chapter is that a sociological analysis cannot take these claims at face value. In their place, I suggest an analytical strategy that assumes a model of the building blocks of identity as *banal* (I use the term introduced by Billig 1995). By this, I mean that the building blocks of identity are i) material, ii) largely consist of everyday experiences, and iii) contemporary. Thinking in terms of banal building blocks of identity assumes that the varied levels of social ontology are something to be explained rather than assumed. It is not unusual to speak of our selves as something which contains depths and heights; we often think in terms of a topography of the self. How do we come to experience ourselves in this way? According to this model, the experiences, memories, values and so on that an individual feels constitute the “depths” of her being, and are made of the same stuff as all other experiences, memories and values that constitute the everyday humdrum life.

Sociologist Nick Rose uses Deleuze’s concept of “the fold” in a way that is useful here (Rose 1996). He explains a model for understanding how a person

can, in a real and empirical sense, be said to have a core, a character. This core is made of the same stuff as the rest of our lives, even though it does not feel like it. I imagine Rose's model as follows: imagine the self as a circle, drawn with a single line. All that exists is the markings of the pencil, the core is empty. The pencilled line represents our experiences as we are thrown into the world. However, this is only the abstract model of the self, a thought experiment to serve as an imaginative starting point for this model. As humans we are thrown into the world: we encounter the complex mess of life and bump into surrounding people, surrounding institutions and also generally experience stuff. Imagine now that some "bumps" are stronger and/or more repetitive than others. The idea is that, by the application of force and work and power from our surroundings, parts of our surface are gradually pushed into the circle, to fill up the space in the centre of the sphere. In a sense, my style of analysis is about describing in detail the surface of a small part of the pencil marking, as well as the nature of the force that pushes some surface experiences towards the centre. Schools are a crucial arena where such work takes place. In this way, I can explain how people experience themselves to have depths without resorting to essentialist stories of selves and identities flowing forth from within. Notice that I am not denying the existence of character, core or identity. Indeed, without the experience of personal depth, most of us would probably be counted as "mad". I am taking it as something to be explained, rather than something that does the explaining.

A level of structuralist theory might be added to this: Structuralist theory divides language into structure and use, "langue" and "parole". Classic structuralist

theory proposes that use emanates from structure, that “langue” is deep, whereas “parole” is shallow. In a sense, “meaning” is deep, but “use” is shallow. Discourse theory turns this upside down, and emphasizes that language *use* is what makes meaning possible. Meaning is not inherently “deep”, but a result of connections made between signs through speaking and writing.

This is not to say that identity cannot be enduring, that it cannot have great emotional impact or that it is politically irrelevant. On the contrary, it is a way of understanding and describing identity that, if it is fruitful, makes identity work explicitly political. Too many people treat identity as something which comes before politics. I do not mean political in the sense of that which is fraught or conflictual. Rather, I mean that this way of understanding identity makes it easier to identify useful interventions that may shape future identity work. It is an understanding of identity that is parsimonious in that it does not invent non-observable explanandums, it is an understanding that explains data well, and it is an understanding that expands the scope for action, both by policy and the individual.

I shall exemplify this argument by returning to the example of the agreement made between a pupil and a teacher (example 10.4 D, p. 209). The teacher and a pupil had been arguing about whether or not religion was a good or a bad thing, and the disagreement ended in a consensus that it was wrong to mix religion and politics. Now, the teacher had told me that he was afraid of the argument becoming threatening to the tone and feel of the class overall, and he was happy that he had achieved a sense of agreement. His underlying argument may have

been that this boosted class morale, or even made easier a sense of belonging to this class. Nevertheless, a deeper analysis of their discussion shows that there was really no agreement at all. If I, as an analyst, were to take their previous statements as true, they had both argued that religion and politics *should* be mixed. However, one had argued that politicians should put limitations on religious life, whereas the other had argued that religious ideas could be a positive moral force in public and political life. Nevertheless, they both agreed to the more or less iconic phrase “it is bad to mix religion and politics”. This statement has, in my opinion, acquired status as beyond argument. I argue that the sentence is, in this case, emptied of its meaning, but used as a prop for consensus. Nevertheless, the feeling of tension resolved in the classroom was something I felt as an observer. They shared a signifier, but not the signified. They agreed to the statement, but they did not agree in substance. Indeed, they seemed to share a value, but in my analysis they only shared a *value-statement*. The actual value, if understood as something that might guide action, remained a point of disagreement.

This, I think, happens often. “Our shared values” is a phrase that people might agree on, but when a nation tries to put these values into action, it becomes clear that they shared the use of a phrase, not a sense of right and wrong. If we accept that the building blocks of identity are banal, then nations share experiences, not values. They share debates, not opinions. They share value-talk, not substantive values. Indeed, what is a democracy if it is not a place where different values are peacefully transformed into legitimate action on behalf of the collective?

12.6 Conclusions

In this chapter, I have analysed ethnographic classroom data that seem to stand in a relationship of friction with understandings of identity which were seen to underpin the formal curriculum. Below, I summarise my findings using the analytical language that I propose in this thesis.

It seems that the formal curriculum connects the concept of values with identity and groups. This understanding is available to the pupils in at least two ways. On the one hand, it is solidified as the formal basis for schooling; it is shaped and frozen in the institutional mould of the school. On the other hand, this is an understanding of identity and values that is more widely available in society, and the pupils may also have access to this understanding in more fluidised and dispersed ways. The understanding of values and identity does not seem to sit well with the observation data. In other words, the impact of the formal curriculum understanding of values and identity must be other than what it seems. The image of values and identity is used by the Norwegian state in their conceptual and material boundary work. The effect is to make solid an understanding of identity that is emotionally powerful, behaviour-relevant and durable, and with clear-cut boundaries. This is a nation-building endeavour. The nation has become a project for, rather than a basis for, government.

Religion is mobilised as the provider of depth. Religions, as they are imagined, are seen as emotionally powerful, behaviour-relevant, durable and collective.

Religion is thus mobilised as a solidifying anchorage. This presentation of religion and depth reduces the scope of our manifold experiences as it selects some experiences as “core”, and posits these as relevant for national identity. The effect is, then, boundary work that connects national identity to historically durable, place-specific, allegedly emotionally powerful and behaviour-relevant traditions. Norwegianness is connected to Christianity.

This culturalist idea is supplemented by two mutually contradictory ideas. One is that *other* groups and religions are construed in the same way, with clear boundaries and a core that is often religiously defined. The other idea is that *our* group is the vanguard of a social-democratic enlightenment project. Paradoxically, this position is used to make solid boundaries between the Norwegian “us” and those further down the imagined ladder of progress.

The formal curriculum is a deeply culturalist document. However, its impact in the classroom is not just a smooth transference of its meaning. What the teachers and the pupils are actually doing is not to create sameness, but to manage difference. The classes I studied were communities of disagreement. The pupils worked on their identity through learning together and acting together. They became a community, but they did not necessarily become similar. They certainly did not in my data. The practical experience of the classroom should be fed back to curriculum authors. Hopefully, the identity management of future curricula for schools in Norway will be less guided by ideas of solidity and sameness, and be careful about religionising identity.

In chapters 11 and 12 I have presented and analysed data from my case study. I have attempted to analyse these using the analytical toolkit developed in chapter 6. I now turn to evaluating the utility of this toolkit compared to the analytical strategies already found in relevant literatures. Chapter 13, then, revisits the literature reviewed in chapters 2, 3 and 4. The aim is to show if and how my analytical toolkit represents an advance in relation to understanding and describing groups with identity claims.

13. RELATING TO ACADEMIC DEBATES

13.1 Introduction

In the last three chapters, I gave a picture of religious education in Norway. I have found that through the formal curriculum, the Norwegian state is, in part, *religionising identity*. This is achieved by presenting religion as *deep*, the stuff of cores. Furthermore, the dominant feature of the present core curriculum is a culturalist assumption that nations cohere around shared values. I have challenged these assumptions using examples from my ethnographic fieldwork. These data indicate that identity is built in local situations, using the local identity tools that are made available to them. I have looked at the emergence of classroom solidarity, and I argue that these are *communities of disagreement* (Eriksen 2008b). To the extent that a state school can represent a microcosm of larger communities, I find it interesting that disagreement and difference (not so much conflict) not only co-exists with classroom solidarity, but seems to be part of the fabric of this micro-community. Teachers are rarely able to perform the tasks of the formal curriculum, but the teachers cannot be blamed for failing to follow a map that does not fit the landscape. Rather than establishing shared values, teachers are in the business of managing disagreement and harnessing this to create learning communities. However, these findings are only of intrinsic interest for those who are interested in religious education in Norway, or those who see relevant similarities between religious education in Norway and other scenarios. These empirical findings can only be generalised to a very limited

extent. I shall therefore turn to the main focus of this thesis, which is development of theory through analytical generalisation.

These findings emerge from using an analytical toolkit consisting of three elements, viscosity, boundaries and work. The metaphor of ‘viscosity’ represents my main claim to originality in this thesis. This toolkit is a contribution to the academic literatures presented in the literature review in Chapter 2. These are i) Representations of religion in education; ii) Norwegian Sexualities and iii) Multiculturalism. In this chapter, I shall discuss my findings in relation to these debates. My specific focus will be to see if, and to what extent, my proposed analytical toolkit can contribute to these literatures. A major point in my analysis is that the different bodies of literature share the same challenge: namely to account for the various degrees of solidity of groups with identity claims. Not only are the boundaries of groups with identity claims of variable solidity, but these groups are also reactive to what Hacking calls “feedback loops” (Carter and Fenton 2010; Hacking 1999; 2004). This means that the political battles of identity politics are part of the matrix that solidifies or fluidises the boundaries of groups, and hence the “reality” of the group. It is important here to distinguish between “fluidity” and “unreality”. The point here is that all three literatures seem to have disputes or challenges along fault lines that run between fundamental methodological positions, namely constructionism and critical realism. The suggested analytical toolkit is intended as a development of constructionist theory, bolstering constructionism against valid criticism from a realist point of view.

I start by discussing the debate within the theory of religious education between Robert Jackson and Andrew Wright. The second part considers the Norwegian sexualities literature. The final part of the chapter will discuss the literature on multiculturalism, a body of work that subsumes the two other debates. I shall specifically return to discussing the points made by Carter and Fenton and the work of Gerd Baumann.

13.2 Representing religion in classroom: Developing the interpretive approach

Introduction

I have chosen to take as my starting point an exchange between two senior British educationalists of religion, Robert Jackson and Andrew Wright in the *British Journal of Religious Education* in 2008. This debate is merely the tip of the iceberg of a large scholarly discussion of how religion should best be understood by scholars. I choose this debate, because it pinpoints with some precision both my field (the presentation of religion in the classroom), and my research question (what kind of reality do religions and religious traditions possess, framed as a debate between a social constructionist account, and critical realist account).

Restating the debate

The starting point is that Wright criticizes what he calls the contextual approach to Religious Education, and especially the work of Robert Jackson. Contextual religious education, according to Wright “*focuses on the immediate lifeworld of*

the pupils and seeks to help them negotiate their emergent sense of personal identity” (Wright 2008: 3). Wright further claims that *“contextual religious educators tend to view discrete religious traditions as artificially constructed systems disconnected from the ordinary experiences of children and, as such, largely irrelevant to the process of personal formation”* (Wright 2008: 3). Wright wants to challenge the idea that any unified description of a religion is merely a construction by the teacher. He wants to claim that examples of dissidence and heterogeneity do not challenge the *“robust identity”* of the various belief systems as wholes. He then argues that religions are *“out there”* as *“robust social facts”*, available for the social scientist to describe.

Jackson responds with arguing that his position is not anti-realist. He focuses on interpretation, sensitivity to descriptions being made at a particular place at a particular time, and issues of power.

“The fact that religions elude straightforward description testifies to the richness of texture and abundance of reality. Traditions such as ‘Hinduism’ cannot be comprehensively and finally described, not because they are not ‘real’ but because they cannot be encapsulated in a single set of words.” (Jackson 2008: 22).

Jackson’s point is that it is the complexity and multi-voiced nature of reality, not the lack of reality, which makes human world-building an editing exercise. I find this argument useful, as it makes it possible to think about social construction without letting the world of our senses disappear into a mist of unreality. It also allows a sceptical social scientist to be far more aware of

powerful work that is needed to maintain one of many stories as a “robust social fact” about that religion. Somehow, orthodoxies become “facts” and other versions are marginalized.

I conclude that Jackson has a theoretically more fine tuned approach. Furthermore, and perhaps surprisingly, his approach is more empirically grounded. It is certainly far more useful than Wright’s approach for answering questions such as the ones I am asking. However, there are some important points that Wright brings up, which present some difficulties for Jackson’s position.

Why, if curriculum writers take Jackson’s approach seriously, should Norwegian religious education spend more time on the official doctrine of the Church of Norway, than on the personal views of the first person you can hit with a stick on the street? This would be an interesting exercise, no doubt, but nevertheless, it would not adequately prepare pupils for engaging with the religious landscape of Norway. The reason for this is that the Norwegian religious landscape is the result of a history of power relations, and as such there is no level playing field where all religious voices have the same efficacy and prominence. The same goes for presenting minority religions in Norway. How should Islam be presented? Through presenting the orthodoxy of an Islamic “mainstream”? Through presenting the doctrines of the most popular mosques in Norway? Why not the views of dissident Islamic voices? Now, there is nothing in Jackson’s approach that says that the views of the Church of Norway, or the orthodoxy of

a large Mosque in Oslo should not be presented. However, any reasons for doing so do not seem to emerge with any great ease from his theoretical starting point.

The theoretical thrust of Jackson's work seems to imply that distorting power is there to be unmasked by industrious students of religious education. It seems important to him to reveal the underlying multiplicities and varied personal stories that lie *behind* the supposed unity of monolithic religious traditions. Contrarily, I claim that these monolithic traditions need to be identified and mapped as well as deconstructed. If not, then education would not be preparing pupils for the world they are about to become adults in, a world where large religious organizations do exist and do have power. Jackson does see the importance of power in the representation of religion. He does accept that religions should be presented in some unified way, but in flexible, dialogic and tentative ways. At this stage it seems to me that the practice is ahead of theory, and that "flexibility" and "tentativeness" do not emerge from the theory, but as a result of observing the craft of good practice of teachers.

In terms of the questions I raise here, the weakness of Jackson's interpretive approach to Religious Education seems to be the ad hoc way in which power is included in the theory.

Applying my analysis

There are two ways in which my study can be applied to the debate between Jackson and Wright. First, there are my findings as they stand. To the extent that Wright's and Jackson's theories are testable, my research provides empirical

grounds for evaluation. Second, there is my trio of analytical concepts. These cannot be used to evaluate their claims. Rather, I argue that the trio of concepts can be a useful addition to Jackson's interpretive approach. They are useful in so far as they strengthen the approach against criticisms such as Wright's.

The first point is quickly dealt with. My data and their analysis support Jackson's assumptions. The fuzzy borders of religious traditions and heterogeneous religious understandings are not merely minor distortions in a basically clear picture. Rather, they are basic to how identities are managed in classrooms during religious education in Norway.

I will move on to the second point. In what way can my trio of concepts develop Jackson's position vis-à-vis the criticisms levelled at him from Wright? I think that the combination of the metaphor of viscosity and the concept of boundary work has something to offer. In the literature review in chapter 2, I argue that Jackson's interpretive approach relies on the ad hoc addition of a concept of power that is never explicitly developed. The concept of work, combined with the idea of viscosity, goes some way to rectify this. For instance, I have drawn attention to how solidifying factors, such as the formal curriculum documents, textbooks or self-appointed religious authorities among the pupils *do* influence the identity work that occurs in classrooms, though not in predictable ways.

Wright criticizes Jackson for lacking a way of describing religions as "robust social facts". Jackson answers by claiming that this is not the case. Rather, the robustness of any particular religion or religious tradition must be seen as one point in a hermeneutic circle. A religious tradition must be presented by way of

a to-and-fro motion between the individual experiences and the overarching, generalised, mainstream presentation of the religious tradition.

Viscosity

In terms of my analytical concepts, a viscous social reality will appear as more or less fluid or solid. Fluidity is, in this case, represented by the range of individual religious experiences. Solidity is represented by stable institutions and tradition. Historically, solidity can (at least by a methodological agnostic) be explained as the result of human *work*. Fluidity is logically prior to solidity, but as we encounter the world at any given time, we encounter phenomena with various degrees of solidity, permanence and stability. Even though Wright is wrong to argue that Jackson does not allow for stable religious traditions, he is right that Jackson's approach lacks an appropriate language to describe it. This is, in my opinion, because educational and sociological theory has difficulty in describing a variable, or layered, social ontology. Using my analytical metaphor of viscosity, or variable degrees of flow, a religious tradition can be understood as arrested flow. There are a range of metaphors that may follow. Rather than being a completely static understanding of a stable phenomenon, a religious tradition can be understood as *glacial*. A glacier is durable, solid and slow moving. However, manoeuvring on a glacier is a very different thing from walking on rock. Wright seems to argue that *in the main* we can treat religious traditions *as if* they are rocklike, because their change is slow enough to be ignored. Another useful metaphor of stable religious traditions as arrested flow, is the *reservoir*. If a river is dammed, a flowing river is transformed into a stable

body of water. This metaphor has two advantages. A reservoir of cultural resources describes how religious traditions are available for people in a way that allows both for distinctive particularity and individual agency and creativity. Secondly, the dam must be *built*. This recognises how human *work* is necessary to understand stability.

Work

Work is my term to embed power in agency and material human micro-action. The term is needed both to explain how fluidising or solidifying processes actually occur in the phenomena we are discussing. Historically, on the one hand, it is necessary to understand how the structures and institutions that shape and give resources for present day behaviour have been solidified. In a synchronic analysis, on the other hand, both *fluidising* and *solidifying* processes must be seen as effects of human work. To freeze or melt a substance, energy is needed. In social action, *work* is this energy.

The formal curriculum documents represent the work of the Norwegian government. The institutional processes that underpin the formal status of the document can be interpreted as the on-going result of powerful solidifying work. Furthermore, these documents have effects. Their description of the world feeds back on the world as it will become in the future. If the formal curriculum documents present religion as deep, stable, connected to behaviour and as the carrier of values, then this is part of creating future religions that are less prone to change. Such religious education will present religions as traditions with more clearly defined, and more jealously guarded, values than often is the case, and

more intimately connected to identities. Furthermore, these religionised identities will be more politically relevant. The findings of chapter 11 might be brought to bear on the Jackson - Wright debate in the following way: The formal curriculum has the effect of solidifying religious traditions as elements in individual- and group identities. The values-identity web of meaning includes a vision of religion that lends itself to what Tuastad (2006) calls *external, positive and instrumental communalism*. This means that the Government, whilst not itself having a stake in faith, sees religion as a useful tool for creating social cohesion. I have pointed out the metaphorical microstructures of this discursive work. By using container metaphors for religions, these multi-voiced and complex traditions become presented as available to *act upon* or *act with*. The usage of container metaphors in describing religion is thus a key feature of the stabilising work done by the Norwegian Government in the formal curriculum documents. Wright is correct to suggest that religious groups are robust social facts. However, a political strategy towards religionising identity has been an important part of building this robustness. This strategy reached its peak in the late 1990s. I see the Government establishing an intimate connection between individual, national and religious identity. This connection was and is part of the wider intellectual movement of (multi)culturalism, of which the L97 curriculum is a part. Wright's position seems to be that this is not a problem. According to Wright, teachers who present the stability of religions give pupils the religious literacy that enables them to manage well in a world where these stable units do make a difference. Nevertheless, Wright's approach makes it more difficult to explain change and difference within religions. I emphasise the political

background for the empirical stability of religious traditions. In doing so, I hope to add some strength to Jackson's interpretive approach.

The classroom ethnography, however, lets us see how both teachers and pupils might engage in solidifying as well as fluidising work. The Eid example (example 12.2 A, p. 260), as well as the "Muslim without believing?" (example 12.2 C, p. 262) example, illustrates this. Pupils present various ways of being religious. They are challenged by other pupils with different ideas. Teachers sometimes open the space for the fluidity; at other times the teacher bolsters an orthodox understanding.

Boundaries

The importance of looking at *boundaries* also becomes clear. It is not the case that there is a "core" of Muslimness, and the further you get away from it, the less Muslim you are. The shape and substance of the concept of "Muslim" is worked out by negotiating the boundaries of the concept. Who are inside and who are outside? What are the criteria for this? Also, the more material and institutional these boundaries are made, the more they impress themselves on people's lives. Being able to "pull off" staying away from school at Eid is more constitutive of *doing* Muslimness than statements of faith. This is certainly the case among the pupils of Bigby. I think it is clear that these identities are constituted in opposition to other identifications that are available, and that this is relevant for understanding part of what is going on. The everyday opposition of the terms "Muslim" and "Norwegian" for instance - rather than the opposition "Muslim" and "Christian", might be a sign that Norwegianness is being defined

in narrow, exclusive ways. However, this might be situational. I can easily imagine situations where the same pupils who did not identify as “Norwegian” in the context of religious education, would find themselves claiming Norwegianness.

The main question for this section is “how should religion be represented in the classroom?” This becomes a politically relevant question when the state has its own opinions on this, and that these opinions emerge from a different context, that of identity management and citizenship governance. It is clear that religion is presented, through curriculum documents, as *the stuff of cores and foundations*. This relates to identities, but it elegantly bridges or fudges the difference between individual and collective identities. It is this representation of religion which makes it such an enticing resource for nation building. This nation building has two faces, but both share the underlying, very slow-moving, understanding of religion as the stuff of cores. On the one hand, there is the backward-looking pseudo-ethnic version of religion as a cultural heritage that has shaped and created a Christian-based culture in Norway. On the other hand, there is the forward-looking civic version, where religious differences are seen as potentially deeply divisive, a problem that must be met through creating shared spaces in religious education. So, in answering the question “How is religion mobilised in the constructions of Norwegian national identities?” I propose the answer “through being presented as something deep and solid”. This begins to answer questions that are relevant to the debate between Jackson and Wright. It hints at new metaphors to speak of the contexts of power and politics in which religions are made to be solid or fluid. This, to my mind, is an

analytical step forward from trying to a-priori establish the level of viscosity of the concept of “religion” before applying it to the world.

Challenges and conclusion

There are also some problems with my adjustments of Jackson’s work. Jackson’s work is marked by its closeness to the field of religious education. My own contributions are designed to challenge the everyday ways of thinking about religious groups’ formation, and may need some work to move from an analytical to a pedagogical language that can be applied by practitioners. Secondly, but related, is that the concept of boundary work, and the idea of political contestation of definitions that is implicit within it, may often take place in a benign and dialogical way. It may seem that in terms of providing a description of the field, I over-emphasize conflict and struggle. I hold on to the idea that contestation and difference are logically prior to consensus and accommodation. However, I concede that this might not always be the way it appears in the world. This disjunction between levels of analysis and description is a weakness of my approach.

In conclusion, the ways in which I have analysed my case study provides tools that Jackson could use to defend his interpretive and contextual approaches to religious education against criticisms from Wright’s critical realist point of view, in a more theoretically cohesive way. The main contribution of my analysis is to provide a more theoretically integrated account of the effects of power and politics on the representation of religion in religious education.

13.2 National identity and Norwegian Sexualities

Introduction

Classic literature on nationalism has often concentrated on two dichotomies. First, the distinction between ethnic and political nationalism, and second, a debate concerning whether nations are: old/primordial or: new/constructed (Billig 1995; Calhoun 1997; Wodak 1999; Østerud 1994). These distinctions have helped focus my questions and my observations. Do the authors of the formal curriculum envisage the national community of having an ethnic or a political nature? How can I, by observing a short slice of time, get to grips with the experience of primordial belonging to a “nation” which informants claim? I think that my trio of concepts is useful in answering these questions. The solidity of the nation is maintained through continuous boundary work. This is true on a grand scale of politics and rhetoric, and it is true on a banal level of everyday life.

To get to grips with the contemporary literature on Norwegianness, I have pursued two different strands of thinking, which can usefully be linked. Firstly, there is a literature on globalization, which suggests several redefinitions of the nation and the nation state. Secondly, it is possible to identify an increased interest in power-laden identities, rising from post-colonial, queer-theoretical, post-structuralist and feminist points of views. Whiteness, masculinities, heteronormativity and (in Norway’s case) Norwegianness have all become popular objects of study.

The relationship between globalization and the nation-state is the subject of much debate. Most relevant for my purposes is the tendency of governments responding to increased transnational flows, to view national cohesion as a project, something governments *do*, rather than a prerequisite *for* governance. The communitarian rhetoric surrounding the introduction of the KRL-subject in 1997 is easily analysed as an instance of “glocalised” nation building work.

The Norwegian social historian Rune Slagstad analysed (1998) the work of the Minister of Education who was in charge of the 1997 educational reforms, Gudmund Hernes. Slagstad’s analysis also suggests an image of a technocratic Labour-government instrumentally using education about Christian cultural heritage. The goal, according to both Slagstad and this study, is to *create* the future nation of shared identity and values. Slagstad’s argument continues. As modern social democratic states embraced an economic and institutional globalisation, the state’s power was diminished. The then Minister Hernes is recorded as saying that when the Norwegian Labour Party no longer has the means to govern the base (he uses Marx’s terms), they must govern the superstructure (Hernes 1991).

Slagstad and this study both represent a similar line of thinking as that of Thomas Frank in the USA (2004), and Magnus Marsdal (2007) in Norway: as the differences in economic policy between the left and right of politics disappear, questions of identity take centre stage in politics. This takes the form of culture wars in the USA, and populist right-wing parties in Norway. My analysis of the formal curriculum does indicate that identity is increasingly a

project for government, and that religion is, in this case, mobilized as a tool for solidifying a Norwegian identity. My study supports the suggestion that the government seeks democratic cohesion through means of identity management, rather than sharing legal and economic institutions.

This shift in thinking corresponds to the shift in seeing nation building as consisting of creating shared institutions, to seeing it as inculcating shared values. I find that Slagstad's analysis fits well with the view of the state brought forward by James C. Scott, in his book *"Seeing like a state"* (1998). He argues that the project of the high modern state has been to make a messy world, understandable, predictable and ordered. He investigates how statecraft changes societies, and makes them "legible." I find that this corresponds particularly well with my analysis of how container metaphors transform a mass of human activities and differences into thought-units which can be acted upon. The difference between "Norwegian values" and "values in Norway" is interesting. Similar couplets are "Norwegian culture" and "culture in Norway", or "the people in Norway" and "the Norwegian people".

The presentation of religions, religious groups, nations and other groups with identity claims in the formal curriculum, makes sense in terms of identity management. These presentation strategies seem to fit with Scott's claim that governments have an interest in simplification. In this case, it is the simplification of cultural complexity into action-relevant units. With Scott and Slagstad in mind, my analysis of the formal curriculum enters a larger field of interest. The historical shift from finding the space for difference within one

institution, to using a shared institution to inculcate shared values, fits nicely with this view of Government. The liberal, the mono-communitarian and the multicultural strategies for organizing religious difference that can be read out of the formal curricula, are fundamentally simplification strategies for making possible state intervention in a complex society. This process of making order and legibility is not necessarily hostile to the people who are subject to the state's identity management projects. The title of Cathrine Egeland and Randi Gressgård's article "*The will to empower: Managing the complexity of others*" (2007) captures this point eloquently.

The Norwegian Sexualities approach: a summary

In this section, I will revisit the literature presented in chapter 3, and discuss it in relation to my approach. So far, I have argued that the connections between religion and national identity are a response to globalization. Furthermore, they are part of a distinct and relatively recent response of centre-left or social democratic politicians. Part of the motivation for establishing the understandings of religion, values, cultures, groups and identities in the curriculum was a will to power. This involves seeing national identity as a project rather than a natural state. At this stage it is relevant to look more closely at the substantial forms of solidification that occur, and the boundary zones where there is real dispute. *A clear finding in my work is that this is in relation to gender and sexualities.* Masculinity and femininity, heterosexuality and homosexuality are very much connected to ideas of Norwegianness and otherness. As such it is relevant to enter into a discussion with the emerging literature on what I call "power-laden

identities.” These can be heterosexuality, masculinity, whiteness or, in this case, Norwegianness.

A natural starting point in terms of analyses of Norwegianness, is the work of anthropologist Marianne Gullestad (2002). Two aspects of her work are especially relevant. Gullestad applies post-colonial theory to Norwegian political discourse about immigration. She points out that “Norwegianness” remains largely an empty category. However, the reality of “Norwegianness” is shaped by the borderlines of inclusion and exclusion. These boundary zones are sites of important strategies for othering. Her second point is that gender relations and the position of women are a major site for creating the boundary markers of Norwegianness (Mühleisen et al. 2009; Røthing et al. 2009; Røthing and Svendsen 2008; 2009a; Forthcoming). I have also found that homotolerance and heteronormativity are mobilized as boundary markers of a hegemonic Norwegianness. Gressgård and Jacobsen (2008) have also researched the uses of sexual equality arguments, with special reference to the inclusion and exclusion of Muslims in Norway. A summary of this approach might be that gender equality and homotolerance have become established as markers of Norwegianness.

Gressgård and Jacobsen point to several consequences of this nationalism of sexual equality. Firstly, it overemphasizes the extent to which gender and sexual equality are shared values amongst the Norwegian majority population. It is also likely that it overemphasizes the extent to which these equalities are realized for women and sexual minorities in Norway today. Secondly, these authors

emphasize how gender and sexuality are used for othering and excluding minorities from the desirable status of Norwegianness. Mühleisen, Røthing and Svendsen (Mühleisen et al. 2009), draw on Skilbrei's (2009) analysis of how Nigerian sex-workers perform an alien and un-Norwegian sexuality by being too aggressively sexual. Mühleisen, Røthing and Svendsen contrast this to what they see as the routine presentation of migrant woman (especially Muslim woman) as being sexually oppressed and passive. They emphasise how both alternatives are presented as alien and un-Norwegian sexualities. This straight-and-narrow path of accepted sexuality leads Mühleisen, Røthing and Svendsen to ask, quoting Sara Ahmed (2006), whether migrant woman are "always already oppressed" in the eyes of the majority. Maybe, they ask, it is not their "wrong" practices that make them alien, but the alienness of migrants that make their practices "wrong".

Applying my analysis:

My case study also suggests that gender and sexuality is a central boundary zone of Norwegianness. The bodies of women and sexual minorities have become the embodied battleground for access to accepted Norwegianness. The example of sex education represents many instances in my data where national belonging, group membership and citizenship become entangled with values and attitudes towards gender equality, sexual liberty and gay and lesbian rights. In my analysis of this example, I emphasised three aspects. The authority of the teacher and the school was clearly invested in presenting a homopositive position. This also resulted in the postponement (not the silencing) of critical voices. This

homopositive position was supported with fact-statements, presenting this as a rational and modern position. Finally, given the range of interpretive resources available to pupils, the teaching resulted in an ambiguous connection between national belonging and stating homopositive views.

There are at least two aspects to this connection between nation and gender and sexual equality. First, there are interesting discussions of why groups with identity claims, including nation states such as Norway, so often make the female body a metaphor of group purity. These discussions are well covered elsewhere (Narayan 1997; Røthing and Mühleisen 2009; Yuval-Davis 1997). I shall concentrate on the second aspect. This is the way in which liberal claims are used in exclusivist and particularistic ways, even though they are presented as universal in scope: “WE have universal values, THEY are clannish and provincial.” My case study clearly indicates that when sexuality and gender relations are discussed in school, teachers see their mandate as a liberal one. I have also shown how the presentation of liberal attitudes to abortion and homotolerance were presented within the framework of normality, geography and time. “Most people, in Norway, in 2008, are liberal.” These qualifiers have a dual nature. On the one hand, they limit the statement so that it may stand as a fact-claim with at least some plausibility. On the other hand, they trigger deep set ideas of western privilege, Enlightenment ideas of the essential good of the will of the people, and, crucially, of progress. Liberality is not only good, it is modern, it represents progress, and it belongs to “us”.

Christian Joppke (2009) points to the same dilemma in a range of European countries. When countries become embroiled in boundary battles, even the most universal or political of national ideas become exclusionary and parochial. My case study adds the evidence of the recent history of Norwegian curricula. The arguments for teaching about religion and values transform from being about ethics, and teaching pupils about “good” and “bad”, to being about identity, and teaching pupils about “who they are” and “where they come from”. Nevertheless, these values remain “liberal”. The core curriculum of 1997 does a heroic job of presenting these liberal values as the organic result of a Christian and humanist cultural heritage, a presentation which may be partly true, but certainly homogenizes and downplays the conflictual and political nature of this heritage.

The philosopher John Gray (2000) distinguishes between the liberalism of “*rational consensus*” and the liberalism of “*modus vivendi*”. Liberalism of rational consensus is the idea that there is one ideal liberal way of life, and once it is found (and it is found when ideal rational beings sit down and discuss things until they agree...) it should dictate the laws of the state. The liberalism of *modus vivendi*, on the other hand, is the idea that human beings will never agree on what constitutes the good life. Therefore, this kind of liberalism involves a state that does not come with a vision of the good life. Hence, liberality is open to a range of ways by which people seek out the good life. The paradox resulting from the double meaning of liberalism is apparent in my case study. It is clearly present in the work on gender, sexuality and Norwegianness that is mentioned above. In this sense, my data resemble the observations of Christian Joppke

(2009). Liberality has, in the last decade or so, more often become a tool for national boundary work. When this happens, liberalism loses its *modus vivendi* qualities: it becomes solidified as a liberalism of rational consensus. Charles Taylor (1992) wrote that when liberalism is forcefully challenged, it becomes a “*fighting creed*.”

However, my case study shows that the classroom is a space where there are pervasive and consistent disagreements (I do not wish to use the terms “deep” or “fundamental”, since the disagreements are often laughed about and seen as everyday and unexceptional). Furthermore, these disagreements are constitutive of how classes become groups, how pupils learn their syllabuses, and the way in which pupils manage their multiple identifications. As a consequence, a liberalism of the single-way-of-life variety will not appear as consensus within such a classroom community of disagreement. If the appearance of a liberal consensus is to become solidified, actors with considerable power must *work* to make this happen: the consensus must be guarded. This is not what I found in the classroom. Rather, the emphasis is on creating safe spaces for *different* opinions. In my data, the teachers and pupils seem to cooperate in performing this work. A community of learning does not need to be a community of values. A nation does not need the kind of “deep” or “foundational” values that the formal curriculum presents to us as social glue.

This paradox of liberality and exclusion poses some difficult questions that need to be addressed. Does this mean that it is racist and ethnocentrist if school advocates liberal values? Is the result of this analysis that there should be more

bigotry and misogyny in schools? No. That is not the argument I want to present. However, the present formal curriculum makes it an unnecessarily difficult task for teachers to disentangle this knot. It links identity and values to an extent that all discussion about right and wrong can easily be interpreted as discussions about them and us. The fact that the curriculum advocates a dialogical and curiosity-driven approach to “them” does not decrease the othering. If anything, it is yet another brick in the wall of the Norwegian “niceness-regime”, to borrow Terje Tvedt’s term from a different context (Tvedt 2005).

My case study also gives several examples of how teachers and pupils are not locked into static discourses. Teachers use terms, ideas and tropes from a range of traditions and sources. For the sake of convenience I identified two clusters of meaning surrounding the term “values”, and they do seem to correspond well with wider communalist and liberal traditions. The teachers may use either of them in ways they (and the pupils) themselves consider to be inclusive or exclusive.

An alternative approach could enable values to be taught without connecting values and identity so closely. This would entail teachers presenting values as a *challenge* to the pupils. This counters the tendency in the formal curriculum and in the public debate to treat “values” as defining a tradition that pupils should be inducted into. Such challenges can go beyond making clear what the state considers as normal, and become a challenge that inspires to action. This means that the school sees itself as counter-cultural, a challenge not only to minorities

but also to majority pupils in their values and choices. Another strategy for teachers to go deeper into such materials, is to see how the self-proclaimed values of a group are often at the root of internal divisions of this group. Gender equality is said to be a shared Norwegian value. My twist, then, is to say that this means that Norwegians are particularly engaged in a debate about what gender equality entails. Is it best understood as equality of opportunity, or equality of results? How do gender equality ideals translate across perceived cultural boundaries? These *debates* structure, and even partially constitute, Norway as a political community. In any case, the dividing lines of values-identification do not correspond to a Norwegian vs. non-Norwegian distinction.

Viscosity, boundaries, work and the Norwegian sexualities approach.

I find it particularly interesting that questions of gender and sexuality so clearly emerge as a landscape across which significant boundaries are drawn. This becomes the clearest example of how categories become material, become experienced, become solidified: the categories that I analyse as signs and language in this thesis are also embodied and emotional. The materialities of these categories are, at least partly, brain cells, synapses, muscles, bones, skin and nerves. If we expand Goodlad (1979) and Afdal's (2006) notion of domains of curriculum, it is easy to imagine layers or domains of curriculum within the individual. These might be called things like the reflexively considered curriculum, the taken-for-granted curriculum, the emotional curriculum, the bodily curriculum and so on. In so far as ideas appear to the individual as given,

they seem to emerge from somewhere “upstream” in the flow of curriculum dissemination. I imagine a process like *percolation*, where signs and clusters of meaning filter through different layers within the individual. Each layer makes meaning material in different ways. Some as thoughts, others as habits or emotions and so on. Categories of sexuality and gender engage directly with these bodily “domains of curriculum”. The body, then, is a powerful and layered medium for solidifying categories. The body has the capacity for several ways of learning using *slower flows*. Opinions can change quickly, maybe as we are confronted with better arguments. Emotions, on the other hand, may also change, often at a slower speed³⁴. Belonging, for instance, is not a question of simple opinion, but also a bodily sensation, maybe of *ease*. A way to imagine this is that there is a high level of congruence between the different domains of “curriculum”. Goodlad and Afdal’s model may be expanded to a more general level: it can be seen as a model of how clusters of meaning or knowledge may flow through different materialities. This flow can be swift or sluggish, and different materialities have different levels of viscosity, or resistance to flow.

The embodiment of the boundaries of Norwegianness, or Muslimness, or other identity categories in our bodies, is a prime example of how political or politicised *work* may result in making boundaries material in slower-moving materials. This is especially the case with bodies of women and across the landscape of various sexual orientations.

³⁴ Though it is also easy to imagine instances where Opinions last longer than emotions. The important point is that opinions and emotions represents different modes of learning and information processing.

Similarly, my analysis highlights the effects of the rhetorical *work* which is done using the term “values” in the formal curriculum. The formal curriculum documents represent an attempt by the state to locate “values” at a deeper level of the self. “Values”, then, are materially solidified by being embodied with emotional attachments, and through being rhetorically fixed to larger historical traditions and institutional power. Feeling emotionally sad or angry when confronted with homophobia, for instance, may solidify a sense of Norwegianness. To the extent that people do this, homopositivity and Norwegianness becomes connected.

Religion is thus also mobilised to provide categorical resources for interpreting our bodies and doing emotion work. The bodies of women and sexual minority orientations become boundary sites for contested identity claims. “Norwegianness” is increasingly invested in bodily markers that are in friction with Islam.

How does my research project contribute to the Norwegian sexualities body of literature? In terms of empirical results, I find that my case study supports the story of Norwegian state-led identity management as working to solidify a sense of belonging. This sense of belonging emerges despite increased trans-national flows after the fall of the Iron Curtain. My study also supports the increasingly empirically reproduced result that liberal values concerning gender and sexuality are important sites of the boundary work that solidifies ideas of Norwegianness. This boundary work hides the wide variety of values *within* the category of Norwegianness. The “boundary workers” are constantly working to constitute

tomorrow's Norwegian identity. The boundary is presently being drawn against conservatism, but with Islam as the defining other. This is complicated by the concept of "Muslim" being contested, and thus in a fluid process of change. Finally, liberality itself is used in paradoxical ways. There exists a political rhetoric that combines liberal values with a particular religion's secular cultural heritage. This mode of rhetoric makes it difficult to teach values in school without creating unnecessary and non-learnable ultimatums of national belonging.

In terms of analysis, my trio of analytical terms provides a useful middle level of analysis that retains a high level of explanatory power. "Viscosity", "work" and "boundaries" are conceptual tools that allow me to present a complex history in simpler terms than the long and detailed historical exposition of Slagstad. I present the formal curriculum as boundary work from above: it tends to simplify and solidify identity categories, and has order and control, "legibility", as a strategic aim. Now, I am not arguing that it is a bad thing that institutions with democratic legitimacy have the power to intervene in society. All politics, also democratic and empowering politics, are solidifications of someone's will to power, and the solidifying power-effects that come from political work are necessary aspects of all political activity.

My point is rather that it is important to strive for simplifications that give the best possible map for non-discriminatory political action, and effective tools of communicating this map. Indeed, there is a deep relationship between meaning-making as complexity reduction, and the need for our worldview to guide action.

Irreducible complexity and human apathy are common bedfellows. The idea that our identities are of variable solidity, and that the level of solidity is the effect of our human work, is a way of looking at the world that encourages political action without fantasies of purity or cultural essentialism.

The Norwegian sexualities-approach can be called a post-structuralist queer-inspired approach to national identity. It has some important strengths, in that it emphasises intersectionality in a way that makes it very difficult to produce static, “culturalist” or “ethnicist” descriptions of groups with identity claims. Secondly, it emphasises the *doing* of social reality, it sees the body as a project that can be moulded, and it has a keen sense of power and the political. Judith Butler’s concept of “performativity” is often misunderstood (Butler 1997; 2009). Nevertheless, it is widely used to represent an actor-focussed way of representing social phenomenon. It seems to me that the term overlaps my own assertion that the building-blocks of identity are banal, and dependent on human work. The idea of viscosity may represent an advance. It gives an analytical metaphor for describing the interplay between a ontological fluidity and empirical solidity. ‘Viscosity’ may help to provide a more parsimonious account of slow change and glacial social constructions than the Norwegian sexualities approach.

13.4 Multiculturalism

Introduction

So far I have used this chapter to engage my data with two different bodies of literature that try to account for specific empirical fields. First, I discussed the debate between educationalists Jackson and Wright concerning the representation of religions and religious traditions in religious education. I argue that my analysis supports Jackson's position. However, his approach can be made more robust by accounting for power in a more systematic way. The analytical metaphor of viscosity combines well with Jackson's overall framework, and represents a development of his approach by enabling a variable social ontology.

Second, I discussed a recent body of literature that I called "the Norwegian sexualities approach". This is a broadly post-structuralist queer-inspired approach, investigating the connections between sexual orientation and Norwegian identity. My analysis broadly supports the major arguments of this literature, namely that homopositivity is mobilised as a boundary marker of Norwegianness, and that this is framed in a context of stories of rationality and progress, and posits religion and especially Islam, as an oppositional "other". Theoretically, I find that there are many similar assumptions, even though my analytical language is different from the Norwegian sexualities approach. Again, my concept of viscosity represents an analytical improvement, mainly in terms of supplying a parsimonious account of a slow changing social phenomenon.

In this final section of the chapter, I focus on the main theoretical issue underlying these debates, and that is how to represent groups with identity claims (see chapter 2). With this question in mind, I analyse a recent debate between Tariq Modood (2008) and Anne Phillips (2008). I argue that my approach is similar to Carter and Fenton's (2010) approach: where they criticise "the ethnicity paradigm", I criticise "culturalism" in an analogous way. They argue for a return to classical sociological analytical tools in the analysis of ethnic groups. So do I. However, I have been inspired by a sociological tradition associated with Erving Goffman. Finally, I compare my own tool-kit to the anthropologist Gerd Baumann's concept of "dominant" and "demotic" discourses (Baumann 1996). I see my own theoretical tool-kit as an extension of his work.

As I have pointed out earlier, the main point of contention in this debate is how to understand groups with identity claims. A differentiated idea of the social ontology of groups with identity claims, is a crucial contribution to the multiculturalism debates. One reason for this is the complex combination of normative and ontological concerns involved. Policy-makers have to grapple with horror-movie problems like "Do we create Frankenstein monsters that did not exist before, when we give rights to groups with identity claims?" or "if we pretend that groups with identity claims have no real existence beyond the sum of its members, will we be surprised when the banished group returns to wreak its vengeance?" It is these kinds of questions that my approach makes easier to discuss. Taken together, the trio viscosity, work and boundaries give academics and policy-makers simple and transferable conceptual tools which can be used to

think about the benefits and disadvantages of giving groups with identity claims corporate status.

My data indicates that the core curriculum of 1997 is strongly bound up within a multiculturalism framework, even though it is a strange one given its emphasis on a specific Norwegian heritage defined in terms of a religious culture. This emphasis on values as identity makes it difficult to teach about religions and values within the framework of the formal curriculum, without engaging in some form of national boundary work. The observation data, on the other hand, imply that the framework of western liberal Enlightenment traditions is more frequently mobilized in the classroom setting. Again, teachers and pupils sometimes use these liberal ideals in a paradoxical form of national boundary work, where they speak as if to establish national ownership of values with universal claims.

The debate between Anne Phillips and Tariq Modood

Anne Phillips and Tariq Modood are both academics who wish to “save” multiculturalism from the criticisms that have been levelled against it. They both now advocate a *pragmatic* approach to understanding groups with identity claims. Phillips argues that any policy which corporates subnational identity groups, is part of *solidifying* these groups. She uses the term ‘solidify’ in her own work (Phillips 2007: 19). However, she is reluctant to “prematurely define” her concepts. Nevertheless, it is clear that Phillips operates with a concept of groups in which “groupness” is variable in its level of solidity. She leaves this

untheorised, though. This makes it difficult to re-apply her approach to cases which she does not discuss herself.

Modood also argues for a conception of groupness which allows for variable solidity. He is not as sceptical as Phillips about incorporating groups. Nor is he as sceptical about using such groups with identity claims as the starting point of policy. He presents a philosophical argument for how these groups can be said to exist without resorting to any one unifying essence. He employs Wittgenstein's concept of "family resemblance" to achieve this. In my opinion, he has only gone half the way here. Modood has opened up the philosophical space which *enables* such a description. However, he has not developed the analytical tools that give detail to *describe* variability. So, he must write of these groups *as if* they were either completely stable or completely fluid. I hasten to add that this does not mean that this is his view. Rather, he is forced to deal with this problem through caveats rather than through a developed analytical language.

I see groups with identity claims as categories defined by their boundaries. These boundaries have various levels of viscosity, which depend on the human work which has been invested in the category. This allows for a simple language of "solidity" and "fluidity" of groups. It does not encourage any one policy standpoint: I think that both Phillips' and Modood's arguments can be presented more clearly and economically using my analytical tools. Phillips argues that basing policies on corporated groups will solidify these groups in ways which restrict the freedoms of their members, especially those with less power within

the groups. Modood argues that grass-roots mobilisations cohering around identity politics solidify a group to the extent that the grievances of its members can be addressed. This would be more difficult if the group remained fluid and dispersed.

Both theorists would benefit from a variable ontology of groups with identity claims, and this is what I have attempted to develop in this thesis.

In terms of the data, I think it is clear that teachers and pupils do navigate around reasonably static ideas of religions and national identities. These static ideas shape the available space for action in important ways. However, they do not exhaust the space for action: “solid” representations from the curriculum “upstream” rarely arrest fluidity. Rather the formal and institutional ideas stand as pillars in a stream. As the chaotic flow of the sum of individual actions encounter these solid elements, complex currents and eddies emerge.

Carter and Fenton

The arguments of Carter and Fenton, address a slightly different debate: they argue that the concept of “ethnicity” has been allowed to serve as something that explains, rather than something to be explained. The argument is very similar to that which I advance in this thesis. “Ethnicity” is a subset of my very large category “groups with identity claims”, but the same kind of arguments apply here as to groups that solidify around notions of “culture” or “religious tradition”. Carter and Fenton themselves argue that their notion of an “over-ethnicised sociology” is relevant to some of the literature that I have covered

here. They cite Barry's (2001) criticism of multiculturalism as well as critiquing various forms of primordialism. They argue for explanations of culturally complex societies where "*the subject of study is not ethnicity, but power, resources, social relations and institutions (which may or may not be) informed by cultural identities and ideas of ancestry*" (Carter and Fenton 2010: 2). They argue for a return to what they call "*the staples of sociology*" which they count as "*power, the state, class relations and inequalities, economic change and social institutions*" (Carter and Fenton 2010: 3). The analytical toolkit that I propose in this thesis is also inspired by well established sociological "staples". I have been inspired by a more micro-oriented sociology, focussing on situations and interactions rather than overarching economic structures. However, it is these kinds of overarching economic interests that I would turn to for material explanations of the trends and tendencies I have pointed out in my data. I have for instance hinted towards a connection between the emergence of a third-way social democratic trend in the 1990s, and the importance of governmental identity management. This trend seems to correspond with a turn towards identity management. As control over national economics was seen to be a lost cause, identity politics increasingly became a mode of governance.

Carter and Fenton present a forceful and relevant critique. I attempt to answer some of their calls. Carter has elsewhere proposed a layered social ontology (Carter and Sealey 2001), and pointed to Layder's (Layder 1994; 1997) work on social theory. The concept of viscosity of the boundary of groups is an attempt to meet this demand. Layder suggests four domains of social action. In contrast, I propose the possibility of a sliding scale from fluidity to solidity. The concepts

of boundary and work also imply a material understanding of the world. Their use implies a description which enables descriptions of agency. Finally, my analytical tools incorporate an understanding of contexts, political contestation and change that Carter and Fenton seem to encourage.

I argue that this thesis represents an empirical demonstration of the kind of sociological analysis they propose. With my starting point of seeing the world as material and irreducibly complex, I intend to create the methodological room for a constructivist account of groups which is not anti-realist or overly “identitarian”.

Gerd Baumann

Finally, it is relevant to compare my approach to that of Gerd Baumann. He also has a “tool-kit” approach to developing theory. On the basis of long fieldwork in the culturally diverse London suburb of Southall, Baumann developed a flexible and power-sensitive account of identity management (Baumann 1996). He describes how a static “multicultural” world-view co-existed with a more mixed and hybrid world-view. The informants were very much aware of the internal diversity of the posited cultural groups. The similarities across these groups and the large areas of incongruity just did not fit the scheme of bounded cultures. Baumann called the static multiculturalist world-view the “dominant” discourse. The more practical and flexible approach he called the “demotic” (“of the people”) discourse (Baumann 1996).

My own terms of fluidizing and solidifying work were developed after working with, and through, the thinking of Baumann for some time. However, I decided against using his terms for several reasons. Firstly, I wanted to focus on the agency of curriculum authors, teachers and pupils. I wanted to see what they DID with their discursive resources. And so I developed terms that are action focused rather than discourse focused. In this way I also avoided reifying discourses and investing them with unwarranted agency. Secondly, in my material, it soon became clear that there was a range of “dominant discourses”. From the position of the teacher, or the pupil, there was no unified story from above. The formal curricula use a range of ways of thinking about values and identity. I named two identifiable streams for convenience, but the analytical point is the multiple nature of discursive resources available to teachers and pupils. Even after reducing this to two traditions, communitarianism and liberalism, I was left with a bewildering range of options. Are these two traditions competing dominant discourses? Are they co-existing discourses? Or is there one dominant discourse that is a clever blend of the two? Baumann’s term did not seem to cover my data. It also seems to be a point for Baumann that all dominant discourse was solidifying. In my data, this was a robust empirical connection, but it was not a necessary one. On several occasions, the syllabus and/or the teachers were working to fluidize previously held opinions of pupils. All in all, the concepts of solidifying and fluidizing work from “above” or “below” retain the dynamic and power-sensitive virtues of Baumann’s terms, and increase the level of analytical generality. As such, my terms are more flexible than those of Baumann, and may travel more easily to other cases. There

is a distinct disadvantage in that I lose some of the parsimony of Baumann's analytical dichotomy, but I just could not fairly represent my data within his framework.

13.6 Conclusions

In this chapter, I have crystallized the defining elements of my analytical voice. This voice was developed in the process of analysing and presenting the data of my case study. I have followed the logic of case study generalization, and its potential for theoretical development. Consequently, I have focussed less on empirical generalizations, for which my data are insufficient. The main strategy has been to apply a fresh trio of analytical concepts to the three theoretical debates that have informed this study.

In terms of representations of religion in the classroom, I have supported Robert Jackson's broad contextual and interpretive approach, but suggested that his theory would benefit from a more organic inclusion of a useful concept of power. A more developed concept of power will strengthen the ability of his theoretical approach, especially in terms of explaining the empirical stabilities that are clearly evident in religious traditions. It is this concept of power that my trio of concepts approaches. I focus on the relationship between human work and the stability of cultural flows, in a manner that is consistent with the basic premises of Jackson's overall approach.

In terms of constructions of Norwegianness, my focus on boundaries makes it easy to criticize the myth of Norwegianness being held together by a core of shared values, and to present clearly the exclusionary effects that often follow when people use this mode of argument. Empirically, the case study data also support the emerging view that gender and sexuality are crucial border-zones for struggles of Norwegianness. I discuss the paradoxical usages of liberal values. Theoretically, my main contribution to these debates is in attempting to find a constructionist analytical strategy that answers some major questions posed by critical realists.

In terms of the discussions of multiculturalism, I find that both multicultural “groupist” arguments, and liberal “individualist” arguments, are used with both inclusive and excluding effects. Both liberalism and multiculturalism are flexible enough to be used in a range of ways. Consequently, they lose some of their explanatory power, and as such, my main engagement is with the more hybridizing approach of Gerd Baumann. My own terms have developed in relation to his terms of “dominant” and “demotic” discourse. However, I found that my own trio of concepts is more flexible. It does not assume pre-existing static discourses, and it does not assume that all cultural influences that seem to come from “above” are the same. I argue that my concepts of “fluidizing” and “solidifying” work represent a useful development of Baumann’s theory.

Notwithstanding some relevant objections to the use of my terms, I conclude this chapter asserting that my case study has yielded analytical tools that are useful for explaining my case. Furthermore, they may even be useful for analysing

similar cases. I hold that my approach is a useful contribution to the on-going discussion concerning how best to understand groups with identity claims. It might contribute to our understanding of the slow, “glacial” change and stabilities of groups within a non-essentialist framework, whilst avoiding anti-realism.

PART VII

CONCLUSION

14. CONCLUSION

In this concluding chapter, I start by assessing the methodological choices that are the foundation of this thesis. I then summarise the empirical findings emerging from the case study. It is important to remember that the claims to generalisation in regard to these findings are modest. I then move on to summarise and evaluate the theoretical contributions of the thesis. These conclusions are more strongly stated, in accordance with the logic of generalising from a case to theory (see section 7.3 and 7.5). Finally, I give some suggestions for further research that might follow the work done in this thesis.

Methodological assessments:

I am confident that the use of two kinds of data enhanced the analysis. The modification of Goodlad's (1979) and Afdal's (2006) model of curriculum domains was useful in terms of dealing with *one set of signs*. However this one set of signs was distributed over a range of material contexts, and in several different locations. I was able to show the use of the ideas in the formal curriculum, as well as the ways in which classroom interaction eluded the categories of the curriculum texts.

I am also reasonably confident about the accountability and transparency of my ethnographic data. The combination of an ethnographic presence over time, classroom observations and supporting interviews, gave me a rounded and challenging experience of the everyday life of the teachers of religious

education. I have discussed issues of power and research roles in relation to this earlier.

I am far more concerned that my emphasis on analysing metaphor in the text analysis led me to downplay the subject syllabuses. In terms of understanding the interplay between the different domains of curriculum, the leap from core curriculum to classroom interaction is large. Teachers do not engage with the core curriculum texts very often. Also, it meant that I was investigating the classroom in terms of a core curriculum that was developed simultaneously with a subject that had been revised twice by the time I was doing my ethnographic fieldwork, and yet another time by the time of writing. Many teachers felt that the subject had “moved on” since the core curriculum was written.

My choice had its reasons: The core curriculum is still national policy, and each time it is challenged politically, it seems to bounce back. I think that the core curriculum encapsulates some patterns of thinking that remain politically active 13 years after the reforms of 1997. Furthermore, as a sociologist, I am interested in the discursive resources available to teachers and pupils to interpret processes of identity management. I argue that the core curriculum is a better source for such an investigation. This is connected to the final and most practical reason for emphasising the core curriculum: its rich metaphorical language gave far more opportunity to investigate a discursive *field* than did the bullet-points of the subject syllabus. Nevertheless, this is a weakness in the research design that I would have changed if there had been more space available. I have given priority to presenting the logic of my argument, not showing the details of how it

works out. This follows from the sociological rather than didactical aims of the research.

Findings from the case

Religion *is* mobilised in the construction of national identity, at least in the case of religious education in Norway. The connection is not made through faith or nurture, but through rhetoric of values and cultural heritage. Connecting nationalism and religion in this way is in line with a long tradition on the political left in Norway. It should be seen as Governmental identity management, rather than religious missionary zeal.

The rhetoric of values is crucial to understanding this dynamic. The use of the term “values” has shifted from ethics to identity. The change was marked from 1974 to 1997. The term “values” is important to understand the assumptions concerning identity in the formal curriculum documents. Identity, be it individual or collective, is consistently presented as something which has a core of values. These values are seen to define the individual or the group – the identity seems to cohere around these core values.

The rhetoric of values has the effect of creating a sense of *depth*, either to the individual or to the group that allegedly holds these values. This idea of depth of identity seems to cut across other fault lines in the data.

Religion is presented as the provider of core values. Thus, religion is seen to provide depth of self, and solidity of the group. Religion is clearly used in governmental identity management project as a resource for social cohesion.

The classroom interaction data, however, challenges the assumptions in the formal curriculum documents. Group categories, such as “Norwegian”, “Christian” or “Muslim” do not rest on shared values. Rather, they gain their practical reality in terms of inclusion and exclusion of people, ideas, acts and objects. Categories are made material and maintained through *boundary work*. The classes were primarily communities that shared values. Nevertheless, they were units of solidarity and identification. The teachers were not involved in instilling shared values. Instead, they were managing disagreement. The classrooms, then, were communities of disagreement. At the same time, they were communities of shared *action*, communities of shared *decision making*, and communities of *shared knowledge*.

Furthermore, to the extent that teachers or pupils *did* act according to the underlying assumptions of the formal curriculum documents, the results were rather the solidification of exclusive and narrow ideas of religious groups. More significantly, the connections made between values and identity became clear in some topics, especially gender and sexuality, becoming boundary markers of Norwegianness.

Connecting values, religion and national identity makes it difficult for the school to challenge pupils on ethical issues. If discussions about “right” or “wrong” become discussions about “us” and “them”, then the scope of democratic deliberation becomes smaller.

Knowledge about religion makes pupils more able to deal constructively with the world. Pupils’ worlds are, and will increasingly become, religiously diverse.

Religious education in Norway has great potential to contribute to a future of democratic participation and citizenship in a religiously diverse future Norway. However, the present map, represented by the formal curriculum documents' assumptions about religion, values and national identity, does not fit the landscape. In my data, the practice of religious education gives reason for optimism. Policy makers and curriculum authors should give more attention to the diverse classroom experiences.

Theoretical contributions.

Chapter 13 gave an in depth analysis of the extent to which my analytical toolkit represented an advance. I conclude that it is a toolkit well suited for explaining slow-changing phenomena within a constructionist framework. The approach, when developed, has the potential to stand up to some of the criticisms that critical realists have levelled against constructionism.

The logic of argument is sound, and well grounded in the data through the case logic of Yin (2009). The metaphors open up the opportunity for new insights and are, in my view, good to think with.

However, there are still some issues of operationalisation that I have not dealt with in sufficient detail. There is still some maturation to be done before the terms *stability and fluidity* can be used in a more structured way. As it is, the terms now refer to similar processes that occur in different mediums. Fluidity sometimes describes the ease with which an individual can change her mind, at

other times it describes a situation where a group of people have disparate opinions. The concepts need further attention with regard to *scope*.

Recommendations for further research

Norwegian religious education needs more empirical research. Academic research and educational policy would be strengthened if this project were expanded to a larger study that could lay greater claims to generalisation within Norway. I would recommend a study that combines qualitative and quantitative methods. I envisage 4 different sources of data: 1) Further development of document analysis of formal curriculum; 2) Qualitative observation data from classrooms; 3) Quantitative observation data from classrooms; 4) Survey data from teachers.

1) Further document analysis: A study that investigates the construals and constructions of identity in Norwegian religious education could take as its starting point an analysis of the formal curriculum documents. As a starting point, the two traditions identified in this study, communitarian and high modern, might yield four categories: 1) communitarian, 2) high-modern, 3) neither, 4) hybrids combining the two. This study has established some criteria for different events that might be placed within these categories. Suitably developed, this might be a starting point for a study that gives a quantitative overview over how identity is taught in Norway. Furthermore, this would open up opportunity for further description within the four categories, and development of new categories.

2) Qualitative observation: This entails producing ethnographic descriptions of the teaching undertaken. The aim would be to develop the understanding of the existing categories, as well as developing new categories.

3) Quantitative observation: The development of the categories would benefit from a pilot study drawing on action research. Initiatives undertaken at the University of Stavanger, as well as at WRERU, have done exciting work together with religious education teachers (Jackson, Miedema, Weisse and Willaime 2007; Johannessen Forthcoming 2010a; Forthcoming 2010b; O'Grady and Jackson 2007). Co-researching teachers would be instrumental in developing a clear set of criteria for identifying the different traditions for understanding identity. These should be sufficiently clear so that different researchers should, after the pilot, have a co-evolved understanding of what to look for in the classrooms.

4) Survey research: It would be useful to provide the teachers at the sampled schools with a short survey which might shed light on these important issues: i) Attitudes towards the subject; ii) Educational background of the teachers; iii) Religious affiliation of teachers; iv) Amount of time spent on different sections of the syllabus last year; v) Amount of time spent on non-syllabus activity.

In a study tailored to produce quantitative and generalisable data, it would be important to develop a stringent sampling strategy. I would suggest a stratified sampling strategy, where it is important that a geographical range is secured, as well as a variation in terms of the religious background of pupils, so that the sample includes both homogenous and heterogenous schools. There are national

statistics on foreign language teaching, and this is the best proxy available to identify a multi-faith school.

Such a study would need a large sample to be able to generalise. Given the use of a stratified random sampling strategy, it would be necessary for even the small categories to have an N of a fair size. One way to minimize costs would be to recruit teacher-training students as co-researchers. The present teacher training in Norway includes periods of observation, and this project could be tailored to benefit the participating students.

I would suggest 6 regional research teams:

- i) Northern Norway;
- ii) Middle Norway;
- iii) Western Norway;
- iv) Southern Norway;
- v) Eastern Norway excluding Oslo;
- vi) Oslo.

This regional division would recognise the important points made by recent research in sociology of religion done at the University of Agder, concerning the regional variations in religious culture across Norway (Hermansen, Løvland, Repstad and Tønnessen 2008; Repstad 2009). The research teams would be

responsible for training and supervising students, who would be able to base one of their written assignments on their observations.

The work done by Marie von der Lippe involving video data might also point to an interesting source of data (Lippe 2009a; Lippe 2009b). Video data could be combined with observations, providing greater reliability of the data gathered, and enabling the research team to evaluate the extent to which co-researchers make similar judgements in class.

In terms of analysis, I would recommend using three questions based on my analytical toolkit as a starting point (See chapter 6, p. 101):

1. Where are the boundaries between the categories I am looking at?
2. Who is working on them, and what is the nature of this work?
3. What is the level of viscosity (speed of flow) in these boundaries?

This would yield interesting results in terms of inclusion and exclusion in religious education in Norway. It would give educationalists and policy-makers a better grounding for their future work, and provide guidance for improving identity in religious education in Norway.

Secondly, research in homogeneous “white” schools has great potential. This follows the line of argument that taken-for-granted powerful identities deserve some serious attention. Further developing the concepts of “whiteness” and normalcy would be a welcome contribution to literature on Norwegianness.

In terms of the analytical work, I hope that the tools are replicable. There are at least three aspects on which I can see interesting work being done. I) Diaspora religious groups. Norwegian churches abroad represent an exciting research arena which effectively operationalizes the concept of boundary work. II) Expanding the notion of curriculum domains to the sub-individual level. A study that theorises religion, multiculturalism and identity in terms of the body and emotions would have considerable potential. III) A theoretical development of the concept of 'ritual', and its relation to the boundary work involved in identity management. There is an analytical gap between my trio of analytical concepts and the actions that people perform. A flexible and material concept of everyday interaction ritual represents a way forward in this respect (see Couldry 2003: for an instructive example of such work within media studies).

Final thoughts.

The relationship between religion and national identity will continue to be an issue in the politics of Western Europe. This development is connected to the globalised flows of money, power and people. Norwegian national identity has a range of practical and discursive resources that connects it to kinship, to heritage and to Christianity as cultural heritage. These discursive resources are not only linked in with racism and xenophobia. The linkage between Christianity and the Norwegian state has a legacy that still resonates in the rhetoric of the political left in Norway.

I hope that the image of the culturally and religiously diverse state school classroom as a community of disagreement and action can stand as a model for a larger vision of inclusive citizenship, in Norway and beyond.

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