

Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Conference

October 13-17, 2010 Dalton, GA USA

Author: Mona-Lisa Angell

Jeanette's paper for RECE 2010 starts on page 4, after information about RECE 2010 and about our 90 minute session

**Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Education, 18<sup>th</sup> Conference  
Dalton State College, Georgia USA**

October 13-17, 2010

**Conference Theme: LANGUAGE, CULTURE AND POWER**

A conference reconceptualizing research, theory, policy and practice

***Name of the 90 minute session: POSITIONINGS AND SOCIO-CULTURAL JUSTICE***

***Presenters:***

**Mona-Lisa Angell**

**Marcela Montserrat Fonseca Bustos**

**Jeanette Rhedding-Jones**

***Abstract for the 90 minute session***

**We take up Bronwyn Davies' concept of positionings to present critical issues and concepts regarding whose languages matter, which cultures count and where power is located. To do so we focus on documents (Mona-Lisa), narratives (Marcela) and practices (Jeanette). Additional conceptual terms are Derrida's differAnce (not only difference and différence) and Deleuze's 'dwelling' and 'lines of flight'. Critical issues are neo-liberalism, racism and exclusions.**

*Name first presenter:* Mona-Lisa Angell (unable to attend, so Jeanette will read parts of the paper and show Mona-Lisa's PowerPoints: 10 minutes)

*Affiliation:* Vestfold University College

*Address:* Postbox 2243, N-3103 Tønsberg. NORWAY

*Email address:* [Mona.L.Angell@hive.no](mailto:Mona.L.Angell@hive.no)

*Name of second presenter:* Marcela Montserrat Fonseca Bustos (25 minutes)

*Affiliation:* Oslo University College

*Address:* Postbox 4, St Olavs plass, N-0130, Oslo, NORWAY

*Email address:* [MarcelaMF.Bustos@lui.hio.no](mailto:MarcelaMF.Bustos@lui.hio.no)

*Name of third presenter:* Jeanette Rhedding-Jones (25 minutes)

*Affiliation:* Oslo University College

*Address:* Postbox 4, St Olavs plass, N-0130, Oslo, NORWAY

*Email address:* [Jeanette.Rhedding-Jones@lui.hio.no](mailto:Jeanette.Rhedding-Jones@lui.hio.no)

*Discussant and Chair of Interactive Session with Audience:* Jenny Ritchie (30 minutes)

*Affiliation:* Te Kura Matauranga - Department of Education, Te Whare Wananga o Wairaka

*Address:* Private Bag 92025, Tamaki Makaurau – Auckland, Aotearoa - New Zealand

*Email address:* [jritchie@unitec.ac.nz](mailto:jritchie@unitec.ac.nz)

## Regarding the 90 minute session

*Brief rationale:* RECE provides a forum for alternative thinking within a supportive context of international scholars and practitioners. We therefore take the freedom to present what may be too contentious for more conservative audiences.

*Purpose and content of session:* The purpose of the session is to present and explore practical and textual matters of power, cultures and languages. The content of the session deals with these through three different sets of exemplifications, theorizations and reconceptualizings. It focuses on policy documents from government departments, practitioner narratives within higher education contexts, and practices with children whose families are either Muslim or so respectful of Islam that they send their children to private Muslim preschools. Against institutionalised and normativizing discourses we attempt to shift theorizations towards new constructs, new work around subjectivity and new explorations of belonging and agency in communities with histories of migration.

Angell-Jacobsen, M.-L. and Becher, A. A. (2007) *Paradoxer i strategier for sosial utjevning : Økt kartleggingspress lest i i lys av teorier om postkolonialisme og privilegier.* (Paradoxes in strategies for social equity: Reading testing agendas in the light of postcolonialism and privilege), *Norsk tidsskrift for migrasjons forskning* (Norwegian Journal of Immigration Research) 8: 49-62.

Bustos, M.M.F (2009). *Hvor kommer du egentlig fra? Problematiseringer av språklige konstruksjoner av virkeligheter.* (Where do you actually come from? Problematising language constructions and reality) In K. E. Fajersson, E. Karlsson, A. A. Becher and A.M. Otterstad (eds). *Grip sjansene! Profesjonskompetanse, barn og kulturelt mangfold.* (Take the Chance: Professional competence, children and cultural difference) Oslo: Cappelen Akademiske Forlag. Pp. 43-52.

Davies, B. and Gannon, S. (Eds) (forthcoming 2009) *Pedagogical Encounters*. New York: Peter Lang.

Davies, B. (Ed.). (2008). *Judith Butler in Conversation: Analysing the texts and talk of everyday life.* (1-273). New York: Routledge.

<http://www.bronwyndavies.com/>

Rhedding-Jones, J. (2010 forthcoming) *Muslims in Early Childhood Education: Discourses and epistemologies*. New York: Springer.

*Session type:* 90 minutes, including three short presentations of twenty minutes each with Powerpoints, and thirty minutes of audience interaction with a discussant/chair located globally 'somewhere else' but theoretically quite close.

The 90 minute session will:

*#describe practices built on reconceptualizing principles* in relation to work with ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities. It will do so by focusing on languages and how 'minority children' are conceptualized and policy strategies are relatedly written; how stories practitioners told in higher education construct professional identities, and how normalised discourses operate to exclude what matters for Muslims.

# offer reconceptualist and critical advocacy perspectives on policy issues through exemplifying what is currently happening and being thought in Norway. As an apparently progressive nation there are still problems here, though reconceptualizers in nations less open to difference may wish their positionings to be otherwise.

# explore childhood in multiple contexts, including how early childhood policies aim to work for social equity but may not, how discourses of racism and neo-liberalism counter-act attempt to work for change, and how narratives and practices with young children operate to re-construct, destruct and deconstruct.

# demonstrate ways in which theoretical perspectives such as critical theory, postcolonial theory, poststructural theory and feminist theory expand the boundaries of our work. As three connected but separate presentations we together aim to move theorizations in new directions as other lines of flight.

**Abstract in 70 words for presentation one: Mona-Lisa Angell**

*Name of presentation: "Tracing discourses of racism in early childhood education policy"*

Emerging issues and contradictions in early childhood education concern policy documents. These are produced with all 'good' intentions but with discursively constructed racism. The presentation regards traces of this in Norwegian strategies for increased social equity. Here ECE is used politically to promote discourses where capitalist ideas of 'minority children' are strong. These are juxtaposed with readings of the No Child Left Behind white paper and with discourses of neo-liberalism.

**Abstract in 70 words for presentation two: Marcela Montserrat Fonseca Bustos**

*Name of presentation: "Constructing professional identities of difference"*

As an alternative perspective to mainstream higher education, Norway has introduced recruitment strategies for early childhood students of cultural 'difference' and practical experience in *barnehager* (preschools) to begin their studies. Here possibilities related to theory and research regard the constructions of professional identities. Whether or not these are identities of new differences is a key question. Such students/practitioners narrate their experiences to speak of positionings, power and events.

**Abstract in 70 words for presentation three: Jeanette Rhedding-Jones**

*Name of presentation: "No Aunties in our preschools: Muslim positionings in western practice"*

This concerns the lived realities of children's lives. In Islamic cultures (Arabic, Urdu, Turkish, Somali, Bosnian, Bangladeshi) the women who educate and care for children are called 'Auntie'. In Norway this word (*Tante*) is banned unless the *barnehager* are privately owned by Muslims. In England, Muslims in nursery schools use the Arabic word for Auntie (*Khala*) which the English don't know about. Constructs of professionalism are cultural, linguistic and in this case religious.

Jeanette's 2010 RECE paper is now re-written and accepted for publication in a book edited by Georgina Tsolidas for Springer (2012, New York and Amsterdam). The title of the book is *Diasporic Identification, Gender and Family*. Here Jeanette's chapter is called 'Muslim women in western preschooling: diasporic effects on identity issues.' It follows the abstract for RECE 2010 but it addresses an audience of sociologists, not early childhood people. The chapter has been developed firstly from Jeanette's presentation at the 2010 XVII World Congress of Sociology for the International Sociology Association; and secondly from the comments of the (sociologist) reviewers of the 2012 book. For the PowerPoint presentation at RECE 2010 the practical and critical issues were taken up. Although the Sociology conference (held in Goteborg Sweden) was in July 2010 and the RECE conference (held in USA) was in October 2010, the RECE paper was written first. Here it is:

## **No Aunties in our preschools: Muslim positionings in western practice**

### **Muslims in diaspora and globalisation**

In the case of Muslims in the west, languages and religion make a difference in the nations to which they have migrated and become citizens. This is an effect of the Islamic diaspora since the 1970s, when wars and deprivation caused mass migrations. A diaspora is a dispersal of people to other places, resulting in non-homogenized diasporic identifications, as Georgina Tsolidis (2001) has shown with her work about schooling and being different. She says (p. 116) 'diasporic communities have a range of skills ... includ[ing] entrepreneurship, the building and utilization of networks and a facility with education.' Whilst preschool practitioners who have migrated may not be positioned to develop 'global cultural production', or 'take advantage of the new era' (p. 115-116), the children from a Muslim children's centre in the west will be.

Some practical effects of diaspora are exemplified by the writing of four Muslim practitioners in Norway: Noor, Isnina, Bina and Suada [pseudonyms]. Noor is of Urdu/Pakistani background, Isnina migrated from Somalia, Bina from Pakistan, and Suada from Bosnia. In the preschool (*barnehage*) where they work together there is a blending of many cultures, and of Muslim practices and Norwegian language and pedagogy. As in the mosques, Friday is a holy day in Muslim preschools, where the practitioners can practice their faith and their cultural celebrations with the children. Noor, who wrote the following in Norwegian, says this in (my) English translation:

We want you to know that we can't describe ourselves without saying something about Islam, and how this affects everything we do, and everything we want to do.

I have worked in this Muslim preschool for about seven years. This is where Muslim women from different countries work together. It feels almost like a family to work in this preschool, because we all act like a big family and we support each other on good

days and bad. Here we can practise our religion with prayers and celebrations of Holy Times such Eid-ul-fitr and Eid-ul-adha.

On Fridays, our Holy Day in the week, the children learn about Islam. They also get to eat food from different countries when they all sit together to eat. The children do not only learn about Islam, they also learn about Norwegian culture, music and language. We take the children out on tours [into the woods, into the centre of the city and to islands in the fjord travelling by boat]. In these ways they learn the Norwegian language [from us] and at the same time some of us also learn to speak [more] of this language.

We are lucky, we who live in Norway, where there is freedom of religion. This is very good for the children in the preschool, which prepares them for when they will go to school. The first priority is the Norwegian language, so that children from other countries do not have problems with language later in their school life.

Noor writes Eid the Norwegian way as 'id', with small letters and without the E. This is an example of the effects of Norwegian normalizations on spelling. Not only spelling has been Norwegianized by the processes of migration and diaspora as these affect Islam in the west. Although religious compromises are few when the preschool is called a Muslim preschool, the compromises are huge when the preschool is not Muslim. In her preschool Noor is called Auntie, for example. In another preschool without the descriptor of 'Muslim' she would not. Nor could she celebrate Eid/id in the ways she would like to.

Suada wrote the next narrative in Bosnian. She was at the time of writing the only one of the practitioners who knew this language, yet it was important that she read it aloud and we listened. After that she told us in Norwegian what she had written, so that we who do not know Bosnian understood her narrative. In this Muslim setting, there was respect for not only Suada's language but her practices of being a Bosnian Muslim/Auntie. The story is about her care with the youngest children. Here she interacts with ethnic Norwegian and Muslim families together, though none come from Bosnia. The two year old who speaks in the story has understood both Suada's Norwegian and the situation. The bionotes she wrote for our co-authored book say the following: Suada moved to Norway together with her family because of the war. She is now a grandmother, likes sport and goes skiing and paragliding with her husband quite often. Suada wears hijab at all times in public. She is a qualified preschool teacher in Bosnia, and is professionally experienced in Bosnian work with children aged from three to six. At the time of writing this narrative she had just begun paid work in Norway.

*Jednoga dana bili smo vani sa djecom da se igramo. Posle igre djeca su usla unutra da se odmone, i tada sam ja njima objasnila da djeca moraju sad da legnu, da se odmaraju, da bi posle mogli ustati odmorni. Za nase tijelo je jako vazan odmor. tada sam ja rekla njima "sad je vrijeme za spavanje, sva djeca moraju leci i spavati", i ja sam im pjevala pjesmicu da bi bolje zaspali. sva su djeca legla, samo jedna djevojčica sto se zove Selma nije htjela spavati, i ona je ustala i uzela jednu lutku. S njom je pocela ponavljati moje rijeci koje sam ja uputila djeci. Tada je ona rekla: "sad je vrijeme za spavanje, sva djeca moraju spavati, da bi kasnije mogli biti odmorni i raspoloženi.*

*Today we have been outside playing for a long time. After being very active the children came inside to sit down and some to sleep. They were so tired and they need a breathing spell. I explained to them how we were all going to lie down. [The practitioners usually lie down beside these young children until they are asleep. They stroke backs and sing, on mattresses on the floor.] I said to them, "Now it is sleep time. All the children will lie down and sleep." All the children lay down, except one, who went and got a doll and said to it, "Now it is sleep time, all the children have to sleep."*

This story represents the shift Suada has made to another culture, another language and another workplace. Sending me an email with the Bosnian and the Norwegian versions of the narrative was one more step on the long road to 'cultural competence' in this new location as a Muslim 'Auntie' in a preschool.

Arjun Appadurai (1996; 9), writing of cultural dimensions of globalization, calls for a rupturing and subverting of what is contextual when this denies the rights of marginalized cultures and speakers. In 'producing locality ... in new globalised ways', by considering the effects of migration and media, he asks us to radically re-think what has mattered. If this advice is applied to pedagogies, and not only to languages, then those of dominant cultures must begin to re-think the ways their own pedagogies have operated to colonise others. For me, going into the Muslim preschools includes a suspension of what I might earlier have thought of as 'good practice'. Appadurai tells us (p. 19) 'the nation-state, as a complex modern political form, is on its last legs'. What postmodernity requests, he says (p. 158) is to 'think beyond the nation'. If this were applied to transnational pedagogy and practices with children, there would be huge changes; not just changes in the polite ways of addressing practitioners (as Aunties) and normalizing hijab and celebrations after Ramadan in work with the children.

The effects of the Islamic diaspora are felt throughout the so-called 'western' world. Not only Europe is affected by debates about hijab and whether or not the children might celebrate Eid. As a privileged academic I get to travel quite a lot and make presentations in various nations. After visiting Aotearoa/New Zealand, someone's conference paper proposal was sent to me electronically. This was conference paper was planned as a shared paper with one Somali and two non-Somali people in early childhood education. Here Hawohinda Jama (She gives permission to use her name) is firstly described as 'a refugee from Somalia'; then as 'in her last year of completing a Diploma in ECE'. The proposal says she 'will challenge us to think more deeply about inclusion and partnership, as a person from a "collectivist" culture trying to fit into an "individualist" cultural framework. There are many cross-cultural differences between Somalian [sic] and Pakeha cultures: non-verbal language, assumptions, expectations of education understandings of such things as cleanliness, discipline and the importance of play.' I note that there is no mention of anything Muslim and wonder if Hawohinda Jama is a Muslim or not. Maybe the cultural issues of coming from Somalia are what dominate her colleagues' agendas but not hers. Maybe my focus on Muslims means I can't see beyond this.

Muslims have been moving around the world for centuries, and not only recently. North India, for example, was Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist together for many many centuries before the British destroyed the Mughal Empire in 1857 (Dalrymple, 2006). Post 1970s migrations of Muslims to the west are quite another matter, as movements cause new practices to blur with the traditional. From www I got much information in English about what is happening globally. These websites point to pedagogical and religious work by Muslim practitioners of

child care and teaching. From China, the following advertises a Muslim kindergarten that is not in 'the west' but further east. The text comes from the Chinese newspaper *People Daily* (12.10.04), written for readers of English: 'First Muslim Kindergarten set up in China's poorest area' says its headline. Then:

A high-grade Muslim kindergarten opened Monday in the remote mountainous Tongxin County, one of China's poorest areas, in northwest China's [Ningxia](#) Hui Autonomous Region. Children will receive education in Chinese, English and Arabic at the kindergarten, which is furnished with modern teaching equipment, said Ma Ling, head of the kindergarten. "Though there have been some kindergartens in the area, none of them meets the state standards in teaching and hardware resources. My husband and I decided to invest 4.65 million yuan (560,240 US dollars) to build the kindergarten," said Ma. "The money comes from the profits of our family farm. We might have spent it on larger houses or better cars, but it prickled us when seeing so many people still struggling in poverty at my hometown," Ma said. ([http: English.peopledaily.com](http://English.peopledaily.com))

This raises the question of what an institution for care and children's learning actually is, and how cultural and geographic locations construct different practices (Rhedding-Jones, 2001; 2007). The fact that Arabic is on this kindergarten's agenda indicates the presence of Muslims, so here Chinese Islam is making a difference to practice. The Chinese children will presumably be learning at least the key Arabic words within Islam eg *Assalam alykumum* as a greeting, and *inshallah* meaning 'if Allah wills it'. There is no mention of any such Arabic in the co-written proposal sent from New Zealand. From Germany though there is evidence of Muslims working in Muslim practice with children, not posing as normalised non-Muslim Germans, or simply as ex-nationals of somewhere else. The following came up when I googled looking for a language I could read.

Kindergartens and [daily mothers](#) in Germany and Austria. Please you announce us further Muslim kindergartens in the German-speaking countries. [Information from Berlin follows. This English is preceded by German, which I can't read.] The group of plays takes place in the Islamic center in Duesseldorf inschaAllah each Tuesday until Thursday in each case from 9:30 clock to 12:30 clock. The support is taken over of a Palestinian sister with training as a Kindergärtnerin. The group is kindergarten-similarly ... in an Islamic environment with Islamic education and Arab learning. We can accept still children inschaAllah. [Names and addresses of kindergartens follow in Karlsruhe, Munich, Münster, Ruesselsheim, Wiesbaden and Vienna].

In the UK a 'day nursery' advertises itself on the web as 'Noor Islam Pre-school, London.' I know the name Noor because it was chosen by the first practitioner whose story is quoted in this chapter. After a while the Muslim names begin to become familiar to those who have not grown up as Muslims, and these names are found internationally. Still looking for traces of Muslim global practice I read about a new Islamic preschool in Ohio USA. Here is its advertisement:

Al Ihsan Preschool in USA

The first Islamic preschool in northeast Ohio. Fully licensed by the Ohio Department of Education. Full day and half day programs are available. Registration is open for the second session. For more information, please contact ...

From Melbourne Australia three Islamic schools informed the public in 2006 about their activities and what it is they affirm. I quote some of this further into the chapter. This information is not specifically about preschooling, so I assume it is for children over the age of six. As some websites are culturally sensitive and subject to terrorist attacks I shall not give them out. The Australian cyberspace sites have since been removed from the web, as has the information about Muslim 'home [as school] education in Australia'. The latter said:

The Muslim Home Education Network hopes to provide information and support on the viable and responsible option of Home Schooling, theoretically and practically. (insha'Allah) Whether you are new to home schooling or an "old hand", we are sure you will find something of interest in the articles presented below. Also, if you have any articles on home schooling or indeed are interested in being involved with the Muslim Home Education Network please email us, the more people get involved the more ideas and resource sharing we can do, the more opportunities our kids will have. Insha'Allah. The Muslim Home Education Team would like to suggest that you be very careful with all links provided here - many unfortunately contain resources or activities which may be against our way of life.  
(www. Site now removed for safety reasons)

What I am trying to do here is build some complex pictures of who works with children in Muslim settings in a range of nations. In doing this, traces of how the work is done, and how it differs from place to place, come through the text extracts. Two English Muslim practitioners I met in the course of this project are Hawwa Haide and Saira (whose surname I do not know). They give permission for their names and the following notes of mine to be published.

At the end of my two days of visits to the Muslim nursery school in an English city I meet Hawwa Haide, the managing director of the centre. She gives me her card, tells me her name in English means Eve. She is as Anglo as I am, but wearing full black hijab including head covering. She says I can write down what she says about being Muslim and working in a Muslim centre, she would like to be quoted. "This is like a home from home." "They say it's multicultural [the work in English nursery schools are not Muslim] and they believe they are working with cultural diversity. But it's Christian based. [In contrast] we project our Islamic values onto others." I'm quietly reading the children's books in the bookcorner. *Amir and the Ants* is the third book in a Muslim nature series, written by Rowaa El-Magazy. The series 'explores the scientific and spiritual wonders of Allah's creation.' As I handwrite this, Saira, who works with the children, comes up to me and says "It's good to work in mixed environments. I came here because I need a job and I hoped to get this one. I also do child minding at home, until I get qualified. I'm doing my level 2 now. I got level 2 in 2000 and level 3 in 2003. It's kind of good here. All our staff speak different languages. It's really good working in a Muslim environment. We feel at home, you know. I don't know what to say about that. I don't mind if you put my real name in the book. I work from home and have my own business minding children now." [She's part time here and part-time there]

This section about Muslim practitioners has presented some whose situations are more global than diasporic. The Chinese Muslims, for example, are not immigrants. Islam moved into China and Chinese communities in other Asian countries many centuries ago. The ethnic English who are Muslims have not migrated either, but have been affected by the migrations

of others. A related concept to diaspora therefore, is globalisation. There are also complex connections between globalisation, transnationalism and transmigration (Adams and Kirova, 2006; 8) as identities formed within them are ‘fluid and open to transformation’. Here immigrant children often have highly conflicting discourses in their homes and in their schools, say these researchers. In contrast, Muslim parents in Oslo Norway say that having a *barnehage* that functions as a community house, with practitioners speaking the many languages of the families, who share the Islamic faith and practices, and who know what it is to shift around the world and become different, is a great blessing.

### ‘Aunties’ as (non)professionals

This paper troubles the concept of professionalism in early childhood education. It does so by problematising the term ‘Auntie’. In Aotearoa/new Zealand (Ritchie, 2008) it is a normalized practice for the Māori practice of calling the teacher-carers. In Muslim preschools in the west the women who work there are called, as a term of politeness and also to show that the family matters. For Norwegians and Swedes this term is not acceptable to today’s educated preschool teachers, though before the 1970s the women who worked with young children were called *tante* which is Scandinavian (Swedish, Norwegian and Danish) for Auntie. In England, in the Muslim nursery school introduced above, the word Khala was said a lot, before the name of each of the women practitioners. At this nursery school the only language spoken was English, except for this word Khala and some Arabic words I had learned in Oslo. Guessing that Khala might be Arabic for Auntie, I asked if this was so. And yes, they could not use the English word because that would be forbidden. So they simply said Auntie in a language the non-Muslim English would not know. What mattered most was professionalism, though what was Muslim mattered also. Here the Muslims were non-Arabs, mostly from Bangladesh, but the holy Qur’an is written in Arabic and they knew much of this.

The next Auntie to write in this paper is Isnina, who migrated from Somalia and learned to write in Somali language before moving to Norway. There was no written Somali until 1970, when the Roman alphabet was selected for it. Now Isnina writes better Norwegian than Somali, but she wants Somali published so that other Somali people can see it and value it. Our collaboratively written book (Rhedding-Jones, Nordli and Tanveer, 2010) with its tales from practice is written by the practitioners, with their writing becoming a textual politics stemming from the preschool. Here is Isnina. Like everyone else she chose her pseudonym for its links to her own family history. My name in our book is Harriet, the name of two of my migrant great-grandmothers who went to Australia from England in the 1850s.

*Maalin maalmaha kamid ah ayaan u fariisanay in aan cunteyno markii ey ilmaha soo dhaadeen gacmaha kadib oo ey boosaskoodi soo fariisteen kadib ayaan waxaan bilaawney eedooyinkeena meesha ka shaqeeye in aan caruurta caana u shubshubno oo an ilmaha qaar u baahnaa in wax loo soo qandiciyo aan. Ilmaha badan kood waxey bilaabeen in ey cuntadoodii furtaan oo ey conteeyaan. Muda yar kadib ayaa waxaa isheyda qabatay wiil yar oo iska fadhiya oo aan cantadiisii furan. Wiilkii baan utagay waxaan kudhahay maxaa kugu dhacay oo aad cuntadaada ufuran weyday oo aad u bilaabi weysay in aad cunto waxuu iigu jawaabay ducadii mannagaa akhrinay, taas oo caado noo ahayd. Waxaan kudhahay aad ayaad u mahadsantahay waaxaan ku jeestay ilmahii kaloo dhan waxaa kudhahay waan iloownay manta ducadii waxaa na xasuusiyey hebel waxaana nagu filan hada in aan dhahno bismi laah waanasii wadan kartaan cuntadiina. Waxaan u jeestay wiilkii xagiisa waxaan ku dhahay adiga*

*sidoo kale waa cunteyn kartaa. Wuu ii dhoolacadeeyey kadib ayuuna furtay cuntadiisa.*

One day we sat down to eat, all the children had been to wash their hands and they came back to their places. The Aunties began to help them with their milk, and some of the children began to eat from their lunch boxes. After a while I went to a boy who had not yet opened his lunch box, I went up to him and I asked him why he had not started. The little boy answered that he had not read the dua [the prayer] before eating. I thanked him for reminding us, then I turned around to the other children and said we had forgotten to say the prayer and he had reminded us. So I said Bismillah [the prayer] then, aloud. Then I said they could all now begin to eat. The boy smiled so broadly as he opened his lunch packet and began to eat.

Here Isnina uses the Arabic words for the Muslim practices to do with praying. At the same time her narrative shows what kind of relationship she has with the children as their teacher-carer (practitioner). At that time she was employed as an assistant to the woman who has an undergraduate education in early childhood education. Isnina uses the polite address for the women who work in these ways in this preschool. They call themselves Aunties, following Muslim norms and gendered namings. The few men who work here (as preschool owner, driver or cleaner) are cheerfully called Uncle. Isnina is *Tante* Isnina, Noor is *Tante* Noor, Suada is *Tante* Suada. *Tante/Auntie/Khala* is not only a polite form of address. It is also a familiar title of address: Here ‘familiar’ means ‘family’. In refusing to allow Muslims to call practitioners *Auntie*, non-Muslims are able to denigrate Muslim practice in early childhood education to the level of the non-professional. In theory this exemplifies a binary split and its effects of an hierarchical valuing of family/non-family. Non-family, read as professional, rates higher. Accordingly, family is read as comprising of persons not knowing about pedagogy, curriculum or theorized care. My positioning complicated matters, as the children decided after they got to know me, to call me *Tante* Jeanette. This was fine by me. As a Professor in early childhood education I could hardly be seen as a non-professional; but I could be seen as just playing with the children when I visited, and not really doing the real research which should be the work of a real professor. The problem of such non-research was got around by calling the project a development project, but that is a matter for research methodology to grapple with. The concern of this paper is the effects in the Islamic diaspora of the term *Auntie*.

Bina, who wrote first in Urdu by hand in one of our writing workshops, used the term *Auntie* when she quoted what a four year old child said to her about her relationship with him. Bina has worked as an assistant for over ten years in Norway and speaks Norwegian fluently, though it is not perfect. After hand-writing the Urdu in one of our multi-language writing workshops, she copied it out by hand in Norwegian. After that Bushra’s mother put the Urdu into a computer file, in the Urdu alphabet, which like Arabic is read from the right. I would argue that all of this is a professional practice, despite the fact that Bina is an ‘uneducated assistant’ and that she calls herself an *Auntie*. The Norwegian is bypassed here, for readers who must have the Urdu in English.

یہ ایک نارویجن بچے کے بارے میں ہے جو ایک بچوں کے سکول میں پہلی جماعت میں جاتا ہے، لیکن وہ پہلے بارنے ہاگن جاتا تھا، جو پسند کرتا تھا کہ میں اسے لے کر نارویجن میں کتاب پڑھوں۔ جب وہ کتا میں پڑھتا تھا تو اسکو شور بالکل پسند نہیں تھا۔ ایک دن اس نے مجھ سے کہا کہ آنتی بیبا “ میں آپکو پڑھنے کیلئے کہتا ہوں کیونکہ میں آپکا استاد بنوں گا، آپکو نوشک سکھاؤں گا۔ ”

میں محسوس کرتی ہوں کہ اُسکے کہنے کا یہ انداز بہت پر لطف تھا۔ لیکن یہ حقیقت ہے کہ ہم غیر ملکی ایک اجنبی زبان کے سیکھنے میں بہت وقت لگاتے ہیں۔ مزید اس نے کہا کہ ”میں تمہارا دوست ہوں“ تب میں نے مسکراتے ہوئے اس سے پوچھا، ”کہ کیا میں تمہاری بہترین دوست ہوں؟“ ”نہیں“ اس نے بے ساختہ کہا اور وضاحت کی کہ انسان کا بہترین دوست ایک ہی ہوتا ہے جس کے ساتھ وہ اپنے راز بانٹ سکتا ہے۔

This is about an ethnic Norwegian child who is now in the first grade at school. He went to this preschool before that, and he liked me to read books to him, in Norwegian. He was very quiet when we read books. One day he said to me, “Tante Bina, I want you to read for me so that I can be your teacher, I will teach you Norwegian.” I think that was so wonderful, the way he said that. We immigrants have to use much time to try to learn this foreign language. Then he continued, “I am your friend.” I teased him a bit. “And am I your best friend?” “No” he said, and then explained that you only have a best friend when you share your secrets.

What Bina points to here is not only her Auntie relationship which blends pedagogy, care and family values. She also says what an ethnic Norwegian child says he will do to help her perfect her Norwegian reading. Ethnic Norwegians, who usually speak only Norwegian, are very much in the minority in this Muslim preschool. There are some ethnic Norwegian parents who are Muslims (reverts), married to a spouse not born in Norway (and who might speak Arabic as a first language). The next section focuses on some ethnic Norwegian families where both mother and father were born in Norway and are not Muslims.

### Non-Muslim families

Some non-Muslim families in Norway want their children to grow up learning about cultural, religious and linguistic differences. They know that their children will learn in the preschool about Islam, whilst at the same time their children will know that their families are outside this faith but respectful of it. One such mother is Synnøve (pseudonym) who sent the following to me on email, specifically for publication in Norwegian and in my English translation which she has verified.

*Hei! Dette med tanter og kjærlighet er nok det vi liker aller best med [denne]barnehagen. I tillegg til at Jo får en fantastisk forståelse og naturlig forhold til det at folk er forskjellige, Jeg har lyst til å dele en liten samtale jeg hadde med Jo for omtrent ett år siden, da han var to. Jeg synes denne lille praten taler for seg selv, samtidig som den er et av mange eksempler på hvorfor vi er så strålende fornøyd med de kjære "tantene" i barnehagen.*

*"Jeg elsker deg, mamma", sa Jo en dag. Jeg ble litt forundra, for vi hadde ikke brukt dette ordet. Jeg lurte selvfølgelig på hvor han hadde lært dette. Var det via Beste? Så jeg spurte ham om det var noen andre han elsket, og antok at jeg med svaret ville få vite hvem som hadde lært ham det. "Tante Beren", svarte Jo.*

Hi! All this about Aunties and love [another word the Aunties use a lot but which is not considered 'professional' enough by Norwegians] is what we like best in [this] preschool. Also Jo [her son aged three] gets a fantastic understanding and learns in a natural way that people are different. I want to share a little conversation I had with Jo

about a year ago when he was two. I think this little chat speaks for itself, at the same time it is one of many examples of why we [she and Jo's father] are so especially pleased with the dear "Aunties" in [this] preschool.

"I love you, Mummy", said Jo one day. I was a bit surprised, because we hadn't used this word. I wondered of course where he had learned it. Did he get it from his grandmother? So I asked him if there was anyone else he loved, and assumed that with his answer I would find out who had used this word with him. "Tante Beren", he said.

Jo has learned not only the word from Tante/Auntie Beren. He has also learned the concept, at the age of two, from a Muslim practitioner. Knowing the concept he can then apply it to his mother, who he knows he also loves. Here then are twisted discourses of family and professionalism. Beren is educated in Norway as a preschool practitioner. She speaks her heritage language which is Turkish and she is the mother of two small boys. Her Norwegian education for the profession would certainly not have included anything called love or anyone Auntie. What she does in the Muslim context of the Muslim preschool is resist her Norwegian education here, asserting instead her Muslim identity as a woman in diaspora. It took a non-Muslim mother to write this about the place of love and of Aunties as they connect to it. Synnøve knows that love matters and is delighted that her child is learning this from his Muslim Aunties. She chose to write this for publication because she wants to support the professionalism of the Aunties/practitioners and she knows that the family (including Aunties) is quite often assumed to be lacking in appropriate knowledge, arts and skills as these relate to childhood.

A letter that two non-Muslim parents sent to one of the Aunties shows further the support such parents are giving to the Muslims. Amina [pseudonym], who got the letter, showed it very proudly to me. Later they wrote her another letter, perhaps after they were sure she was comfortable reading Norwegian.

Dear Amina,  
Thank you so much for taking such care of our son Per [pseudonym]. With you we know that he is always in the very best of hands. We are all going to miss you so much now. We hope we can soon see you again.  
Have a great summer,  
Hugs from Per, Ragnvald and Inge [pseudonyms]

Later they wrote again. Amina kept these notes as signs that she values. It was her idea to copy them for publication; she wants them published in a book.

Dear Amina,  
We didn't get to give you the flowers and the card because you were away sick. We thought we would visit you at home but time has got away from us. Anyway we are sending you another card now and thanking you so very much for all you did with Per. He just loved being with you. Now he is a big strong boy [in another preschool] and he is very clever to run and eat up all his dinner [He is aged two]. He can say quite a lot more words and he is learning many things all the time ... but he thought it was tough to begin in another preschool. [They moved away] He really misses you, and at the start [in his new preschool] he would only be with a woman who was wearing hijab and speaking Arabic. [Here the parents have drawn a smiling face on their card] Hope everything is going really well for all the people in ... [the name of the

preschool unit]. We are going to come and visit you soon. Say a big hello from us to Suada and Mona [Amina's colleagues in the barnehage].  
Hugs from Per, Ragnvald and Inge

There are not many non-Muslim families whose children attend this preschool. Mostly their children are aged two or three. After that, when the children are more verbal and the more explicit instruction about Islam starts, the non-Muslim family mostly send their children somewhere else. An exception was Maria, whose mother is Polish and who kept Maria in this preschool until she started school at the aged of six. "Such a wonderful start she has had", Maria's mother told me (in Norwegian) at the preschool's summer party when Maria was six. "We will really miss this place and all the Aunties who know these children so well and teach them and care for them so wonderfully." I have not heard how Maria got on at school (the summer party was a year ago; when I first met Maria she was three) but it is fairly certain she would not there get the care and understanding the Aunties gave her. Eating pork sausage in the preschool, for Maria, was quite acceptable, as the Aunties simply explained to the other children that Maria was different. Everyone accepted that she ate what was *haram* (forbidden) to Muslims, and no problems.

This paper aims to point not to individual Aunties but to collective identity as this is constructed in Muslim preschools. For women who now work in private but state funded Muslim preschooling in the west, this collective identity (Anthias, 2002) is complex. Cultural, religious and national locations construct practices of difference as education and care for the young. Muslim women, discourses and positioning enable children in England and in Norway, in private nursery schools and *barnehager*, to take up or acknowledge Islam because of the women practitioners, for whom it is a way of life (Rhedding-Jones, forthcoming 2011).

Looking at this theoretically, the shift in focus of identity to religion is an unacknowledged category of inequality, a marked binary and a construct of subjectivity. There is not space in this paper to go into these, only to name them. What work with Muslims does is negate ethnicity because Muslims in the diaspora (Hall, 2000) move across ethnic, national and linguistic borders. Identity however is not negated, as having a Muslim identity (Haddad and Smith, 2003) is central, regardless of what postmodern academics may think of essentialism. It is not for a non-Muslim to theorize Islam and the effects of postmodernity as in diaspora and identity. Instead I name some critical issues. These as I see them regard firstly diasporic communities and religion; secondly, Aunties as an unacceptable term; thirdly, governing religion in 'multicultural' management; and fourthly, communities, variation and religious identity. I deal with each in turn, making use of academic references to extend the theorizing.

### **Diasporic communities and religion**

In the work I have been doing over the last four years with Muslims the question of identity has never been suggested by Muslims. This may be because being a Muslim or a non-Muslim is a given, not a positioning to be negotiated or even articulated in verbal forms. It may also be because our conversations are conducted in our only common language, which is Norwegian. In our efforts to speak this language with each other, much of the complex remains linguistically unspeakable. That Muslims in Norway are living the realities of the Islamic diaspora is not in doubt. Anyone who has migrated knows about blurring past

practices with present necessities, heritage languages with that of the new nation, and previously unquestioned cultural normalizations with other ways of acting and being. To now consider identity, and to re-read Hall, with Muslims in Norwegian preschools in mind, is to think also about my own positioning as a non-Muslim and an immigrant to Norway who has been befriended by followers of Islam.

It is clear that in the case of Muslims who have migrated to Norway, their heritage nation and language continues at the same time as their adoptions and transformations of Norwegian practices and language. They are thus positioned in Norway as Tsolidias says:

‘diasporic communities are understood not as stranded minorities, but as providing, through the lived experience of their members, insights into cultural production as it occurs in both of the locations they function between’ (Tsolidias 2001; 114)

What is known only by these Muslims is how they are positioned in their heritage nations of Kurdistan, Tunisia and Morocco. They do return each year for holidays, Muslim burials, marriages of their adult children who are Norwegian citizens, and the child care of their extended families’ offspring, who eagerly await their visit, I am told. Having religion as the springboard for all that happens means the Aunties are appropriate as family child carers during their holidays, because of what they have learned in Norway, and what they have not forgotten about Islam and the nation from which they migrated or escaped.

### **Aunties as an unacceptable term**

For Muslims in early childhood education in Norway and England being a Muslim is said to be more important than anything else, including heritage or former nation. It is the blurring of the new nation and the continuing religion that is interesting from the point of view of identity, diaspora and gender. As the practitioners are almost without exception women, this gives them the honorary title of Auntie. This title however is unacceptable to English and Norwegian pedagogy, and ideas of what counts as professional practice. So in England the Aunties have given themselves the Arabic name of Khala (transliteration to the Roman alphabet from the Arabic alphabet) which the English appear to not know about. In Norway the Aunties are safely in their own private preschool (barnehage) and not saying or writing Auntie outside it. We are not allowed to publish this word in our Norwegian book (Rhedding-Jones, Nordli and Tanveer, 2010) as our Norwegian publisher tells us Norwegian early childhood education people would not buy the book with this non-professional word in it. Accordingly we have had to erase the word and leave the Muslims women without this title of politeness. Yet no child in the Norwegian Muslim preschool who is of speaking age would dream of not calling the practitioners Tante/Auntie. But in our book they just say the first names when they address the practitioners.

All of this can be seen as connected to what Beck calls in newspaper article ‘waves of social unrest and anti-immigrant sentiment [that] are already washing over Europe’ (Beck, 2009; 19). Here the resistance of what Muslim appearance, but non-Muslims in the west, makes itself felt in the rejection of the Aunties. These must be normalized to become just like all the other Norwegians practising in the preschools. In fact these Aunties are Norwegian citizens and speak fluent Norwegian, in addition to many other languages that are in use every day in the

preschool. They are Norwegian citizens because they have to be. You can not move to Norwegian as a refugee or as a free ‘settler’ without Norwegian citizenship unless you have a valid reason (like mine: I live in a relationship with a Norwegian so am able to stay an Australian). By inserting my own story occasionally I hope to widen the debate to let other points of view and other examples into the discussion: namely that not being a Muslim is a lot easier than being one in the west. Here Beck points to what he calls the cosmopolitan era, where, region matters more than nation. ‘The unit of political action in the cosmopolitan era is no longer the nation but the region’. (Beck 2009; 19) If this is so then the matter of citizenship becomes, as I am showing, sometimes a farce. For identity, the cosmopolitan citizen matters more than the nation of heritage of residence. This applies in both my own case and in that of the Muslim Aunties.

### **Governing religion in ‘multicultural’ management**

As the title of this paper says, there *are* Muslim women in western preschooling. Excluded from positions of relative power (in higher education) and mostly working as assistants to teachers educated to work with young children, the women I have come to know are positioned to practise their religion in the work they do. Here their Muslim identities are made manifest by the eating of halal food, the wearing of hijab, the recitations from the Qur’an, particular ablutions and regular praying, the adults’ daytime fasting during Ramadan, and the celebrations of Eid. Moreover, such Muslim identities are passed on to Muslim children in these private preschools, and acknowledged and understood by the non-Muslim children and adults there. Examples here include the singing of Muslim children’s songs and the non-representation of persons and animals in children’s art. Norway has two such preschools (*barnehager*) which operate with state and private funding combined, and which follow the re-writing of particular clauses of the national Curriculum Frameworks (*Kunnskapsdepartementet*, 2006) plan so that Islam may be practiced instead of Christianity or the lack of religion. Such *barnehager* also operate in Sweden as Muslim/Swedish institutions, in England as Muslim/English, and in China as Muslim/Chinese. In New Zealand Muslims from Somalia have set up play groups for young children but these are called Somali not Muslim play groups, presumably because it is former nation not religion that is uppermost in the minds of those funding these. Yes all of this appears to have come not from institutions that would ‘manage’ religious difference, but from those who are concerned about the differences and want them positioned as acceptable. Here the term ‘multicultural’ is not used, presumably because of its overtones of neo-liberalism, management strategies and normative agendas. Relatedly, Hall says:

‘Like other related terms – for example, “race”, ethnicity, identity, diaspora – multiculturalism is not so discursively entangled that it can only be used “under erasure”. ... multicultural is used adjectivally ... multiculturalism is substantive. It references the strategies and policies adopted to govern or manage the problems of diversity and multiplicity which multi-cultural societies throw up.’ (Hall, 2000; 219)

The question then becomes: Who should be governing the Muslims in the west? In the case of the Muslim preschools Muslims govern themselves, whilst still following the rulings and mandates of their new nations of citizenship. Such preschools, however, are rare. What can be the future for Muslim children in the west, given the difficulties and the complexities of who is positioned to work as a practising Muslim with them?

## Communities and religious identity

What this chapter points to takes critical multicultural matters (Rhedding-Jones, 2010) beyond matter of curriculum and care in early childhood education. It does so to consider how religion matters to identity: the identities of Muslim women who have migrated to the west and who now work in institutions for young children. In such a preschool, religious identity is fostered and respected because the preschool itself is a community for the children and adults who are there every day. Having “Aunties” there makes it into a kind of family. What is happening here seems to be as Stuart Hall says, where:

‘Maintaining racialized, ethno-cultural and religious identities is clearly important to self-understanding in these communities. “Blackness” is as critical to third-generation Afro-Caribbeans’ identity as the Hindu or Muslim faiths are to some second-generation “Asians”. ... there is very considerable variation, both of commitment and of practice, between and within different communities – between different nationalities and linguistic groups, within religious faiths, between men and women, and across the generations. ... Identities declare not some primordial identity but rather a positional choice of the group with which they wish to be associated. Identity choices are more political than anthropological, more “associational, less ascribed”.

(Quotes are from Madood et al 1997, in Hall, 2000; 220. The underlining is mine)

For Muslims in the west, languages, pedagogical practices and Islam make a difference in the nations to which they have migrated and become citizens. These are effects of the recent Islamic diaspora, when wars and deprivation caused mass migrations. For Muslim women who now work in private but state funded Muslim preschooling in the west, collective identity (Anthias, 2002) is complex. Cultural, religious and national locations construct practices of difference as education and care for the young. Hence Muslim children in England and Norway are discursively positioned in private nursery schools and barnehager to take up or acknowledge Islam because of the women practitioners, for whom it is a way of life. Non-Muslim children here are also learning about Islam and that their families are outside it but respectful of it. This chapter aimed to shift the focus of identity (Hall, 1996; Hall and Du Gay 1996) to religion as an unacknowledged category of inequality, a marked binary and a construct of subjectivity. What work with Muslims does is negate ethnicity because Muslims in the diaspora (Hall, 2000) move across ethnic, national and linguistic borders. Identity however is not negated, as having a Muslim identity (Haddad and Smith, 2003) is central, regardless of what postmodern academics may think of essentialism.

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