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Walking on Uneven Paths : the Transcultural Experience of Migrant Children in France and Ireland

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DUBLIN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY



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REFERENCE ONLY

Walking On Uneven Paths:
The Transcultural Experience of Migrant Children
In France and Ireland

Rossella Ragazzi

This Thesis is submitted to the Dublin Institute of Technology in
Candidature for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

November 2005

School of Media
Faculty of Applied Arts

Supervisor: Dr Áine O'Brien

Summary

This thesis foregrounds the application of anthropological documentary methods and ethnographic investigation in examining the world of child immigrants and the cross-cultural dilemmas they encounter upon entering the formal educational system of the 'host' country – in this case, a primary school setting in Dublin and Paris. The specificity of the primary school classroom as an ethnographic site facilitates a sustained audio-visual examination of immigrant children as they work to re-build their identities in a new and unfamiliar environment. Such a richly textured space opens up potential avenues of exploration for the researcher: what, for example, can intercultural pedagogy learn from the child who is dealing with two or more languages and for whom the past and present have been unexpectedly and irreversibly transformed? How are embodied cultural memories from the past carried and expressed in the immediate present? How are the values of the 'host' culture transmitted and what pressures, if any, are placed on immigrant children to prematurely verbalise their personal stories? How do immigrant children dramatisate between themselves and with their teachers the conflicted dynamics of their cultural transformation? How does the cinematic process generate a milieu for young migrant actors to be multi-vocal?

The thesis comprises five chapters together with an introduction and a conclusion. Chapter one provides a critical overview of the concept of childhood and the role of migrant children's agency in the construction of a transcultural identity. Drawing on a number of scholars in cultural anthropology, visual anthropology and cultural studies, the chapter elaborates and explains certain terms and concepts used throughout the thesis: the 'transcultural;' the 'anthropology of experience' and 'cross-cultural ethnographic film practice'. Simultaneously the chapter introduces the role of the DVD artefact as an essential and integrated component of the thesis throughout, offering the reader a viewing source of all moving image material, referenced in each of the five chapters. Chapter two introduces film fieldwork conducted in a primary school in Paris in which migrant children, newly arrived in France, and who do not speak French are compelled to learn the language, since it is a compulsory requirement for integration into the French school system. The thematic and critical concepts of this chapter include: the post-colonial school system in France, the effects of linguistic assimilation, the tropes of observational cinema, migrant children's experience of intercultural modes of communication and the role of the somatic in the acquisition of new languages and cultural practices. Chapter three functions as the main field site in the dissertation, comprising the core ethnographic work conducted in a mono-denominational primary school, in the inner city of Dublin. Juxtaposing classrooms (in Paris and Dublin), a contrast is created between two European models of 'multicultural' education and cultural integration. Divided into five sections, chapter three includes thematic and critical concepts, such as observational participant cinema, storytelling and personal memory, transcultural pedagogy, the role of religion, the cultural life of Irish educators, and the role of multicultural literacy. The fourth chapter engages with the subject of a migrant domestic sphere, conducting visual fieldwork with an Algerian family recently reunified in Ireland. The thematic and critical concepts of this chapter include the politics of the migrant domestic space, intergenerational tensions, the practice of cinema-vérité, the cultural politics shaping Algerian and Berber minorities, the construction of adolescence and the performance of migration and memory. The fifth and final chapter merges storytelling with an anthropological analysis of migrant children's stories. Thematic and critical concepts throughout this concluding chapter include: memory and remembrance; childhood strategies of agency and resistance; the politics of heteroglossia; children's everyday lived experience, the role of participant cinema and the interview.

I certify that this thesis which I now submit for examination for the award of PhD, is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

This thesis was prepared according to the regulations for postgraduate study by research of the Dublin Institute of Technology and has not been submitted in whole or in part for an award in any other Institute or University.

The work reported on in this thesis conforms to the principles and requirements of the Institute's guidelines for ethics in research.

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This study has literally and physically traversed a multiplicity of arenas, which mirror my various cultural affiliations, linguistic backgrounds and academic allegiances.

In the arenas where knowledge was produced first hand, by collaborating with the social actors, I have realized how timely and necessary the study was for those who were the real, main contributors of the study: the children (and subsequently parents, caregivers and teachers to them connected). These persons confirmed that I should not demoralize, even if sometimes I could not see anymore why I was confused and where I was heading. Among the social actors who exposed themselves in a generous way, far beyond our initial agreement, I also wish to acknowledge particularly Tahar and his family, Pascale Lantéri, Liz Morris and Alfa Bâ. Both teachers in Ireland and France and all their pupils have outstandingly supported this study. My gratitude goes to all of them first and foremost.

Concerning the academic arenas where I grew up, I wish to mention that the foundations of this study began somewhat during my undergraduate education, longtime ago, when I was a student in *glottologia* and sociolinguistic with professor Giorgio Raimondo Cardona (1943-1987) at Rome University. His teaching and scholarly qualities had a great impact on me, even when he told he did not support my choice of studying and practicing ethnographic film as instrument of research. Nevertheless, I explored film for social scientific research with the same care as for any art praxis. Yet, Cardona was the only one who made me seriously thinking about remaining exclusively in textual-verbal scholarship in order to direct my energies in one main medium. I wish to acknowledge him, even if, alas, he will never know and read this study, for he prematurely died, leaving many 'academic orphans' behind him.

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Dublin, 11.11.2005

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Introduction

This study is situated across interdisciplinary fields of inquiry, traversing cultural and visual anthropology, cultural studies and migration studies. A central focus within the research is both the thematic and problematic of migration and childhood. The research aims to offer a distinctive critical perspective from which to analyse the multiple forms of agency and the social challenges facing migrant children entering Europe in the 21st century. A distinguishing feature in this work is the integration of a cross-cultural cinematic practice with textual ethnographic analysis; this practice-led research thus provides an empirically led and evidenced-based analysis on the subject of migrant children in Paris and Dublin and within the field of migration studies.

In chapter one I define the ground in which my doctoral research has developed over the past three years, primarily in the context of classroom fieldwork in Dublin, and prior to this in Paris, where I conducted visual fieldwork in a primary school. The opening chapter serves as a critical overview of the concept of childhood with which I work with throughout the thesis and the role of migrant children's agency in the construction of migrant identities. I draw on a number of scholars in cultural anthropology, visual anthropology and cultural studies to elaborate and contextualise my use of certain terms and concepts: such as the 'transcultural;' the 'anthropology of experience' and 'cross-cultural ethnographic film practice'. I introduce the reader to the primary methodologies deployed throughout the dissertation, in particular focusing on the central role that visual ethnography plays in developing a critical and comparative analysis of migrant children as they make their way and walk the various pathways across the educational structures of the 'host' country. I provide a brief overview of the authors and films which have influenced my poetics and politics of

representation, concluding with an analysis of two film sequences which introduce the reader/viewer to both my working methodology (in Paris and Dublin) and the precise manner in which the DVD film archive functions as a thoroughly integrated part of the study, thus acting as an interface between the textual analysis and the filmic ethnography running throughout each chapter.

In chapter two I move back in time and direct the reader/spectator into a primary classroom in an inner city Parisian school. I locate the school for the reader, providing both an autobiographical summary of what led me to this research and also my situated perspective in the school itself. I outline the socio-political atmosphere in France (1997-1999) at that time and how the social actors of the study were inscribed in larger questions permeating within the public sphere: issues to do with new modes of citizenship, social class and civil inequality. A central part of this chapter is dedicated to one particular classroom as an enclave where migrant children who do not speak French are compelled to learn it quickly, since it is a compulsory requirement of the French school system. The thematics and critical concepts of this chapter include: the post-colonial school system in France, the effects of linguistic assimilation, the tropes of observational cinema and the everyday practices in a segregated classroom, migrant children's experience of intercultural modes of communication and the role of the somatic in the acquisition of new languages and cultural practices.

Chapter three builds on the research conducted in Paris and acts as a critical bridge directing the reader/viewer into a very different cultural environment. This chapter functions as the main field site of this study in that it comprises the core ethnographic

work conducted in a mono-denominational primary school, in the inner city of Dublin. I juxtapose these two classrooms (in Paris and Dublin) in order to create a contrast between two European models of education and cultural integration. The Irish site has a distinctive social texture in that it is made up of a mixed constituency of students, so called 'under-class' Irish 'natives' and new migrants, both experiencing disadvantaged social conditions. To begin with I introduce the debates addressing migration in Ireland and explain why this school was chosen as a representative laboratory for transcultural rather than intercultural education. This particular context, in which recent migrants are temporarily sheltered within the confines of the classroom and the surrounding urban environment creates a very different modality of interaction *between* migrant and non-migrant children and offers a very different perspective to the situation encountered in France. I describe in detail the unpredictable modalities in which the film fieldwork in Dublin was deployed, highlighting the dynamics of power within the school and the methodological adjustments that were made, by both me and the school staff, throughout the development and construction of this fieldwork. I then present an in-depth portrait of a particular classroom in the context of one particular teacher, along with her resource teachers; I also document the school year's activities with resident artists who worked with the children on various techniques of storytelling. Divided into roughly five sections the thematic and critical concepts of this chapter include: observational participant cinema, storytelling and personal memory, transcultural pedagogy, the role of religion, the cultural life of Irish educators, and the role of multicultural literacy.

In chapter four I follow one of the main social actors (whom I first met in this Primary school in Dublin) into his domestic sphere: I thus bring the reader/viewer into the

home of an Algerian family, whose father was an asylum seeker living in exile before family reunification brought his wife, his mother, his son, and daughters to join him in Ireland. Working with this family I had the unique opportunity to meet the child, his parents, grandparent and siblings at the beginning of their reunification and was therefore able to closely analyse their initial period of integration into Irish society. The chapter, in conjunction with the filmic material featured on the DVD, investigates the modalities in which cultural memories, values and class aspirations are displayed and performed by the family. I explore the gradual, nonetheless radical, changes of behaviour, aspirations and social opportunities expressed by the siblings over a two-year period, often working in counterpoint with their parents' perspectives.

The thematics and critical concepts of this chapter include: the politics of the migrant domestic space, intergenerational tensions, the practice of cinema-vérité, the cultural politics shaping Algerian and Berber minorities, the construction of adolescence and the performance of migration and memory.

Chapter five brings the thesis full circle by returning to the migrant children first encountered in Chapter Two in the classroom in Paris. In this final chapter, I merge storytelling with an anthropological analysis in an attempt to render these migrant children's identity in a more complex light. Through these stories, I aim to scrutinise and challenge definitions of cultural identity and the pitfalls of stereotyping the migrant child as a generic category through a careful, ethnographic, dialogue with the children; a dialogue in which their agency is articulated in the form of both personal recollections and a resistance through silence; through non-participation or vice versa through an intense articulation of their diverse and situated standpoints in an outspoken manner. The thematics and critical concepts throughout this final chapter

include: memory and remembrance; childhood strategies of agency and resistance; the politics of heteroglossia; children's everyday lived experience, the role of participant cinema and the interview.

The thesis conclusion closes the analysis with a brief reflection on the current political situation in France. For as I write this Introduction and reflect on my longitudinal visual fieldwork, I am obliged to think about the young social actors in the Parisian classroom and wonder about their present 'reality' as first generation immigrants in contemporary France. The conclusion thus raises questions about the future in the present in both Ireland and France, indeed across Europe, as we strive as researchers to better understand the everyday reality and 'habitus' of young migrant children, newly situated in the host country, perhaps dreaming of a more inclusive transcultural society in which they can eventually feel at 'home'.

Guidelines for Use of DVD

The DVD is designed as an essential and integrated component of the thesis, offering the reader a viewing source of all moving image material, referenced in each of the five chapters. The reader/viewer should therefore work closely with both text and DVD media content simultaneously. The cross-links to the DVD are embedded within chapters, designated by a corresponding numerical DVD reference (in bold). While appearing in sequential order, I will occasionally but rarely refer back to previously cited DVD references, retaining the numerical specificity of the cross-link. Double-clicking on the DVD's icon (compatible in all regions of the world and both for PC or Mac) launches the contents menu of the DVD in which the abstract, acknowledgements, main menu for accessing the chapter are presented; clicking on a

selected chapter activates a submenu containing the digital video clips. The contents menu and chapter submenus can be exited using the *menu* button on the remote control. Any clip can be quit at any moment by using the same button. There are five chapters corresponding to those of the written thesis.

Chapter One

Framing Migration and Childhood: An Anthropological Film Approach

Introduction

There are people who belong to more than one world, speak more than one language (literally and metaphorically), inhabit more than one identity, have more than one home; who have learned to negotiate and translate between cultures, and who, because they are irrevocably the product of several interlocking histories and cultures, have learned to live with, and indeed to speak from, difference. They speak from the 'in-between' of different cultures, always unsettling the assumptions of one culture from the perspective of another, and thus finding ways of being both the same as and at the same time different from the others amongst whom they live (Hall 1995: 206).

Migrant children who have been in transit for long periods, or who 'finally' reach a new country in which their families hope or simply need to stay, experience on the one hand, a 'geographical-cultural' shift, and on the other, by virtue of having entered an entirely different school system, a 'disciplinary-collective' one. It is in this context, often marked by long silent periods of observation and withdrawal or conversely by hyperactivity and anxiety, that a psychic and physical journey towards so-called adulthood occurs, as the children become integrated linguistically, come to understand norms of behaviour and develop the skills necessary if they are to find employment and social acceptance. Migrant children, like settled ones, are not a homogeneous group; if their parents or carers are temporary workers, travellers or nomads, asylum seekers or expatriates, the personal investment and expectations on them vary considerably, affecting their identity expressions in the host environment (Faulstich et al 2001).

How then do migrant children from non-European countries link their places of origin to their countries of destination? Are these concepts of 'origin' and 'destination' too narrow and can they be challenged? How do migrant children express, not only verbally, but in many other forms, from somatic to artistic expressions, their multiple identities and identifications? How do they perform when speaking different languages and how are they required to downplay their linguistic and communicative knowledge, which at times appears to be no longer useful in much the same way a currency becomes obsolete? How do migrant children access compulsory school and how are they received by the European educational system? How are they located as objects of study within educational practices connected to intercultural policies? How do migrant children experience being responsible for communicating and translating a 'family lexicon' in addition to a parental 'inexpressible', through acting as mediators between their family-members and their schools, often in the midst of misunderstanding and prejudice? (Castaneda 1996: 201-204; Piault 1986).

These questions have framed my research throughout the past three years (with regard to my doctoral research in Dublin) and two years prior to that (in fieldwork in Paris leading up to my doctoral fieldwork). During this period I have conducted research alongside and with migrant children and have focused on the political, symbolic and imaginative dimensions underlying the expression of transient or resettling acts (Clifford 1997) in their lives. These children have names, faces, lived experiences and stories. The manner in which they express these experiences is clear evidence of how they refuse to be essentialised as a generic social category. What I have witnessed first hand throughout this research is the emergence of a remembering and subtle re-articulation of diverse childhood

experiences, which have taken place both before and after these young boys and girls have come to their 'new home'.

My research focus, therefore, centres on the emergent intersubjective knowledge surrounding these sometimes hidden moments and comparative social conditions, experienced first hand by the children. My focus does not provide a macro-sociological analysis, rather I utilise empirical methods and experiments produced through longitudinal film fieldwork, where the camera and cutting room are the main instruments. In this respect, this practice-led research is anchored in the tradition of ethnography, ethnology and anthropological film-making, following the methodologies, film techniques and fields of study evident in the tradition of 'cross-cultural filmmaking' (Barbash and Taylor 1997) and more widely 'transcultural cinema' (MacDougall 1998).

When filming and researching in such a comparative context, I have tried to learn about childrens' abilities of living and surviving, through sharing everyday events with their peers and families, educators in the schools, engaging and observing encounters in the streets and other places where migrant children act. As for my own subject position as researcher, I am similar to the ethnographer conducting 'homework' (Clifford 1997:85), who has increasingly become a member of the social web within which they are engaging, exploring contexts of reception within host-countries rather than those of departure from left behind homelands. Throughout this work I hope to restore and expand on images depicting the childrens' personhood, particularly with regard to how they are framed in institutional settings such as the school and the family. In so doing, I engage with theories of 'personhood', as defined by Douglas and Ney (1998: 61), where a person can be seen as a 'transactor engaged in complex, external exchanges with the environment and with

other persons. ... The individual, set in a context of other interacting individuals, carries a legacy of institutions from past generations of other persons'. I thus engage with the above theoretical stance by aiming to capture what MacDougall (1998: 217) calls: 'dimensions of personhood' through exploring the multi-dimensional characteristics of social actors *within* and *through* the medium of film.

Through the accounts of migrant children and their relationships with those who care for them, I have come to identify issues of 'memory', 'embodiment', 'silence', 'resistance', and the disciplinary framework and performed identities shaping the space/time surrounding a child while adjusting to new cultural contexts. I analyse via the use of filmic excerpts selective experiences of migrant children who find themselves in a liminal zone; whose identity is gradually reshaping itself since they are yet to put everything from their past life behind them. Fragmented recollections are revealed to the camera before being buried, perhaps forever. As I hope to argue in this thesis, migrant children can often teach us crucial knowledge about the condition of displacement, since they occupy a very critical position: one demanding that they constantly adapt despite competing allegiances of family and community. They are also often under extreme pressure as part of a generation that must 'manage' migratory success and achievement, given that in many cases they are the generation for whom the act of cultural displacement was first planned and executed. Key, then, to my research is the recognition that migrant children are often socialized both by their older kin and by school staff, through a radical inhibition of their creative responses to a 'new' social environment. These children occupy a crucial position in that they are able to make manifest alternative forms of knowledge and agency.

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Throughout I assume that 'childhood' is itself a culturally constructed concept (Ariès 1962; Prout and James 1990; James et al 1998; Gullestad 1996; Stephens 1995; Feldman 2002), but would argue that since children exist in reality and are perceived through a model of a deep essentialism of childhood, materialised in the form of generic categories often imposed via social policy, they are not given power over many of their options and choices. They are, in fact, refused the option of a youthful agency. Even from the standpoint of when they are subordinated (in Europe the term 'subaltern' is not commonly used, even if recent scandals over the child-pornographic industry illustrates new forms of being subaltern, exploited and deprived of rights), children are indeed individuals shaped by sociality and capable of articulating a transcultural bias; they are subjects who are able to control their psychological and physical selves. What I hope to demonstrate in this research, albeit modestly, is that because migrant children belong to different cultural contexts and share new cultural horizons in contemporary Europe, they are often able to educate us about the emerging boundaries which inevitably build and define the discourses of 'childhood' – whether this discourse is disseminated in the sphere of the family, school, or through state policies on immigration and 'integration'. Through their everyday practices, migrant children often subvert forms of social domination in their own particular manner, and this study explores some of these local, singular and collective (resistant) practices. As MacDougall points out:

Children are the first and most ferocious students of culture. Moreover, they move within society as witnesses and agents, constantly re-imagining and modifying it. They are concerned, in their own way, with the most important questions of human fulfilment and survival. Their conceptions of the world may be largely for themselves, but over the generations these inevitably affect the thinking of adults (2006: 144-45).

Thus my main difficulty with conducting research among children arose when I realized that to gain access to their perspectives one should be extremely careful not to fall into the adults' perspectives where one ends up speaking on behalf of one's subject – both a real

temptation and a methodological limitation. I had to work hard to maintain contact with my target constituency of social actors despite the fact that adults tried to 'take over' at times, whether teachers, parents or audiences to whom my partial findings were shown. It is important to emphasize, however, that the results of this research are not fully returned to the children. One has to be honest and recognize that the mediation of this research, at times, occurs between and among adults, where it is framed according to their expectations and knowledge base. This remains one of the main aporias of the study in that I have had to 'undo' much of my previous learning as an adult in order to engage with the children's perspectives and life worlds, yet remain equally aware of the impossibility of such a contradictory task. Since a balance has to be struck, I would define this as a consistent methodology shaping the research, configured through a permanent mode of 'unlearning'.

The Transcultural

As the title of the thesis illustrates, I am working with the term 'transcultural' quite consciously and am aware of its contested connotation. I use this term as a means to avoid any essential definition of 'culture' as a bounded and territorial standpoint for individuals, with the awareness that individuals invariably express cultural codes and models through a form of sociality where 'sharing' modes of experience, be they conflictual, empathic, constructive or harmful, is always historically situated. The transcultural thus refers to both recognition of cultural difference and also a moving toward the 'other' in mutual recognition of some similar and shared cultural codes. Obviously children do not regularly (if ever) use the word culture, transcultural or intercultural. While they often use abstract and difficult terms, like *freedom*, *experience*, and *likeness*, the term *cultural* is simply not part of their vocabulary. I utilise the 'transcultural' as a means to document a reality

characterised by transnationalism, where the communication of groups and individuals across cultural systems is dominant (Bhaba 1994: 7) and where a 'trans-coding' of different forms and languages shapes the everyday reality of migration. This term also refers to a transitive mode of cultural expression in which experiences and cultural backgrounds, generational and categorical differences (gender, ethnicity, class) are constantly being transformed by new sets of experiences and concrete situations: languages and jargons (trans-as the linguistic shift in 'translation'), values and valuable items (trans-as shipping, in modes of 'transport'), a sense of homelessness and provisional homes (trans-as 'through time' and the 'transient'). As Thurlow describes the concept of the 'transcultural':

[It] allows better, I think, for the fluidity of these systems, their porous boundaries and constantly reorienting expressions, as well as the conceptual spaces that open up between traditionally defined cultural systems ... that emerge between shifting patterns of sociocultural organization and practice (2003: 1).

I therefore use *transcultural* with the aim of emphasizing some of these nuances. Whereas the term 'intercultural' tends to signify a binary logic where cultures are still kept intact, the 'inter' serving as a bridge of sorts between cultures, wherein the 'host' culture symbolizes a solid entity waiting for a confrontation with the new (migrant) culture. Likewise the 'intercultural' is used frequently by scholars when they observe, evaluate and document the various forms in which these confrontations occur. While a dominant term within educational research, I have chosen to differentiate it from the 'transcultural' and to explore the latter further. I will argue that the 'transcultural' in many respects facilitates a sharper understanding of the phenomenon of contemporary migration, and the period in which the migrant children of this study are situated.

While a central emphasis in this research is that contemporary European debates on migration need to hear children's accounts and be sensitive to their utterances, opinions,

and stories, I do not categorise children as an oppressed category who are subsequently 'empowered' by the research. The children in this study respond in multiple ways to systems of oppression. By emphasising diverse forms of agency, formations of consciousness, and through the sharing or denying of the experiences and narratives structuring their everyday lives, this overall sense of oppression is often transformed by way of both a participation and protection of their integrity. With respect to the children throughout this research, such multiple levels of agency coexist and traverse the cultural specificity of each dominant institution they find themselves located in. I would argue that it is within this notion of multiple agency and the coexistence of levels of participation and response to the 'new' institutional frameworks within the host environment, that the concept of the 'transcultural' is performed and enacted.

According to recent analyses of patterns of migration (Rouse 1995; Vertovec 1999, 2001; Clifford 1998; Portes 2001; Sassen 1998; Kovloski 2001) we are experiencing an age of transnational migration (Castles 2003) where instances of dual citizenship and multiple cultural affiliations are the norm and not the exception (Clifford 1998). These migratory patterns and practices function differently from the discourse and ideology of assimilation, where the new migrant once needed to go through a rather severe and intense system of acculturation. Contemporary migration is determined by more complex global affiliations and networks between countries of settlement and origin thus facilitating a more flexible notion of territorial belonging, sometimes concretised in the form of a partial citizenship. Means of transportation¹ and the technology of fast communication maintain multiple or dual cultural affiliations: these multiple affiliations have proved to be central among the families of the young social actors in this research, in particular Polish, Nigerian and

Filipino constituencies. The specificities of such multiple allegiances will, I hope, be made manifest in the ethnographies outlined in chapters three and four.

Locations

In what follows, then, I introduce and document two comparative accounts, mirroring one another in the locations of Paris and Dublin. In addition I outline key research questions surrounding fieldwork sites and methodology, concluding with a sample analysis of film fieldwork material from both sites. While my primary field site is the classroom, I also move out of the classroom (in Dublin, in particular), often led by the protagonists in an exploration of their social world. In chapter four, my central focus is on an Algerian migrant family home as a trans-generational site, taking my lead from the son of an exiled father. In Paris, I was able to pursue my research on migration and childhood through a critique of the postcolonial school system and through an examination of the ways in which children, who had just recently arrived in France, coped with re-building an identity during their first few months of residency.² During this initial time within the 'host' country, these migrant children are taught, among other things, new values, manners and rules of behaviour. In addition, since monolingualism is accorded great importance in the French educational system, they are hyper-stimulated to verbalise in French. Whereas in the case of children situated in the Irish classroom, the dialectical balance is between 'settled' children and migrant children and between teachers and children, between parents and other related groups of individuals or persons involved in childcare. In Ireland I focus on a principle teacher, with a distinctive ability as progressive educator and literary editor and thus explore the infrastructure of a national school located in the core of the inner city, with all of its contradictions and lived inheritances of church and state. In addition to this I focus on the various migrant

children and the encounters between ‘migrant’ and national subjects (as described in chapter three).

In Dublin I engage with stories that run in parallel to the Parisian ones, but with different inferences, textures and mediating sources (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). However, the juxtaposition of these visual ethnographies constructed in two contemporary European nation states is not designed to provide merely a comparative analysis, nor is there an underlying assumption that France possesses a visible ‘tradition’ of hosting various ethnic minorities, political exiles and colonial subjects, while Ireland is an homogenous nation in which historically, emigration has been the norm and inward migration a recent phenomenon. Rather I hope to argue that this kind of macro assumption is in danger of overlooking a more productive, perhaps less judgmental comparison.³ Throughout this comparative analysis, therefore, I will argue that difficulties of perception and representation experienced by migrant children in the society ‘still in progress’ within an imagined federal Europe, needs to be understood within the framework of a ‘shared’ dialogue about European citizenship. Most importantly, the critical and reflective encounters with migrant children in this ‘multi-sited’ ethnography (Marcus 1995: 102), aims to offer a detailed and intimate understanding of the attempts made by young subjects to become citizens, children who are in a dynamic relation with the bonds of family, the educational system, their ‘fresh’ past and their sense of the future.

The migrant children I got to know and film in the context of an all-boys Primary School in inner-city north Dublin – children newly arrived from Eastern Europe, the Philippines, Nigeria – did not establish prescriptive models of how ‘we’ should interact. They frequently showed and directed me to the space in which they preferred to act, while in

return I tried to increase my understanding in the light of the locations and modes of socialization they chose. It became clear that children are more likely to be comfortable if they have chosen the location in which the researcher observes them. This interactive positioning takes time and may well lead to misunderstandings, but it is important to acknowledge that it is not a fixed, static process. In the many adjustments which shape this encounter, a hypothesis is developed and results are achieved. This is why I prefer to call the children 'actors' and not 'informants', although I am aware that the use of the former term, transposed from the language of film, could cause those in front of the camera to fall into the ambiguity of performing a professional role, while the readers of the text might mistakenly perceive the social actors as film actors. I prefer to define social actors as 'people' or persons, or simply call them with their real name, as often as I possibly can. This methodological approach stems from the genre in which I work. For within documentary film anonymity is more or less impossible to sustain and in fact contradicts the stricter conventions of social scientific textual inquiry, which, at times, is able to protect its 'informants' by replacing names, dates, places and many of the scenarios in which the researcher engages with her/his subject(s).

At the very beginning of this film work, the children imagined that they might become movie stars, but once we had watched the rushes together, this dream faded away as they habituated to the presence of the camera (much to my relief) in a more relaxed, somewhat oblivious attitude. Once the children got used to the presence of the camera, the medium facilitated a better way to understand recurrent (and sometimes contradictory) behavioural patterns, roles and power dynamics between the migrant children and their peers, their educators, between themselves and their parents and members of the related community. In this respect, the researcher in the school or in the family occupies, partly because s/he is

not a teacher, a relative or a carer, a particular status *vis-à-vis* the children.⁴ Furthermore, when s/he holds a camera in the way I have done so, the relation forged with the children is of a very particular type. For example, the digital video camera – an instrument resembling a child’s toy, all too familiar to migrant communities in the context of circulating video tapes between separated communities – has made my presence as filmmaker both fascinating and acceptable to the children. Had I only observed and taken field notes, the children would have (perhaps) experienced the medium – text – as strange and even threatening, a sort of report, or worse a perpetual form of ‘homework’.

In the chapters throughout, integrated with visual fieldwork footage, I hope to demonstrate that children, in this case migrant children, have the creative ability to weave different realms and modes of being, from those experienced at the level of the everyday to more imaginary scenarios constructed by them as a means to ‘escape’ and ‘cope’ with challenging and stressful situations. This imaginative ability is something that adults have either forgotten and often renounce yet nonetheless long for and perhaps seek to restore. Migrant children practice and perform this imaginative skill even more intensely when they physically travel through or inhabit spaces that appear ‘other’ to their original life world. From this unique position, they often express unconventional, sometimes transcultural views of the world, enriching their modes of mediating, adapting, and getting to know (or indeed resisting) the sites in which they are expected to become ‘integrated’. When migrant children attempt to express just how they experience these different and often competing spheres of action and perception, they often have relevant insights which rely on unpredictable forms of knowledge and agency.

This interstitial and oftentimes ephemeral knowledge needs to be studied, re-presented, depicted or narrated. Hence in attempting to explore the experiential dimension of the social actors of this study, I have chosen to ground my research in what Abu-Lughod (1991: 149) refers to as 'ethnographies of the particular' picturing what MacDougall (1998: 246) calls 'the general forms in which the particular is contained'. This attention to the particular is necessary and is complementary to related studies on migration and childhood, in fields such as cultural geography, social anthropology, history, sociology, pedagogy, and social policy. Nevertheless the use of anthropological film, which is my main instrument, calls for a level of engagement with the minutiae of everyday cultural practices. As a research methodology, film fieldwork of this type does not yield macro statistics and analyses, yet it can reflect larger paradigms and social trends. Anthropological film as I practice it captures and re-presents levels of the ordinary, the prosaic ritual, the symbolic and liminal aspects of people's expressions and consciousness; it is able to explore intimate modes of sociality, the minutiae of spaces and places, the unique specificity of social atmospheres and cultural codes. In a similar way, although specifically addressing textual ethnography, Abu-Lughod suggests what might be the specificity of anthropological film as a mode of observation:

[A] concern with the particulars of individuals' lives [need not] imply [a] disregard for forces and dynamics that are not locally based. On the contrary, the effects of extralocal and long-term processes are only manifested locally and specifically, produced in the actions of individuals living their particular lives, inscribed in their bodies and their words (1991: 150).

Following Abu-Lughod, film provides me with what I call a 'cinematic engagement' whereby I attempt 'to re-inscribe the body and senses into ethnographic practice' (Grimshaw & Ravetz, 2004: 7) through the creation of a space surrounding the camera (rather than having the camera search for events) so as to allow children's storytelling to emerge as a form of social articulation, especially in the case of those children who are

testing out cultural boundaries and the limits of their social selves. It is by looking retrospectively at the various modes in which the child protagonists of these visual ethnographies articulate their narratives that I begin to 'map' out the various trajectories of their 'identities' – always emerging and in flux, but nonetheless situated by the time-space of the classroom and their own mixed memories of 'home', as mediated by themselves, their families, the 'host' environment in which they find themselves and the diverse global 'archives' that shape this environment. 'Home' is not only a location of residency or citizenship, of family values or of safety: it is also an imagined realm or a period of life attached to an object or a person who is both protective and familiar. It could well be a pet, a car, a group of siblings, one's twin, a refugee camp, a secret place, even an imaginary land. Home for the migrant child is mostly reached by crossing a threshold: physical, psychic, or just symbolic (Blunt 2005: 193). With this in mind, children are never forced to 'enter' into the field of the film. Rather I invite them in through a silent and methodical attitude; not by emphasising or blaming those who withdraw or stand aloof, but encouraging silently those who dare to take part in the 'scenes'. In this way I do not force children to immediately be 'actors' of a movie but observe and give weight to the moments in which they 'step in'. It is clearly a performative situation, very different from the active demand for an interview typical of certain social scientific or journalistic inquiries. Moments of dialogue and conversation between us obviously occur, but they rarely occur prior to the observational moment.

In some ways film is also the ground in which to meet and communicate. I do not film to illustrate what I have previously analysed but mobilise my cinematic engagement and understanding of the situation as phenomena literally appear and evolve. I simultaneously analyse the footage and compare my notes, discuss the footage with the actors (children,

educators, parents), and inform and transform my way of filming in an ongoing dynamic where one shapes the other and vice versa. To work with primary school children, with a reduced command of any common language vis-à-vis their hosts and myself, since many are the subjects of a non-voluntary project of migration (given that they are children and do not always have control over the decision to migrate but also because they are asylum applicants or children of economic migrants forced to leave), provokes a whole series of methodological and communicative strategies and challenges (with film strategies at the core) that the researcher (adult, female in the age of a mother or of a teacher, foreigner, more or less integrated and most of the time loaded with film equipment) must mobilise in order to gain access. It is precisely because an ethnographic frame was constructed that we could reveal our mutual intentions; ethnographic and media scholarship empowers both perspectives in that it constructs an exchange where there is not merely a recording of events or documentation of encounters later transcribed in diary-based fieldwork. As Vaughan puts it:

Before all other considerations, the mere act of framing something alters our view of it. Look at the street through a proscenium, and that too will glow with light that is not its own. Nothing can rid the perceived of the act of perception; and in the act of perception lies already the germ of language (1999: 208).

In this way filming is a conceptual action and the ‘framing’ is not a merely a physical or optical act but is socially perceptive as much as it is political, cognitive and symbolic. Through non-fictional filmmaking I engage with people of all ages (when dealing with children obviously many actors are also non-children, such as caregivers, parents and teachers), assuming that the experiences of those filmed and of myself filming are not exhaustively rendered, thus maintaining an integrity with regard to aspects which remain non-translatable in addition to rendering visible those meanings which only film can document. Most children look at film as the means through which to rehearse bodily reactions and somatic expressions. Here the sensuous and the intellectual is never

completely split and categorised, but is perceived and mimed, as Taussig (1994: 206) points out evoking Benjamin's (1933) description of the modern resurgent mimetic faculty. Children talk about movies as if those who are listening them have watched the films (or better again, they experience the screenings with the all the senses). The projections are experienced as sharable performances; movies cannot be paraphrased. Filming and watching the footage with young subjects provided me with these various levels of understanding and again I learned from them and was able to consolidate my critical viewpoints on the basis of this learning.

Films We Are Made By

[E]thnographic film is viewed as a process which necessarily relies on conventions and knowledge emanating not only from the particular sphere of anthropology but also from cinematography, literary studies, aesthetics and indeed the consumers of ethnographic films, the audience (Crawford and Turton 1992: 89).

One cannot approach ethnographic film making as mode of scholarship without being attentive to the levels of its complexity as indicated in the epigraph above; for any limitation of one of these aspects, in order to appropriate/legitimate the discipline, inevitably limits its potential as a mediator and generator of new forms of knowledge.⁵ My film practice as fieldwork methodology, which is then produced in the form of a research artefact, is characterised by a certain 'complicity of style' (MacDougall 1992: 94). It is thus clear that analytical and editorial choices are made during the act of filming itself, resulting in an 'exposition' or even 'exposure'⁶, of both the filmmaker's physical and material posture in addition to a recording of the emotional and sensorial state of the actors. In this respect, and evident both within the footage and the critical reflection after the fact, I try to make visible my 'trajectory of understanding' (MacDougall 1992: 94). Yet at the same time I try to avoid a too reflexive commentary symptomatic of more

experimental and associative films, not because I think these are inappropriate methods but because I have come to realise that the long shot offers a less persuasive narrative than, for example, complex montage. For the purposes of this research, I aim to foreground the contribution of the actors, revealing how a narrative emerges through their own subtle editorial shifts and through their actions and dialogues.

In this research, then, I hope to render the complexity of 'personhood' in the context of documenting how the social actors communicate to a wider world and aim to capture this communication in a 'naturalistic' way, engaging with the emergent process of sociality, as they actually occur (Taylor 1998b). My research aims to capture and render visible and audible these phenomena, despite a high level of unpredictability, creating a mode of 'realism' as a genre and 'rely(ing) on the self-revelation and social interactions of the people portayed' (MacDougall 1992: 93) but not with the aim of giving 'voice' to those who are mute, as many anthropological texts and ethnographic films have stated. I have tried to avoid such a 'demiurgical' stance.

Filming renders distinctive features of the body and notions of embodiment, the sensory and the sensuous (MacDougall 2005; Taylor 1996): this aspect of the research is carefully analysed by Devereaux (1995) who describes the intimacy of the body of Mal Vaskis, her Mexican friend and informant, when helping to loosen her Zinacanteca belt during a sojourn at the hospital. Devereaux relates a discovery (where the signs of the belt on the waist of the elderly woman are like tattoos, for the belt has been fastened everyday since childhood) to a gendered analysis, from her standpoint as a woman and visual anthropologist. Her analysis has informed my understanding of an ethical and existential link with the people I have filmed with for long periods, taking into account this level of

intimacy and somatic expression. For the period required to learn, observe, take responsibilities and start contributing as a full person while filming and acting as fieldworker, is a process that requires a self-conscious 'disposition' (Ragazzi 2005: 91), which allows for the 'intimacy' of filming to develop in an engaged perceptive way; moreover, this needs to be performed in a shared and public mode in order to avoid being merely 'voyeuristic'. Nevertheless I consider 'voyeurism' an important and unavoidable phenomenon experienced by filmmakers, and I do not deny it appears sometimes in my practice. I try conversely to transform it in a self-conscious and active response to the images I am observing; where I try to inscribe for 'others' a narrative space wherein they will become the future viewers of my act of filming.

Furthermore, when I film and make decisions about capturing and editing what I observe, I cannot but mobilise and draw upon the rich references I have absorbed through watching films or working with other filmmakers. Even though there are milestones of my own childhood and indeed my education as filmmaker (such as, Chaplin, Keaton in early childhood, Pasolini as an adolescent, or Godard-Miéville and Rouch when a young student), it is more through particular films' strategies and plots rather than authorial instances that I can reflect on my own craft. There is nevertheless one exception, Yasujiro Ozu, and it is an authorial one which I compare to the work of the Italian painter Giorgio Morandi (Bologna, 1890-1964), who depicted with bleak and obtuse colours the same bottles and cups lain by his bed-side table all his life. Child-like shapes much like the signs of Paul Klee, Morandi's bottles and cups reveal a phenomenological grasp with reality, in which creatures, objects and persons are not all visible but are interconnected by their dependency on each other. In a similar manner, but through depicting the very bodies and postures of people in enclosed domestic spaces, each of Ozu's films is a variation of

its predecessor, in the production of an ongoing positioning of the same thematic: of dialogues, kin and friends placed in 'epidermic' transformations. Ozu's films have given me a sense of how to listen for what is (or will be) inscribed in one's consciousness; in his filmic poetic, the told and untold of ordinary and irrelevant 'small chats' occur in a peaceful but unsettling domestic sphere. Odd details are never perceived at once but suddenly appear as such through the protagonist's consciousness. When it comes to the plain wisdom of dialogues, especially among kin, he does not project any *a priori* ideology of 'family values' onto his characters. He is a master in depicting how the strongest emotions can run into a body as if by way of an invisible tic, fixing the person into a dramatic static posture. These slightly unsettled bodies amplify larger conflicting dispositions, wherein they articulate a longing to be connected to affective boundaries rather than social rules and regulations.

While not directly exploring children and migrants, Pasolini's *Appunti per un'Orestiade Africana* (1967) raises fundamental issues surrounding the culture of post-colonial institutions, and is a film which has deeply influenced this research (I draw on this film in chapter two).⁷ Equally influential is Godard's work and Godard's and Miéville's politics of representation adopted for their 'educational' TV period in the late 1970s. During this period they filmed in the style of 'meta-logues' between children and adults, such as *Deux Enfants* and *Six Fois Deux, France Tour, Detour* (similar to Bateson's metalogues without probably knowing them, though in the filmmakers sense more politically embedded in an immanent everyday). These film texts thus serve as foundational references, and likewise the contemporary filmmaker Victor (1975), whose *Ce gamin-là* offers not only a politics of representation but also a methodology to reflect on. This film was entirely shot when living and collaborating in a house for autistic children, with the well-known pedagogue

and therapist Ferdinand Deligny, in the mountain area of Cevennes, Southern France.⁸ I also draw upon Truffaut's *Les 400 Coups* (1959) in addition to his depiction of subversive but also naïf children in *L'Enfant Sauvage* (1969) and *L'Argent de Poche* (1976). While Truffaut's preoccupation is with the 'subversive' aspects of childhood (in a similar way as Vigo, but less radical, for historical and personal reasons), Godard's and Miéville's preoccupation is with the 'intelligent' and 'individuated' child, with the possibility of communicating a form of vitality which children are able to produce in conditions of discomfort, disability and stigma. Van den Keuken has also provided a distinctive example with his 'free jazz-like' style of camera-work and his pioneering portraits of children (*Beppie*, 1965; *Blind Herman*, 1966) seeking to depict a thirst for freedom and a sense of free will and agency of children. All of these filmic approaches in documentary (and fiction) have therefore provided references from which to build this study and thus form the critically 'unspoken' aesthetic within the film work.

Further films which have provided examples of ways to work with and alongside children include: Philibert's *Le Pays des Sourds* (1992) portraying deaf children learning to communicate and socialize with non-deaf interlocutors; Simon's *Récréations* (1992) observes children's playtime for one entire semester and looks for 'tribal' patterns of social domination and individual disruption. Equally, Gheerbrandt's *La vie est immense et pleine des dangers* (1994) courageously documents, during a period of several months, the everyday of children affected by cancer (and in a terminal stage) in a Parisian hospital. I have also built on MacDougall's most recent *Doon School* (2000-2004) series, wherein he conducts film fieldwork in private secular schools with distinctive pedagogies, facilitating an elite class of young boys in India. All of the films above approach the thematic of childhood in very different ways. While Simon explores the conditioning patterns within

different modes of socialization, MacDougall examines the intelligent, articulate and sophisticated social temperament of elite children in boarding schools, Philibert documents the poetics and the representation of disability and Geerbrandt searches for manifestations of children's agency in the face of adversity. The children in these films are all protagonists and are given the space to articulate experiences and issues which many adults have long suppressed. These children are depicted in a transitory aspect of their consciousness and it is within these temporal 'passages' that one grasps a diversity of interstitial expressions. MacDougall again asks:

Are there other aspects of children's lives that are both more fertile and more transcultural than those of adults? If children's lives have distinctive cultural traits, it behoves adults to understand what these are and how they are transmitted. For some reason, fiction filmmakers have so far taken such questions more to heart than visual anthropologists (2006: 150).

While certain elements within the social sciences have tended to underestimate the potential that media can provide in the study of childhood, one could argue that films are perhaps deemed too ephemeral and not substantive enough in terms of policy and politics. Fiction cinema has historically engaged with childhood, in particular classic films such as *Zéro de Conduite* (Vigo 1933), *Sciusciá* (De Sica 1947), *Diario di un Maestro* (De Seta 1973), *Les 400 coups* (Truffaut 1959), or less known films such as *L'Enfant Sauvage* (Truffaut 1969) – made ten years after *Les 400 coups* – and *Salaam Bombay* (Nair 1988). The ease within which the fictional filmic offers representations of children (actors) interacting, expressing their own opinions, their forms of knowledge, and ways of seeing reality through narratives, highlights the problematic nature of my research and the specific utilisation of anthropological film. In fact, when I was shooting with children, I could not escape the fact that I was influenced by a set of filmic tropes, which I had absorbed and which motivated me to conceptualise this project. The fact that my non-fictional methodological aims are often imbued with fictional examples (as seen above) is

simply a given, and I would argue has helped me seek the everyday plots shaping the competing, yet intimate worlds of young migrant children.

Ways of Knowing

Whether you call it a spectacular image, or an exotic image, or a scholarly representation, there is always this paradoxical contrast between the surface, which seems to be in control, and the process which produces it, which inevitably involves some degree of violence, decontextualization, miniaturization, etc. The action or process of representing implies control, it implies accumulation, it implies confinement, it implies a certain kind of estrangement or disorientation on the part of the one representing (Saïd 2002: 41).

Throughout filming I rigorously analyse footage every day or every week, since the narrative style and ‘focus’ can change shape, mutate and settle as the research develops.⁹ I am indeed aware that I cannot avoid ‘plotting’ (Czarniawska 2004: 140). To plot is an activity of intelligence aiming to conceptualise knowledge, and my final responsibility is to craft persuasive narratives in order to convey some findings. But the area of negotiation of these narrative forms is always evolutionary and in progress and does not stand prior to the performances studied and filmed. Given the lightness of digital video equipment and the lack of restrictions on the pace of work – in contrast to the production work of a full-scale film crew – it is therefore possible to develop a certain intimacy with the social actors and to find a comfortable footing, physically and mentally, within the community where the sequence is being filmed. The actors do not have to be ‘hyper-stimulated’ with questions about particular issues, involving the elicitation of their viewpoints and aspirations; their accounts can emerge gradually, informally and perhaps more spontaneously. Spontaneity gives the style of the film a certain sense of intimacy and the borderlines between public and private are constantly re-adjusted accordingly. In order to realise where our mutual knowledge is carrying us, I listen on the sidelines and am prepared to guide, direct and consolidate the structure of the work in progress, while the relationship with the central

actors develops, sometimes peacefully, sometimes discordantly, and a 'reality' is revealed, imposed and expressed itself through the dynamics of the relationships. This is visible in the rushes, but is also observable by those who watch the researcher and the actors interacting. Social actors surrounding the protagonist children, such as peers and teachers, those who did not want to be filmed and occupy the role of episodic onlookers, could witness this progressive shift, in which the intimacy of film has left them out, so to speak. In this respect a sort of aporia can emerge: the 'public intimacy' of 'participant observational' film-making is a very particular way of directing fieldwork, but it can also exclude, at moments, crucial interventions from those who do not want to adhere to the rules of the game, or who regret having refused their participation at a earlier stage. Hence the social actors are many more than the 'visible' actors in the actual film footage.

A constant alertness to multiple dynamics – to developing possible plots, to events and sudden recollections, or to the unexpected interactions of people being filmed – creates an entirely distinctive rhythm and response. Once a definitive genre is established and maintained throughout, a self-reflexive style emerges, where the author/filmmaker is 'visible' behind the camera through his/her physical adjustments, emotions, distancing, misunderstandings, meddling and productive interventions. Children, as they wait for the camera, have often stared questioningly at me wondering how and why I could be interested in such boring moments. This often happens with participant observational cinema when the actors' question to the filmmaker – 'why are you interested in this?' – is the primary movement provoking the intersubjective engagement between filmmaker and subject(s). This intersubjective movement is arguably the reversal of the 'instigating' use of camera and microphone in many documentary productions. When the filmmaker only occasionally interrogates the actors, s/he ends up being interrogated in return; questions

always unveil the filmmaker's presence, demanding that his/her intentions, plots and manipulations are rendered explicit.¹⁰



Figure 1.1 Nawel asking the researcher if she can ask a question.

Above all, the filmmaker's self-reflexive awareness of her/his bias and ignorance is extremely important in any attempt to provoke a process of understanding between the subjects. For this reason, I take issue with filmmakers who have yet to learn how to observe through the camera with empathy, modesty and humility, when they denigrate observational filmmaking with the stereotyped appellation 'fly on the wall'. To observe and learn, allowing imagined spectators to do the same 'together' with the filmmaker and the actors is a rare achievement, enabling ethnographic film to be as critically descriptive as it should be useful, unique and well crafted. (MacDougall 2001; Henley 2000, Ragazzi 2005.)¹¹

In most cases ethnographic film is constructed in such a way that it is possible to follow the process by which the researcher/filmmaker learns, adapts and acquires relevant skills. Questions that actors put to the filmmaker open up a triangular dynamic (Arntsen and Holtedahl 2005: 79; Ragazzi 2005: 96), acknowledging, in cinematic terms, both the presence of an imagined viewer and the complicity of a shared, acceptable admission that not all the questions can be responded to at once. Ongoing reflection in the context of film fieldwork is a process informed by complex epistemological concerns in which I strive to find a voice to articulate this challenge, sometimes paying the price of being considered a hybrid, marginalized both 'inside', in the academic production of knowledge, and 'outside', in the commercial realm of media production and distribution. The children at school have in fact teased me, because I was neither making money nor making them famous. Sometimes I felt that I was confusing all the categories in a dangerous initiative from which nobody could benefit, not even my study. But this also derives from the imagined audiences who inhabit, haunt each actor's mind when participating in such 'audio-visual research'. I think now retrospectively, that the confusion about the overall sense of this enterprise was a consequence arising from literally embodying the contradictions sustaining my commitment to this project.¹² Children, again, showed me ways to clear these contradictions, but also to constructively manipulate my hesitations and dilemmas.

How, then, is it possible to combine these aspects of what MacDougall has recently defined as 'empirical art' (2005: personal communication) in ethnological research? Here lies the basis of my theoretical argument, shaped by this integrated manuscript and artefact, embodying a practice-led research project. Moreover, the aim throughout is not to actualise a definitive and final form, mainly constructed through plots, where a climax

containing key characters delivers a consolidated narrative. Rather, the micro-narratives throughout are presented as sequences but are not edited in the form of a completed documentary film. In this respect the shift from one sequence to the other is often abrupt and sometimes sudden, since overlapping moments have been removed. The sequences are thus self-contained. The text is in a dialectical relationship with the integrated digital video sequences and neither object (text or film footage) takes prominence over the other. The written text provides the bridge to understand the type of choices I have made and offers a narrative through which to follow the filmed archive. As such, this study remains 'textual' but is perhaps more like a circuit in a museum with posters and texts, and where screenings are installed.

Situated Perspectives

The film footage reveals a series of subject positions which are interwoven across a range of 'situated' perspectives. The 'situated knowledge' stems from, on one hand, the ways in which different subjects interpret the fieldwork footage. There is then a relay of knowledge perspectives informing this material: from the subjects within the film itself, who embody a variety of positions of power and also the potential audience(s) for the footage. For example, when the teachers view the filmic material, they are and will be in a position of power in relation to both the pupils and myself, who are both still 'learners'. But yet when the relationship is read as an interaction between one teacher and me, my status as an academic will most likely be perceived as a given in that I occupy a position in third level education. Other colleagues of the teachers participating in this project may well, in turn, be able to perform a relation of power in contrast to the teacher/participant who risks making themselves 'vulnerable' and have in some respects 'exposed' themselves on film. Yet again, a child from a different classroom

who occupies the 'majority national' status in relation to the migrant children will perhaps have an advantageous position within the host society. Whereas an elder belonging to the ethnic group of any one migrant child in the film, could well give voice to the power of 'tradition' and identify values of authenticity, at odds with and contradicting the performance of the migrant actors. These multiple layers and configurations of power not only set in motion a more complex interpretive schema for the film footage but also raise the question of the impossibility of predicting how the footage will be received.¹³ Film can resurrect many different codes of knowledge each time it is shown, depending on the audience engaging with it. This is why film has a generative power and facilitates an innovative way to examine transcultural codes and social patterns.

Film form has long been understood as a sensitive epistemological instrument in social research, but has not always been recognised as a critical medium capable of constituting knowledge and producing a reflective understanding of the researcher's position (Taylor 1998); neither has it been broadly recognised that film (at least in certain debates within anthropology) has the ability to document the ontological presence of both the researchers and the actors (MacDougall 1998) and the negotiated agencies which occur while filming. In fact, very little attention has been paid to the ways in which a captured sense of 'coevalness' (Fabian, 1983: 85) has the potential to offer a different historical analysis of film-fieldwork and the relationships forged between researchers and actors. The concept of 'coevalness', the sharing of time between social actors and researchers, is embedded within film language, at least when the researcher/filmmaker is critically attuned to its potential meaning. As Fabian writes:

To recognize *Intersubjective Time* would seem to preclude any sort of distancing almost by definition. After all, phenomenologists tried to demonstrate with their

analyses that social interaction presupposes intersubjectivity, which in turn is inconceivable without assuming that the participants are coeval, i.e. share the same time. In fact, further conclusions can be drawn from this basic postulate to the point of realizing that for human communication to occur, coevalness has to be *created*. Communication is, ultimately, about creating shared Time (1983: 30-31).

One of my key methodological questions is how to document the creation of shared time? Additionally, how to progress the work with the understanding that my subjects were in fact moving through time in a quite distinctive manner in that they were literally 'growing up' on film. Once the shooting and my engagement with them ended, I was faced with the questions or methodological problem of how to render levels of coevalness between the children and the adult-researcher, given that the social life of children transforms itself so radically and quickly. For example, I often think that while I analysed, wrote and edited this work, some of the children-actors of the Parisian research, who were part of a former time-space, had already obtained their leaving certificate in high school. Or they may well have had jobs for the last two years. One of them may be driving a car or a lorry? Some could be repatriated or deported? Yet I am still preoccupied with the research findings which come out of their primary school experience; it is as if they are beside me expecting further outcomes from the research. Seven years for a child is enormous in terms of options to be taken, whilst for me, the witness, the retrospective observer these seven years have passed at a very different pace. My ageing has not resulted in a dramatic change in my material and psychic life, even though my body grows old, it does not change as radically as do the bodies of my children protagonists. The passage from a second time span in childhood (1-7 years being the first and 7-14 years the second) and an adult ageing process (33-40 as in my case) results in very different perceptions of time, of body transformations and material opportunities and conditions of life.

Is, then, the sense of 'coevalness' represented here literally found in a time previous to the completion of the film or is it embedded in the 'present' of the reproduced film? For what film offers unlike other media is its ability to render present through performance an event long since past. This simultaneity of interaction is what distinguishes a filmic *mise-en-scène*. For children to be able to observe footage of themselves during the passing of a particular period of time (no matter how brief), facilitates the emergence of a historiographic understanding of their own being in the world. At least this is what their feedback always confirmed. Yet throughout this research I also know that my 'interlocutors' cannot stand in the same position of power as I do and their stories and histories are often denied or re-narrated according to educational patterns of disempowerment and inequality. Because the children are a very different age to me, are both male and female, come from differing social classes, have different linguistic abilities and have different relationships with their caretakers, I have been aware from the very beginning that I had the power to become a caregiver, because the need for extra care was evident. This care could be understood as material, spiritual or even practical and was never rejected. In conducting this research, I have had to respond to diverse sets of experiences reflecting the very different needs that migrant children have. Rather than assume a mode of communication that would render this experience immediate (and problematically transparent), I have worked with modes of storytelling as both a meditative and performative tool through which childhood and migration can be carefully explored.

Experiences and Stories

I draw on a number of scholars' understanding of an 'anthropology of experience', including Turner (1986), Bruner (1986) and Myerhoff (1986). Turner describes experience

as that '[which] has been lived through' (1986: 3) according to Dilthey's concept of *Erlebnis*, and Bruner refers to how 'events are received by consciousness' (1986: 4). For all of these anthropologists experience is mediated through plural dimension of impressions, images, sensorial stimuli and speech. Thoughts, desires, words and images are thus primarily the reality of lived experience, yet one is always aware that because one can never comprehend someone else's experience, it remains at best an intangible concept or theoretical term. Nevertheless as Jackson (1998: 203) recalls, in analysing Stoller's reading of the sensuous in anthropological scholarship, 'memory and metaphor make it clear that *experience* as an analytical category, fuses inner feelings with outward forms'. In this oscillation between outer and inner the cinematic device seems appropriate to capture the emerging of consciousness when it is shared and potentially shareable. How experiences are communicated through stories is therefore an important aspect of the study. Rosaldo (1986) and Jackson (2001), among others, have argued for narratives to be analysed contextually, with a determined anthropological and historiographic (Bruner 1986) understanding at work, relating the telling to wider phenomena of a politics of communication and cultural models and practices.

My aim is to thus explore situated perspectives through children's accounts which are often received in loose conversations with the actors. The reception of these stories is based on a direct observation and phenomenological involvement, in which articulations of human and social relationships are revealed on a first hand basis. Jackson describes how 'telling' is always embedded within a complex web of social structures and situations:

Stories are also authored and told by individual subjects - again, persons acting in relation to others, subject both to the influence of stories already told, and the impinging pressures of their society and their situations. It therefore makes no sense to speak of individual lives without reference to the social and historical

conditions that bear upon them, nor to invoke universals without reference to the individuals who embody, experience, objectify, perpetuate and struggle against them (2001: 290-291).

Hence storytelling can be recorded as a form of social articulation. It is precisely by looking retrospectively at the various narratives provided by the children protagonists of my ethnographies that I can begin to 'map' out the various trajectories of their 'identities'. These identities are always 'becoming' and in flux, nonetheless situated by the time-space of the classroom and their own mixed memories of 'home' as mediated by themselves, their families, the 'host' environment that they find themselves in, the diverse 'archives' that shape this environment, and myself as receiver and listener to these stories. Gupta explores this issue by relating migrant narratives to concepts of transmigration (and also re-incarnation):

[R]enunciation of one's allegiance to an old 'homeland' is often a necessary part of the legal requirements of citizenship in the new one; denunciation of one's affiliation with some other 'homeland' may be an important part of the cultural or civic requirements of citizenship as well. ... But this model of immigration as a displacement of dwelling voluntarily undertaken by a subject in order to improve his or her life conditions rarely does justice to the experiences of immigrants. By uprooting the sedentarist assumptions of the dominant narrative of immigration, we can resituate it more fruitfully in terms of a notion of dwelling-in travel (2002: 176).¹⁴

'Dwelling-in travel' (Clifford 1997: 44) is a common experience for migrant children who re-build homes in transient situations, react to places, people and languages in flexible ways, sometimes unconventionally. This ability to remain flexible and to be open to the novelty of what situations may offer is learned from other children as much as from adults (Toren 1992). Such a flexibility stands in contrast to the institutional frames posed around the child. When analysed in contemporary European institutional contexts, which tend to overlook the experiential consequences of a 'dwelling-in travel' perspective, migrant children's experiences and acts are often marginalised. For example, migrant children often reveal a depth of form and express interesting and conscious skills that are mostly

unrecognised within current educational curricula. The stories which I present and analyse in the following chapters pose interesting challenges to the image of a homogenised social sphere, for they express forms of cultural transformation, mobility and a strong critical (freshly articulated) perspective on the 'host' country.

Many of these accounts take the form of story fragments, variations of similar and repeated stories, communication about events, misunderstandings, difficult utterances and involuntary poetry and descriptions of resistances to political and cultural violence. In some instances I noted that certain children were actively discouraged to tell their own stories and verbal stories were frowned upon. There was a distinctive contrast between telling stories in the family versus the school. In school the recurrent pattern was to contain, if not deny the role of the personal narrative in the class (key differences, however, emerge between the Parisian and Irish classroom). Hymes describes the implications of this form of censorship:

Narrative use of language is not a property of subordinate cultures, whether folk, or working class, or the like, but a universal function. The great restriction on its use in a society such as ours has to do with when it is considered appropriate and legitimate. Generally speaking it is considered legitimated, a valid use of language in the service of knowledge, when it is used among co-members of a group. If the narrative function is excluded in an institutional setting, such as college or school, the implication is that the students are defined as not co-members of a group with those who teach them (1996: 114-15).

One of the key and consistent patterns I have observed in this classroom-based study is that the voices, claims and knowledge of children are hardly listened to and considered seriously by adults, yet, in contrast, children show a subtle understanding and respect for stories told by adults – whether in speech or simply in the form of a prescriptive information giving. This lack of a balance between who is listening and who is talking is a daily feature in school life and the filming process reveals some aspects of this recurrence. For according to Hymes:

We do indeed intend to think of our society, and our educational institutions, as stratified in ways that define certain kinds of narrative as inferior, and people to whom such kinds of narrative are natural as inferior as well. ... The student or child is told in effect that his or her own experience do not have weight (except perhaps for diversion). Not that there is not an essential purpose to going beyond individual experiences. But if narrative of individual experience is a complementary mode of solution of cognitive questions, then a pattern of discouraging it is a pattern of systematically discouraging what is at least a valid starting point, and may be an essential means of thought (ibid.).

What I have repeatedly observed is the tendency to downplay or restrict the limits of a migrant child's desire to tell his/her story, even if still fragmentary and in progress. Yet when in some instances they are given the possibility of telling stories, the speech act visibly empowers them and benefits the whole constituency of adults framing migrant children's education, including their parents. Hymes outlines the possibility of such encouragement in the following way:

[S]tudents may come from homes in which narrative is an important way of communicating knowledge. They may take part in peer groups in which experience and insight is shared through exchange of narrative. A classroom that excludes narratives may be attempting to teach them both new subject matter and new mode of learning, perhaps without fully realising it (ibid.).

Much of the fabric of the film material is therefore based on children's narrative contributions as evidenced throughout the following chapters.

Analysis of Two Sequences

In what follows I will offer a brief and critical reading of my filmic engagement with the aim of foregrounding what I try to make visible (through film fieldwork) at several parallel levels. These include: my strategies as a filmmaker, how they are conceived and then re-adjusted and re-negotiated when in the field; my critical assessment of the film footage as both a viewer and research mediator; my choices in selecting and editing each chosen shot; the construction of the dialogues which play an essential role in the overall dramaturgy, as I edit what social actors say, utter or repeat between and among themselves

or to the filmmaker (a dialogue which is deliberately maintained through unbroken conversations and is mostly unedited).

Since this overall study presumes a central interconnection between the textual and filmic and the reader, therefore, is asked to watch excerpts at key points throughout the reading of each of the chapters, I outline some core motivations and methodological approaches underlying my selection of film footage and overall editing strategy. These choices are to be sure reflected upon after the fact and point simultaneously to the reflexive moments inscribed within the film footage itself. Criteria used include: modes of discovery, narrative connections, the photogenic/'auralgenic', and elicitation.¹⁵ Two sequences will highlight some of the relevant intercultural and transcultural elements which emerged in the Parisian and Dublin classroom environment. In Paris, for example, the exchange appears more intra-and intercultural: an attempt to keep differing cultural categories discrete is a fundamental principle within the French educational system and the preoccupation of this particular teacher. As a marked counterpoint, the Irish classroom is much more loosely configured given that multicultural education is only now emerging. In the Irish context we are witness to a transcultural mode being worked out in its earliest phases.

The Transcultural Classroom: Dublin

The Irish teacher Liz Morris (one of the central protagonists in chapter three) is facilitating a discussion after having shown a short educational BBC programme on the myths and rites within the Islamic religion. She seems to be aware that pupils are finding their depth on this issue through a transcultural dialogue on the matter of life, death, and immortality. Morris utilises the collective construction of meaning in her pedagogical approach and for

her this knowledge illustrates the integration of different standpoints; contributions, sometimes even half sentences, questions and shy suggestions. She prefers to teach by asking and by showing, so that children can start making sense by capturing a specific 'handle' to hook on to through some familiar aspect which concerns them. This contrasts with learning by heart or simply uncritically accepting to repeat what is not understood and unrelated to one's experience. This pedagogical approach allows pupils to learn how to listen to each other, because by responding and debating children and teacher together build a platform of knowledge, so that only those who listen can 'meaningfully' participate. It also allows children to take the risk of exposing their ideas and questions, accounts and dilemmas, without fearing outright censure and criticism. It develops an awareness of sameness when questions tackle similar issues, and an awareness of difference when arguments are posed differently, so that each child has the possibility to try out individual forms of expressions and at the same time is encouraged to socialise through a form of empathy.

In this sequence, which is shaped by an alternative lesson in religion as 'history of religious movements', the children have been watching the program and are now being asked to comment upon what they have learned. In this way the lesson becomes a hermeneutic event, where the teacher prompts and literally holds the tension all the way through, so as filmmaker I do not have to break the flow of the communication. The children participating in the discussion and my 'invisible' though coded position constitutes the profilmic: each word is important, each sentence has a connection with the statements of others, and the script unfolding is both tense and unpredictable. The real event lasted for over twenty minutes including the TV screening. Here I have edited nine minutes and have kept the images from TV simply to evoke what the children had

watched, not to analyse the content. My interest as researcher and filmmaker resides in the way the children are authorised to express and bring their viewpoints to a collective discussion. Questions are crucial, as much as personal accounts and speculations. There are only a few cuts, made in order to provide a few more points of view. There is very little editorial re-construction, but the scene is not in 'real time'. The quality of the communication, the attempt to capture through the movements of the camera each utterance, moving towards close-ups of those participating, renders the intimacy of this short discussion. The postures and light seem to highlight some of the corporeal attitudes (and preoccupations) informing the themes of the chat: death, resurrection, reincarnation, devotion, the evil, life beyond death.

DVD 1 ch.1 clip 1 (DV 4_3) Comments after BBC programme on Islam. 9'19''.

The sequence begins with the 'announcing' trailer of well-known BBC music used in educational programmes. It resonates first on black and then on the poster with the title: 'Collective Discussion on Religion and Transcendence' which is purposely a heavy title in contrast with the lightness of the melody. The following shot shows the class immersed in the dark with full backlight: the attitudes of the bodies in silhouette suggest that pupils are today relaxed and unusually calm. They are hearing the speaker pronouncing: 'A long time ago, a man was poor and his name was Abdoullah...' The first comment, in background sound, comes from Marc, a Filipino boy who says: 'Abdoullah! I know him! Abdoullah, Abdoullah!!' His peers respond to him by approving, while the narrator continues with an Arabic text, perhaps an invocation by the young shepherd.

We immediately have information that most of the Filipinos in the classroom, who are predominantly Catholics, know about Abdoullah, the prophet. They have in fact been

living in Saudi Arabia before coming to Ireland as part of a migratory transnational health chain circuit for health and para-medical personnel between the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, then to Ireland and finally to Australia or the US, before going back in the Philippines for good, maybe after two decades of migration (though the move from Ireland to Australia is recently proving problematic with many health workers returning to Ireland dissatisfied with working conditions in Australia). Most of the children present in the school are part of the same group of co-nationals embodying such a circuit of skilled work. Some of them were born or resided a long time in Saudi Arabia. Thus watching the BBC programme these children immediately react with their own knowledge and backgrounds. Miss Morris does not comment on their reaction; she does not seem curious as to how they know the Ku'ran and Islam from their standpoints as young Catholic subjects.

The first editorial shift now occurs. The following shot shows Séan, an Irish boy, seen from his shoulders, hearing the continuation of the story, the conversion of Mohammed and the holy light of Allah which opened the sky. Séan points it out for the teacher. 'Peace be upon him', she seems to translate. In the following shot, the camera is once again in front of the audience and we realise that the teacher is explaining what they just watched. The programme was not the target of the filming process, but mostly a pretext to hear children's reactions to a lesson about Islam. The teacher checks if they have understood what Muslims say when they pronounce the name of Mohammed, and Séan is the only one who can answer: 'Peace be upon him'. Immediately she sets the frame of a comparison, aware of the trans-cultural issues exposed in the programme. She is also aware that very few pupils in the school are Muslim (maybe one or two) and none of the children in her class are, since Tahar from Algeria (presented in chapters three and four) left a few days earlier: Miss Morris: 'What do people say in Ireland?' Séan tries to answer

again. Nobody seems to know and thus Miss Morris must find some examples. She says: 'Suppose somebody is dead... What does one say? Well, I don't, but what do people usually say?' The camera pans up and down, never knowing who is going to speak and when, but obviously trying to guess and anticipate. Various dialogues go on sometimes in hidden corners. The simultaneity of purpose makes it hard to choose where to pose the aural focus, and the option is mainly for the leading dialogue, closer to the teacher, camera and microphone. Séan repeats: 'Rest in peace!' The teacher approves and raises further examples of common habits accompanying the name of a dead person 'God rest him'. She then suggests that Muslims do the same invoking Allah. In the meantime one boy, Giordàn, a Roma Polish, has risen his hand. He has a question, visibly a serious question for the mistress: 'Miss, can I ask you...' He smiles with excitement and genuine curiosity: 'How does it look when you go... like, when you go to the God?' (He points to the sky-ceiling with his eyes). This is the inaugural opening of a discussion about the 'beyond life', heaven or paradise and evil, various themes connected to the transcendental.

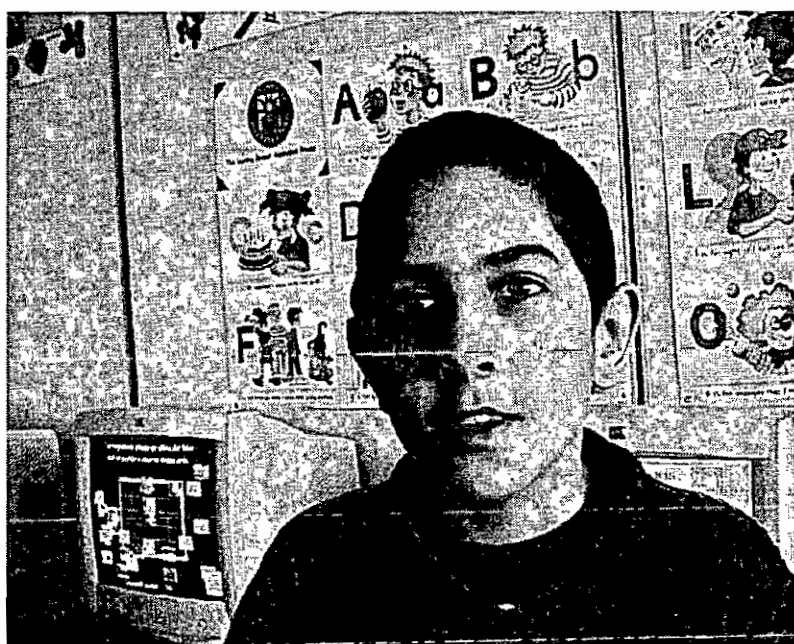


Figure 2.1 Giordàn asks about life after death and evil.

The camera movements acquire a focus from this point and are no longer too hectic. There is the emergence of a 'script', both in terms of the expressivity of actors and of serious questions. This potential opens up the possibility for a plotting and mapping in the mind of the filmmaker:

Morris: '... (You mean) What Heaven looks like?'

Giordàn: 'When you go up... I have never heard about that...'

Atilio (*off frame*) 'You've to die first!'

Giordàn : 'I know!' (*a little annoyed*)

Morris: 'Well, nobody knows really! Because nobody really came back!'

(*Mild laughter rises from the rest of the class. Marc, the only peer in the frame beside Giordàn seems to appear ironic.*)

Giordàn: 'Is everyone black?'

Giordàn has engaged with his teacher. He has dared to enter into the dialogue and seems to rely only on her; he is sceptical about his peers' answers. He has a genuine fascination and wants to know. There is an attitude of intimacy, and differently from his peers, no concealment from the camera, which is nevertheless filming him very close. The profilmic is now suddenly restricted; it becomes more a metaphysical issue and the camera must film first of all a 'dialogue' requiring a different perception of what is in focus. To film utterances, speeches, the 'told and untold' is very much part of the challenge of the present film-study. Giordàn is now leading the discussion in his attitude of exclusivity vis-à-vis the rest of the class. His position, just below and beside the teacher, makes his standpoint privileged. Giordàn asks: 'Is everyone black?' Morris replies: 'What? Is everything black? Why should it be? Why should everything be black?' Children appear to be impatient,

they wish to add their perspectives, but the teacher chairs the discussion between Giordàn and the rest of the class. But by looking at the footage retrospectively, it seems she is also chairing the chat for the camera, because she knows the interest shown by me in these themes. We have been talking about the ‘transcultural’ and she too is arguably drawn into my interests.

‘Hang on, hang on’, she adds moderating the audience. Giordàn adds: ‘My cousin said that everything is black’. Morris responds: ‘It depends in what you believe, some people think that Heaven is here, now!’ Giordàn seems more and more intrigued. Séan, off frame, tries to contribute. This discussion fits into the aspirations of the children: to come out with a hypothesis, not with definite information only. In such cases the filmmaker has to be aware that everything is of worth and should be recorded, because the progression of the dialogue makes the script a collective and unpredictable movement. There is intelligence in the air and for the first time since the school year began, I feel that pupils and adults are on the same level: they are concerned by what they are learning, because these are serious matters that children at that age ask about. Moreover they illustrate an emerging transcultural formation in the way in which these aspects aspire to be universal, because children with entirely different backgrounds and lives can meet over questions of transcendence, mystery and kinship, even from secular standpoints.

Giordàn: ‘You go into the ground? When you go to God, is everything quiet?’

Morris trying to calm down parallel discussions (*off frame*): ‘Atillio! Do you think that everything is quiet when you go to God?’ Atillio is very turbulent. In some ways he seems to be willing to participate, yet from another side he disturbs and threatens the well-being of the discussion. Atillio, for example, is suddenly concerned by his Romanian ancestors: ‘They are all in Romania, nobody is dead’, as if he suddenly realised that to preserve his

cultural roots the imagined homeland must become eternal and so too his grandparents. Jordan, sitting beside Atillio, gets for the first time intrigued by Atillio's background. He asks about Atillio's grandmother. Séan also provides thrilling descriptions of hell and heaven, and of 'what hell is all about'. History, manifest in the destruction of the Twin Towers in New York, is also evoked by Séan and simultaneously associated with the theme of suicide. Children, especially Séan, Giordàn, Atillio and only mildly Marc, express their desire to 'live forever', to be immortal. In parallel they provide also the example of their grandparents, the fact that they are sick, in hospital because they smoke too much or simply have become weak.

Almost all the students denigrate Marc when he dares to say: 'I am afraid to die'. This is a moment when the camera pauses and there is a glimpse of recognition. Marc decides to show his vulnerability and to depart from the domain of information, questions, data and hypothesis characterising the lesson so far. In fact he states something on behalf of all the children who have not dared to talk. Ms Morris protects him against a general criticism for he has most probably uttered what was in the heart of most of the children. New stories emerge and also a hypothesis on how to become immortal ('Tablets', as Giordàn suggests, but then Séan warns his mates about the harshness of living forever and says candidly that he could 'then stab himself' when too tired of living for an eternity).

I would argue that what we see and hear represents the potential for transcultural experience and communication as the following chapters hopefully evidence. The aspiration and potential to transcultural expressions of experience, at the level of both the lived and the unpredictable, is visible throughout the sequence, which is one of the most

intimate and at the same time publicly shared and collective discussions occurring within the walls of this Dublin Primary School.

The Intercultural Classroom: Paris

In the Cl.in classroom, the Parisian special class for non-French speakers, we see a similar but markedly different dialogue emerge. The children have also been looking at a tape, *The Circus*, by Charlie Chaplin (1928), but this time for leisure (instead of playtime in the yard). The teacher Miss Pascale was not present during the screening and instead on this occasion I initiated the discussion by asking: 'Is Charlie in love with the girl?' and after some comments of Kadiatou (a young girl from Guinea) about the fact that his feelings are 'evident' in the way 'he's constantly with her and even feeds her', I tease her by adding 'so, do you think they are going to be married?'. She answers 'yes' at once (predicting a happy ending, which in fact does not take place in Chaplin's narrative) and then adds a very important consideration, 'if the father allows her!' From the basis of this intelligent and culturally specific remark, I try to resurrect the topic of engagement after two days, for I knew Kadiatou was already exploring this issue in her domestic sphere. The thematic of marriage and engagement arose from the Chaplin ending, but was opened up for further exploration.

DVD ch. 1, clip 2 (Dv 11_4) Discussion about habits and customs. 6'12''.

Kadiatou had a similar attitude to girls experiencing puberty in her home country of Guinea, who talk with married or divorced women, aunts or girlfriends from the market place, who can listen to their worries or make fun of their situations in order to provide some good counselling. These chats have the power of shifting personal perspectives, providing tangible examples and teaching girls to face the scary transformation implied in

the female obligations of wives and mothers. The fact that Kadiatou took the initiative of expressing such forms of storytelling at school shows how this location was relevant for her to perform a sense of agency, and how the presence of older women like me and the teacher, (even the psychologist who was preoccupied with her), created a receptive ground for her accounts to emerge. In the following transcription, Kadiatou tells a story about herself not in the form of a dramatic confession, though the situation being described seems to be experienced by her as somewhat unfair, but rather by way of an ironic description of the family atmosphere. The sequence shows a plain shot with the following dialogue and she is talking with the teacher, Miss Pascale, who picks up on the issue a few days after the screening of the film. Here, Kadiatou relates a story about how one night her father's friend paid a visit to the house in Paris and jokes about having an option on her by asking Kadiatou's father that they become engaged.

As the dialogue between Pascal and Kadiatou unfolds:

K: 'He came home and said I was his wife. I said to him: if you want me, you have to pay a lot of money. Then he came back once more in the night. My father had left for his job at night... he worked...I don't know where, but till one o' clock at night-time. So, he came and stated that I was his wife. I started to cry and my brother laughed at me, and my mother too, everybody was making jokes with me, saying that I was going to be promised to him... And this is the reason why I started to laugh too... No, to cry'.

Pascale: 'Did you cry or laugh?'

K: 'I cried...'

Pascale: 'Oh yes my poor, you cried poor baby...'

K: 'I cried so much that I had headache afterwards...'

P: 'And what did she say, your mother?'

K: 'My mother said: it is not true, he's joking! But when my father came back, when they told him (about it) he commented about me: she can just continue with her tears! If she's going to grow up she will be married, even if we are not *there*! And anyway, even if she cries, I don't care a shit! After he told me to stop crying, he said: 'It is not so important after all.' 'So then, the friend came again and my brother said that he was my husband... I hated him: he had a big mouth, big teeth...Oh! He was not handsome at all!'

P: 'Well: you have to say: I will choose my husband and he will be very beautiful!'

K: 'He was not beautiful at all! I cried and cried...'

P: 'My poor dear lass...'

K: 'I stated: I want to come back to grandmother, you are going to give me a monster as husband!'

P: 'No, no. In France nobody will give you anything like this. I've told you once: here nobody can act in such a way!'

Kadiatou's story is told with humour, although she states that she 'cried so long that she had a headache'. The desire of making fun of the event, adding distance but also avoiding to over-dramatise a seemingly common, ordinary situation, makes us understand how Kadiatou could, through her use of colourful phrases, turn upside down many taboos and fears surrounding her, giving her audience a platform for learning and understanding. Here it was Pascale who took the issue too seriously and halted Kadiatou's somewhat humorous slant on the situation with serious words: 'My poor lass. Beware! Here in France nobody can oblige you (to do this); I told you this already!' The teacher assumes the responsibility of her civil education and consequent integration in France, implying a sort of complicity between female subjects. She must somehow prevent her pupils from any sort of abuse, and she knows that many children suffer from domestic violence, harassment, oppression

and not only migrant children, of course. She thinks that the role of a teacher is also to provide knowledge about civil rights, social rules, and to encourage the self-awareness of the child as a future citizen.

Much like the sequence in the Irish classroom, the teacher plays the role of the 'chair'. In France there is nonetheless an a priori idea that cultures are discrete and can only be translated, not crossed and fused in new standpoints (unlike what we see with the tentative, gentle probing of the Irish teacher). The French teacher is open to learning something from the children, but only within a framework of comparative behaviour and the underlying suggestion is that the cultural changes that the migrant children experience in the host country are fundamentally more 'democratic' and morally superior.

In the following chapters I hope to explore the relationship between the intercultural and the transcultural in more detail by closely analysing the particular codes, rhythms and practices in both educational systems (in France and Ireland), and in the context of migrant children's experiences. This is narrated in both the film footage and the written text in the form of their personal, shared accounts and viewpoints about cultural diversity, experiences which they have worked through from a time preceding migration and into the present. Film captures the sensibilities of migrant children and asks that the reader/viewer also embark on these somewhat uneven paths. In chapter two I begin this journey in what I call the Parisian 'intercultural' classroom.

Notes

¹ In Europe, while I was operating as a researcher 106 low cost airlines were flying on a weekly basis to various international destinations (*Le Monde*, November 2004).

² *Ragazzi* (*La Mémoire Dure* 2000, 80-mins). Screened at numerous film festivals, among others: Nuoro International Film Festival, Italy 2000, Special Prize of the Jury; Festival International du Cinema du Reel, Paris 2001; Beeld voor Beeld, Amsterdam 2001; and British Film Institute, London 2001, Irish Film Institute, Dublin 2003, and several international and national conferences in Finland, Italy and Norway.

³ The extent to which the researcher is familiar with the original culture of migrants s/he seeks to portray is crucial. The difficulty of relying solely on doxic (Bourdieu 1977) accounts is often conflated by the tendency of migrants to 'freeze' certain images of the past, offering a restricted level of 'truth' to the researcher. The assumptions of the researcher can further influence the response of migrant actors, reinforcing stereotypes about their 'origin' in the continuing construction of patterns through which culture is re-invented for the purposes of Western multiculturalism. This is why I think that researchers should try to learn about the life stories of the migrant actors in depth (as did the pioneering studies on self-biography conducted by Marianne Gullestad with migrant youths and migrant biographies in Norway, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c, 2003, 2004).

⁴ See, for example, Steedman (1982, 1988, 1992); Toren (1993); Stephens (1995); Gullestad (1996); Corsaro (1997); Christensen and James (2000); Olwig Fog 2004.

⁵ Drawing on my personal experience as a teacher in this domain, there is currently more agreement on practice-led research, despite the historical and longstanding debate that somewhat inhibited many scholars from engaging in such a practice, for its vocational traits were seen as threatening academic identities and hierarchies. More and more students are enrolling in departments where cross-cultural filmmaking, visual anthropology, visual ethnography and visual sociology are theoretically taught and practiced and where qualitative social scientific research is pivotal (Holtedahl 1993; Altern and Holtedahl 1995).

⁶ For as Marcus notes the 'exposure of "messiness" as a methodology in social sciences, through an outpouring of "trials and tribulations, confessional" accounts' (1998: 182). However, the meaning and enactment of "exposure" can manifest itself quite differently, resulting in a form of complacency and exhibitionism.

⁷ This influence must be acknowledged for I am Italian myself and have worked at the Pasolini Foundation as a postgraduate researcher in the late 1980s. Pasolini, in the tradition of Gramsci, initiated a certain Italian debate in critical studies and influenced my anthropological views about subalternity, difference and secular spirituality. This is anchored in the historical contours of my

motherland and language. For both Pasolini and Gramsci, the sociolinguistic aspects of culture were crucial; linguistics is one of the main instruments in their philosophical and anthropological analysis. In this way I hope I have inherited a critical posture, which is culturally specific and perhaps this can be said for the entire Mediterranean area in a transnational sense.

⁸ This film is practically impossible to watch, for its history of marginal distribution, but it is highly relevant to the ideas I pursue and to the history of non-fiction film in a wider sense. Truffaut, who had provided 16mm film reels to Victor and some other infrastructures, had helped through the film, for he was a passionate of films of childhood himself.

⁹ To write a conventional treatment as one might for a documentary, before shooting, would be futile (Barbash and Taylor 1996); in film fieldwork, the treatment has to be constantly re-adjusted and modified according to the new findings and stories generated by the ongoing (and often sustained) presence of the filmmaker in the ordinary life of the people being filmed, in the very locations where they live, act and socialize (see the pioneering example of the filmmaker Renaud Victor who lived and filmed in the 1980s *Ce gamin-là* in a house for autistic children created by Dr. Ferdinand Deligny).

¹⁰ My film-fieldwork is hence an embodied practice and also a craft sustained almost entirely by my own labour, both technical and intellectual. The act of filming evokes a loom in which relations, actions and their inscriptions are woven. Filming as I said is never exclusively an optical exercise, but sensory, conceptual and perceptive, since it also involves motion, framing and inscription of an emerging reality (MacDougall: 1998, Taylor, 1998:12). To see, as Merleau-Ponty explains is to 'move toward' (1990:6). By looking, learning and attuning oneself to the surrounding and unfolding reality, my sight seeks to comprehend relational phenomena. This is one of the parameters of what I call filmic engagement: an 'active observation' in which sight is not the sole sensory apparatus of our relational engagement with the world (Ingold, 2000, Grasseni and Ronzon 2004). In the wide palette of sounds surrounding the filmmaker, the voices of people (organized into forms of speech that are perpetual and performative), together with the filmmaker's own voice and the tactile attempt at restoring the proximity with the actors, comprise a collective and constituent part of the act of filmmaking. The time it takes to 'incorporate' theories also suggests that this method pertains to the domain of ongoing acquisition of skills, and somebody observing the work of filmmaking, would easily notice how many adjustments and manipulations this apprenticeship might require. In fact the 'craft' and 'art' needed to make films requires the skills of art praxis too and also what French ethnologist De Certeau calls the doing as 'savoir faire' (De Certeau 1993). The way shots are taken must anticipate an idea of montage; at times the filming is prolonged into silent moments where everybody wonders why the camera still runs. The examples of the variety of choices to be taken at all moments could be endless. The art

of filmmaking is also the art of letting actors become acquainted with the body of the filmmaker (M. Piault 2000).

¹¹ If a certain non-fictional cinema is more soaked with phenomenological approach (Nichols 1994), it can also be said that phenomenology as world view is more occupied with description and observation than with explanation of logical cause-effect. The emerging patterns are realised often in different way when filmed and then, when they become footage and rushes the various audiences can contribute to their theorisation. The researcher has also the duty to take into account the act of physically disseminating partial versions of the film thus transforming the research and including some of the echoes of the analytical perspective of the audience (Martinez 1992: 143-145).

¹² The acceptance of the fact that the ambiguities of everyday life should be rendered in their complexity and specificity, it is one of the main aims of modern ethnology. Through anthropological film these aspects become visible evidence: ambiguities emerge because of the medium film, 'via' the film and both from filmmakers and actors. They ideally might appear balanced when diluted in the filmic analysis and ergo in the theoretical conclusions. This is a methodological instance to be taken into consideration to find that "right balance" between purely 'self' reflexive and shared-reflexive. It seems to me that too many moments of ambiguity and ambivalence create a completely different plot in a film for in that case the plot conveys more a 'meta' discourse on 'real' and 'fictional' in documentary and existence (like the last section of *Chronique d'un Été*, Rouch-Morin 1960) rather than a thick component for an ethnological study.

¹³ This is undoubtedly one of the core areas of knowledge production in the research process, especially when dealing with situational-analysis (Spradley, McCurdy and Shandy 2004) and even more with cross-cultural understanding (Salmond 1982), which requires hermeneutical procedures; film here becomes the phenomenological ground for individuating the partial views (Haraway 1991) emerging from the research and from the way the researcher and social actors have experienced each other viewpoints from their respective locations and roles (Lydall 1996; Arntsen & Holtedahl 2005; Ragazzi 2005, 2006b; Postma and Crawford 2006).

¹⁴ As Clifford writes: 'Once traveling is foregrounded as a cultural practice, then dwelling, too, needs to be reconceived no longer simply the ground from which traveling departs and to which it returns' (1997: 44).

¹⁵ Discovery: filming without truly knowing why and for how long. Shooting and reacting mainly in a state of intuition and sometimes altered consciousness. I accept being invited by others into possible events, open possibilities, but I often resist when certain it is going to be unproductive. I often accept for the sake of the relationship and I take a chance. Most of the time it does not bring me far, but it can provide very relevant findings once it is analysed. Some of the sequences filmed in this mode are crucial to my further understanding. In that case the awareness of the people

filmed is more acute and to the point than the awareness of the author, but it can also be said that without the presence and curiosity of the filmmaker these open possibilities would just become underestimated or simply be looked down upon by the actors themselves.

Connection: each shoot constitutes a selection of editorial choices. The plot emerges and is then reinforced by different styles of montage: it can be attraction montage (Eisenstein), dialectic montage (Gordard), collage montage (Marker), distance montage (Peleshyan), naturalistic montage (neo-realism), observational montage (Wiseman), or lyric montage (Trinh T Min-ha). In the accompanying DVD to the thesis I partially abolish the “overall plot” (characteristic of my previous documentaries). Instead I privilege the inner plot of each scene. For me dialogues are the most important aspect of the observational participant cinematographic method; in order to carefully listen to the speech, to the performative speech acts, and to record the actual dialogues of actors, who create the most interesting scripts. I would never be able myself to compose such conversations, with the embodiment of this kind of *‘parole écoutée’* (literally: ‘listened word’) while it is uttered (or non-uttered). In this way my filmmaking is characterised by fictional scripts for the dialogues are usually the driving force of observational sequences. The difference with most fictional dialogues is that they are improvised and never staged, even in terms of asking the actors to ‘comment, talk about this or that’ as agreed before starting to shoot.

Observational (Young 1995; MacDougall 1995; Ravetz 2000; Ragazzi 2006a, 2006b) style is constructed mainly as a collection of sequences, and if they don't end in some ways sometimes it is impossible to edit them. Different from fiction film or from more lyrical documentary (for example, Chris. Marker, Robert Kramer, Trinh T Min-ha), which take their meaning in the unfolding connections between displaced moments in space and time, or differently again from many ethnographic documentaries where the reflexive voice-over makes the continuity possible (*Les Maîtres Fous*, Rouch 1954), so that the discourse creates the juxtaposition of shots rather than the other way round, observational documentary carries throughout segments of events opening up and closing down and self-contained so to speak. Although the montage manipulates the sequences, connecting and imaging within each scene and also between each shot or sequence, it must hypothetically be possible to split each sequence and watch it as an episode to give the feeling of an event. I demonstrate that although I was in a determined observational participatory attitude, my unconscious and also pro-active work of imagination was inducing themes, orienting my gaze, shaping a plot and even interpreting on the spot behaviours and attitudes of the children with whom I was doing research. It would be improper to deny that I did this all the time, in a higher or minor degree, using the camera as an instrument. It is actually a narrative claim and instance, but I think it is also the revelation of what the mind of the filmmaker (and camera person in documentary) most of the time cannot but operate.

Photogenic and 'auralgenic': in order to emphasise the potential of/for action as actors appear and their gestalt rendered, I have experimented with 'the proof of photogram', 'the proof of voice'. Some characters, for example, have the power to signify through body-language in such a way that each frame where they appear gives a fairly evocative meaning of what they are performing, or about the expression they are forming and its significant impact. Others, conversely, never come out in still pictures. Their bodies can only be understood if the speech is supporting the expressions, or with the speech alone. In their case a 'sound' portrait is more suitable, more distinctive. Some actors transform themselves during the process, others appear differently if in interaction with other persons or isolated in the picture. This method analysing one's possibilities and performances in the merely 'visual' or 'aural' sphere, using in some way an applied 'gestalt', is something I have worked with, since I have never read about this as a technique. It just helps me to explore the aspects mentioned above as a 'metteur-en-scene' would do: by attributing specific traits to the actors 'embodying' a given character, and never with the aim of categorising, measuring, or judging anybody for his or her qualities.

Elicitation: the possibility to express new insight, to recall, admit, to confess even, are all part of the process of elicitation. Utilising observational filmmaking with the participant mode, these elicitations might take place in conditions of intimacy as well. I do not see intimacy in contrast to the notion of publicity: each cultural context has its own spaces for intimacy to be expressed. If this happens in public spaces the modalities can be particular but intimate communication occurs nonetheless. Sometimes our public spaces are suitable for the delivery of secrets, confidential information, and a mode of discretion which would never be revealed in intimate or private spaces, for that would have meant to be bound by collusion. Furthermore there is another aspect, which is not connected with collusion but more with complicity: the way actors render moments of intimacy by simply letting me access their silence, or their 'other languages', or their untold stories. All these forms of elicitation, which are mixing the reflexive, testimonial and more 'Brechtian' political address to an imagined audience beyond the filmmaker are thus present in this study.

Chapter Two

The Intercultural Classroom in Paris

Introduction

In this chapter I describe some relational patterns of integration and analyse the educational initiation of migrant children between seven and twelve years, all newly arrived in France. I refer to a body of material wherein the methodological approach is informed by visual anthropology, socio-linguistics, education studies and phenomenology. This ethnography is based on film fieldwork I conducted in Paris from 1997 to 1999. The thematics of storytelling, inequality and education will be incorporated in this chapter and in chapter five, in a portrayal of the liminal space-time of a particular class, where French is taught intensely and is compulsory for children older than six years. In my epistemological approach I also refer to an anthropological film I made with the class where I did my fieldwork. The groundwork and focus of the film fieldwork consisted of a search for accounts of the lived experiences of immigrant children, expressed through acts of remembrance and resistance, as suggested by the title *La Mémoire Dure*.¹

It is necessary to digress here in order to illustrate how I came to select my Parisian fieldwork site and how previous research I conducted led me to that particular school, and then on to a special class for so called *non-francophone* pupils where French is compulsory and taught intensely for one year before pupils are integrated² into ordinary classes. During my postgraduate research training at the Pasolini Foundation in Rome, I studied the work of this controversial but also mythical Italian poet, a film director and intellectual, tragically murdered in my home town in 1975 because of his

troubling public intellectual reputation and his overt homosexuality. Pasolini had conducted research on several occasions with Black students educated in White schools in the Congo and Tanzania, at the dawn of its liberation from colonial power in the 1960s: a screenplay inspired by real encounters in those settings, *Il Padre Selvaggio* ('The Savage Father'), was the only film he left behind unmade. It was 1962 and no producer wanted to finance a movie featuring non-professional Black actors, that centred on postcolonial experience, at a time when 'postcolonialism' was barely formulated in Italy as a concept. However, Pasolini continued to work on a documentary on the subject (1968-1970) with an experimental outcome he called *tacchino per immagini* (notebook made of images), titled *Appunti per un' Orestaide Africana* (1970); the African chapter of the series was called *Appunti per un Poema sul Terzo Mondo* ('Notes for a Poem on the Third World'). He also informally filmed Black African students visiting Italy for their secondary studies. He always had a vivid relationship with the postcolonial, which he compared to the Italian pre-industrialist past with its themes of domination and subalternity (in a Gramscian context), social inequality and national-internal migration. This body of work, comprised of interviews, accounts and disparate images, was a solid ground from which I began to weave a research project on postcolonial heritage within higher education, alongside the controversial practice of Black intellectuals returning to Africa after their studies to help in re-constructing and reinforcing national and cultural identities. The work of Pasolini was then echoing the literature of Franz Fanon, Soyinka, Okri, Walcott, and Morrison in addition to Rouch's ethnographic visual work of the late 1950s. Rouch's lively films on colonial West Africa, his search for happiness, catharsis, self-reflexivity, irony and postmodernism had become a counterpoint of Pasolini's more dramatic style. Films such as *La Pyramide Humaine*

(1961), *Moi un Noir* (1959) and *Chronique d'un Été* (1960) are seminal in this regard³. My original aim was to conduct research in Africa, in some of the locations of Pasolini's journeys, thirty years afterwards. His protagonist, Ngibuini, a young student torn apart between a sense of belonging within his father's ethnic group and the beckoning career of a writer following his education in the whites' school, would encourage me in my research to search for his 'sons and daughters', and also for his peers, the Black teachers in the postcolonial schools.

As soon as I could, I started fieldwork in Cameroon, beginning my observations in Koranic and Western schools.⁴ This first step into the postcolonial dimension of a Francophone region, with a majority Muslim population, then created the groundwork for the later background research into children migrating from Central Africa to Europe. Later on I located the 'cousins' of the Cameroonian children I was observing in Ngaoundéré town when they came to Paris and to the school I would eventually research near my home. These diverse locations were hence bound together by our respective history; my fieldwork was built on a personal shared geography and therefore inherently multi-sited (Marcus 1995: 105). The project took another turn, however, when it began to incorporate the generations of the 'nephews' of Ngibuini; those who had to follow their parents when they migrated to Europe.

So when I chose to operate from my actual home in Paris, after many years of displacement conducting fieldwork(s) away from France, it was because I needed to understand these social transformations and multivocal-oriented instances. I wanted to explore how recently arrived migrant children dealt with the educational system in their first few months in France. What I was doing, by entering the arena where the

transmission of national belonging and the adhesion to forms of national identity were taking place, was a delicate matter, because French institutions often do not like it when foreign researchers explore their policies of integration or eventual assimilation, and take a critical position. I had to wait a long time (nine months) to obtain the permission to operate as a fieldworker in a French Initiation class. But the school I had chosen, and the Académie de Paris, were open enough to the project; I was also accepted because the headmaster offered a guarantee that this type of research could potentially benefit a large spectrum of constituencies (within the school, among parents and children and in the Ministry of Education and *Francophonie* itself).

I chose a grammar school at the bottom of the slopes of Montmartre near the circle of Boulevard de Clichy, Pigalle. I had lived in this area since 1987 and wanted to conduct my research with the help of my neighbours, my own bilingual children, their peers and local welfare infrastructures. I was a foreigner, an expatriate, of the cosmopolitan type. People from various ethnic origins and diverse social classes inhabited the quarter around the school. These ranged from the disadvantaged, unemployed and sometimes undocumented residents, living in small flats in cellars and attics, to the lower middle class French and families of foreign professionals, to the upper middle class living in the hills of Montmartre who sent their children to private schools.

These quarters resembled in part the old type of French inner city, bordering the city centre itself. Most of its population could be characterised by their tendencies towards transience, precariousness, *anonimité* and other social disadvantages; most of this population had already been moved to the *cités* during President Mitterrand's

socialist term of office. Later President Chirac merely exacerbated this process of moving immigrants to the periphery, to areas which were becoming as problematic as the urban suburbs ghettos. Paris is composed of 21 administrative subdivisions, which have their own local mayor and council and also depend on the main council of *La Ville de Paris*, which has its own General Mayor. It is the most politically relevant position a mayor can have and the position is a platform for attaining higher positions in the national government. In the period when I was conducting research, the mayor of Paris was Mr. Tibéri, a collaborator of Mr. Chirac who was himself mayor before becoming President of France in 1997.

Paperless

During this period new policies were devised to control, manage and prevent the introduction of immigrants into France. Work permit regulations were reassessed and immediate deportation (most of the time in violent conditions) was faced by immigrants if caught by police without a renewed permit. The target population of these anti-immigration measures was called *Sans Papier*. Of course, one could enter the country without papers surreptitiously, using methods controlled by smugglers which were well known throughout Europe. People who had already settled in France for many years, when attempting to secure a long-term or permanent residency permit, suddenly found themselves in a risky situation. Police patrols were constantly crossing the Barbès and Goutte d'Or area, with security vans rounding up pedestrians. Men of North and Black African origins were under particular suspicion; salesmen, dealers, prostitutes and the homeless were scrutinised repeatedly. Every day checkpoints were established in the police stations of the XVIII, XIX and XX

subdivisions – these are the subdivisions in Paris where the largest number of immigrants reside.

On a larger, national scale, this period was also marked by the introduction of a new law, the Debré Law, which allowed for rigorous repressive measures to be employed by the French army, the police and the Ministry for Interior Affairs, in the case of riots and resistance to public officers. This law was violently opposed by left wing and associated parties at that time.⁵ What emerged from this struggle, from the side of civil society, was consequently a vital combination of individual associations, from working unions to libertarian associations (anti-racist, gay and lesbian, ethnic, cultural, and educational), which informed the struggle with diverse world-views and multi-vocal articulations, which were in contrast to the monolingual voice of the established left wing parties in power. What emerged was a map of a French society where class, gender, and racial claims were to be redefined again, ranging from human rights to social security, from welfare coverage to educational inequality. During this turmoil, after many years of a maintained status quo, real possibilities for diversity and strands of integration were interrogated again. France was awash with strikes, marches in the street, episodes of solidarity and public displays of political struggle, including sit-ins, occupations and protests activities which today characterise anti-globalisation movements across the world. Organised occupations of churches also occurred, quickly repressed by the special police corps.⁶ The most spectacular of these occupations by the ‘Paperless’ in an anger strike took place in Lyon. They followed an occupation which had taken place at St. Ambroise in Paris, and an even longer strike in the neighbourhood of the school I was to work in, both in the Rue Pajol and St. Bernard Church. Some of the struggles of the Paperless in 1996 are still

enacted today, within a large network of solidarity incorporating other civil society groups, groups working with HIV patients and other anti-discriminatory movements. The phenomena these groups have in common are those of shared social and political precariousness and their associated problems of homelessness, immigrants' camps, prison camps for those who are paperless, deportation and the abuse of human rights in prison conditions. As to the security measures implemented in the schools, they were obviously reflecting the general atmosphere of tension described above. The period 1997-98 was marked by oppressive measures of security called *Vigipirate*, a temporary security measure introduced in 1998. Under *Vigipirate*, children could only enter the school during a limited time, and their parents were not allowed to cross the gate, unless they had previous authorisation. Classes were forbidden to use public transport, including the underground, buses and railway stations, and many institutional buildings under surveillance were boarded up for young visitors. In this way many extra-mural school activities, visits to museums, and short trips didn't take place for three or more years. Teachers had to find solutions for outdoor tours within areas that could be reached by foot.

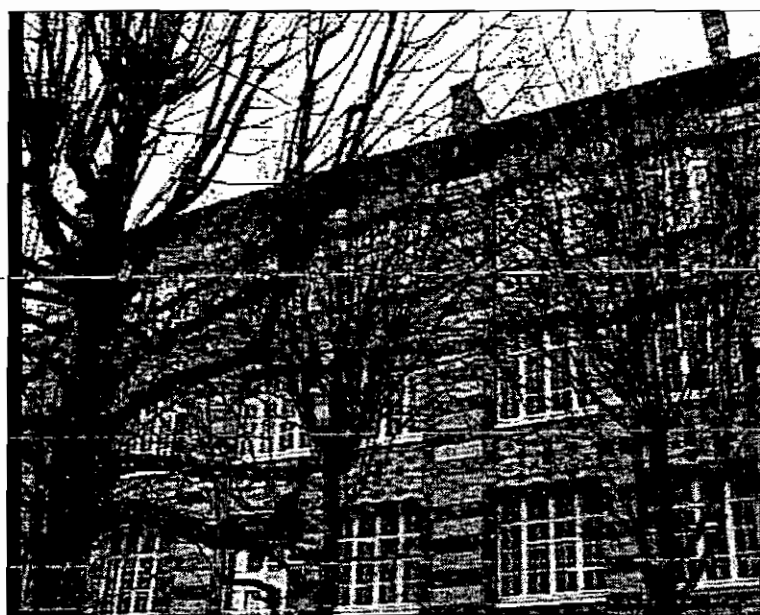


Figure 1.2 The school building seen from the yard.

The School and its Special Class

It was within this socio-political atmosphere that I chose a non-denominational, national school for boys and girls, focusing on a special class called Cl.in., namely *Classe d'initiation linguistique*. One of the last remaining (of 19 Cl.in classes in the whole country), it was supported by extra funding from the Minister of Education for disadvantaged areas, called ZEP (*Zone Education Prioritaire*). A Cl.in class hosts less children than an ordinary class (16 students maximum), all non-Francophone, between seven and twelve years of age. After a maximum period of nine months in this special class they re-integrate into ordinary classes. The school's charter clearly stated that the main integrative pedagogical project was to:

[R]educe the socio-cultural gaps, so to enable every child to succeed. This by diversifying approaches, systematising every taught domain, enlarging the cultural fields of the pupils, including children in the management of projects being most of all concerned by the fact that the child may become conscious of his/her capabilities and will gain pleasure in discovering it (1997: 4).

One headmaster and seventeen teachers comprised the pedagogical team for 337 children divided into fifteen classes, three apprentices, two psychologists and one social worker. In the academic year of my fieldwork the population of the school was divided as follows: 42% of children from French metropolitan areas; 3% from *Départements d'Outre Mer* (D.O.M.); 2% from *Territoires d'Outre Mer* (T.O.M.); 27% of foreign origins (meaning both parents of non-French origins, but children born in France); and 27% of non-French nationals. Thirty-two nationalities were represented in the school and most of the immigrant children were very recently arrived in France. 55.5% of the pupils paid the minimum fee (1,50FF) for the daily meal eaten at the school canteen, (within a scale of five levels in which the more expensive one was used only by 11% of students). As regards the parents, the

professional landscape was occupied by 41% employed in offices, 12% factory workers, 14% unemployed, 2% welfare/retired, 6% precarious traders, 11% liberal professions and 14% artists. The constellation was very diverse, but in general 58% of parents were not earning more than the minimum wage per family. Mono-parental families were also on the increase.

An experimental project implementing the teaching of a series of peri-scholastic activities already integrated in the curricula was initiated in 1985-86 and made permanent in 1995. Thus the evaluation of details and adjustments, in view of potential improvement, were still in progress. One of the key aims was to consolidate the scholastic achievement of children who did not do well in French and Mathematics, and therefore, in the French context, are not allowed to access the higher strands in second level education. The new schedule offered 17 different extra subjects, totalling 6 per year. Subjects such as opera singing, folk and contemporary dance, kite making, puppet making, several sports (roller-skating, boxing, sailing, bow, swimming, squash, and climbing) and many other artistic options were offered.



Figure 2.2 Cl.in pupils help each other in the swimming-pool.

Several cultural trips were organised each year in Brittany or Normandy and a permanent exchange with an Italian school also existed (excluding Cl.in and Resource classes, which did not have foreign language courses). A systematic tutorial programme, which held weekly sessions in the school library, provided each pupil from these two classes a peer-tutor from an ordinary class. Some of the ex-Cl.in alumni were reading French books in a relaxed atmosphere, in which new Cl.in pupils, through peer-relationships of solidarity and linguistic-cultural translation, could see a possible future of greater scholastic achievement. The implementation of strands for diverse scholastic achievements, sustained by research about the chronological and chrono-psychological rhythms of the child, was evaluated each year by the pedagogical board and it showed evidence of regular improvement, according to the report *Project d'Ecole* (1997). Every five years the school was evaluated in greater depth by the inspectors of the *Académie de Paris*, who also came to observe screenings of my film footage, further receiving reports of my work every third month.

To enter the Cl.in class felt like *déjà-vu* for most of the pupils following their recent crossing of the French national border. It seemed like yet another migratory step. Everything happened very quickly for most of these children: from the plane landing in the huge airport of Roissy, going through customs, arriving at temporary shelters, even meeting new family members and the wait in front of the local school gate and the first contact with the teacher (with whom affective bonds in all likelihood would be developed). Cl.in takes in pupils from all over the world throughout the year: the common ground here is the acquisition of the French language, but also

'alphabetisation' because, for many of these children, it is their first experience of an institutional school. The Cl.in class is allowed to receive pupils all year long, entering at any time, provided that the classroom average of 16 children is not surpassed.

At the beginning of the year the names of the Cl.in children, their country of origin, together with their teacher Miss Pascale Lantéri included the following: 'Kadiatou (Guinea), Hedda (Algeria), Alpha (Liberia) and Mangmang (Popular China). They were in the class from the previous trimester. Those newly arrived on the first day of the new year were: Ibrahim (Mali), Alexander (Peru), Cesar (Peru) and Nawel (Algeria). The following children came at different points during the school year: Isak (Ghana), Liz Ain (Popular China), Jingle (Popular China), Tchao (Popular China), Stephanie (Peru), Radija (Algeria), Fatima (Morocco) and Nana (Iceland). During the year Hedda, Cesar, Nawel, Fatima and Kadiatou were re-integrated into ordinary classes one by one at separate intervals throughout the second semester.⁷

The Journey from the Mother Tongue

Little by little the classroom reveals its atmosphere through individuals overcoming obstacles to learning, often suddenly between gestures or events, always within the interstices of laborious communication across diverse age groups, competencies, needs or hopes. The cognitive categories of all those in the school (including the teacher, her colleagues, the principal, the psychologist, external contributors to various activities, Francophone or French children in the 'ordinary' classes, etc.) are constantly turned upside down, stripped, re-interpreted or transformed before they could be understood. Words whose meaning should be obvious are not when spelled or spoken differently by the foreign child not acquainted with them. Slowly, yet

through sudden jumps of comprehension, these children, who share references to TV programs, but have no words in common to speak to each other, start to utilise words and icons from TV, the names of famous music stars or movie titles to communicate, or mime the characters they saw the night before on TV.



Figure 3.2 Miming 'gurus' seen in a TV film.

To learn the language of the host country, which will eventually become theirs, is not only a technical imperative for children who have to gain a command quickly; the challenge is of course much larger. For this reason children reveal otherwise hidden aspects, putting in crisis, even in the time of a wink, the evidence in which everybody around them is immersed; by pronouncing, deforming, refuting, striking their utterances, laughing, they offer a fresh insight into an ordinary language. Moreover, they allow the caregivers at the school to listen to and pick up on their apprehension of their new world, gaining understanding through empathy. Their voices and their

individual physical history are marked forever by the migratory move and the consequent division of time into 'before' and 'after'.

Each time that a new pupil comes in, his or her peers are generally highly excited, as with any novelty promising to reshape social situations, allowing for the balancing of affinities, the re-establishment of peer groups and sometimes the provision of new friendships. The arrival of a new pupil can also provide a new interlocutor for informal conversations if the newcomer speaks the same mother language as someone else in the class. Formal conversations are only allowed in French and mostly guided by the teachers to enable any utterance in the new language to be corrected when it happens. Each time that a newcomer enters the classroom, any other recently arrived child suddenly represents her/himself as a veteran, assuming the role of tutor, showing assurance in their response and also seeing her/himself retrospectively in the now very visible position of the newly arrived. This creates a retrospective perception of the self and of others, as well as a sense of chronology, and also creates a mode of self-evaluation by comparison. Furthermore, the space of the class is restructured in such a way that new locations are invested as a location for new relationships; the landscape is transformed and the relational web among the desks is affected by the new arrivals; consequently pre-existing alliances are reorganised by connections with new peers. The teacher is initially preoccupied with the newcomer and the rest of the class envies his or her position of transitory privilege. The teacher constantly works to build a platform, with tools taken from 'life out there', as she says. Everyday life provides objects and pieces which she refashions, making ABC books out of advertisements, planting a vegetable garden near the underground station, using hip hop from the

radio as a soundtrack to playtime when it is raining or too polluted outside,⁸ when the children dance among chairs and desks.



Figure 4.2 Children dance hip hop music during playtime.

Ibrahim, originally from Sahelian Mali, is eleven years old according to his immigration papers, but most probably he is not more than eight as everybody seemed to remark by looking at his body features, teeth and general attitude. His head is stricken by scabies, which will necessitate him going into forced quarantine soon. In a few weeks he completes a learning process in literacy that his French school-friends took one or two years to finish. Under the constant attention of Miss Pascale, the teacher, he begins to articulate French spelling, the alphabet, and the numbers up to nine. Following a sports session, his first time on roller skates, he tangibly displays his pleasure in his technical achievement; his skill in persisting through pride and stubbornness, despite falling (he refuses to allow a classmate to help him after a fall). Ibrahim experiences one hour of sport and leisure where acceleration, the loss of

balance, threat of falling, negotiating the circuit of the courtyard through his curls, the pride of passing others on skates, could all be compared to a path of handwriting and verbal articulation, the exercise involving his whole body in the 'blank page' of the yard.

DVD 1 ch. 2 clip n.1. (DV 11_6) Rolling, Talking, Remembering. 4'20''.

It is his performative being, who 'writes' on the playtime yard, who inscribes his active presence in the fabric of the school. This shy elation felt by Ibrahim, this effort transformed into pleasure, the light shining through him when he jumps and dances on four wheels, later becomes restful concentration once he is back in the classroom, breathless. This satisfaction, moreover, is generating a desire for (further) communication, I felt, and after my first question to him, it welled up in the form of many recollections. Images, tastes and the tactile feel of his life in the bush have not yet left his mind, and his remembering seems to be activated by sensorial imaging. His storytelling evokes his life as a shepherd, his swimming-tours with friends and cousins to the river, the fresh milk drunk directly from the cow and his hunting of dogs and snakes, with the help of a huge knife (this particular account is analysed in chapter five). What is in focus here is the relationship between discipline and performance in motor education and linguistic command. In fact, the day after the sports session with roller-skates, Ibrahim fluently copied down entire lists of words from the blackboard, talked and joked loudly, responded to questions and followed others' conversations: he has indicated one of those 'intervals', well known by teachers, where sudden jumps in verbal command appear sometimes unbelievable from one day to the next. The desire to learn, the self-assurance in communicating, can be cultivated by all the activities offered by the school. The pedagogy is

encouraging the interface between different disciplines seen as non-hierarchical, even if equality is still not implied, and literacy and arithmetic are therefore taken as fundamental subjects where the pedagogical approach seems to insist that only the individual effort of the mind (*esprit* in French) can aid further learning. In the French national scholastic curriculum, these disciplines are evaluated as platforms for an educational performance, which alone suffices to mark advancement and competition. However these evaluative mechanisms often create difficult obstacles for migrant children.

Each child in the CI.in experiences painful trials of some kind or another. It is clear that nothing is simple. Yet there are ways of alleviating the distress, especially if the principle teacher, who is at times overwhelmed by the responsibility, chooses to share her knowledge with others (parents, external participants, her colleagues and the children themselves), but also has the opportunity to acknowledge the worries, findings, ignorance and doubts which s/he experiences daily. However such an opportunity for sharing is not given; none of the teachers can rely on such support structures. Meanwhile across Europe we can witness the reduction of financial support from each State, negating the possibility for dialogue between teachers within working time in the national primary schools. Further, it could be said that the victories acquired in the 1970s and 1980s are now being repealed.

The Principle Teacher

Pascale Lantéri (who does not want to be called 'Miss') has been in charge of this special type of education for non-Francophone children for eight years, after a dozen years as a teacher in ordinary classes in disadvantaged schools, always in the Parisian

belt. She comes from a family of *Pieds Noirs*, French subjects born in colonial Maghreb, Tunisia, where her father was a graduate in the French Army. They left just after Independence, as did hundreds of former colonial subjects, and when they returned in France they were met with indifference and public denial of their previous life in the colonies. Generations coming from that historical and social experience of return and inward migration to their own distant country of origin were often aware of their loss and a lack of recognition. As Pascale says, she never learned Arabic in Tunisia nor when she moved to France; instead, what she knows of Arabic today was learnt through the Arabian children in her Cl.in classes. In admitting this she states that learning processes can be based on exchange and hence reciprocally oriented. She seems to recognise too that her pupils have a fascination with her and they can bring her fragments of a knowledge that she has longed for since her own return 'home', to France. Pascale also chose to be a teacher of Cl.in because she felt empathy for migrants and more generally for pupils who do not perfectly fit the system. Thus, she also appears to be captured in a sort of Batesonian double bind, because as an adult and teacher she is not meant to recognise that she can learn from children, but her growing awareness of this evidence seemed to affect her professional perspective around the time I stepped into her class. Most of the time she did not show that she was aware of this, but at the end of the fieldwork she realised, through watching the film, how this reciprocity had been denied for the sake of abstract principles, then reversed through her experience of teaching. Her acceptance of the filmic material in its totality, in which she showed an honest and open attitude and never tried to defend herself or to apologise for her actions, made her contribution invaluable and confirmed that my choice of a 'difficult' social actor, like her, was worthwhile. She in fact often appeared difficult to contain, sometimes positing her authority against my

intellectualism which she perceived as somehow oppressing her perspective, and also expressing contradictory attitudes ranging from jealousy to enthusiasm, suspicion to dependency in an unforeseeable oscillation that I was sometimes very disturbed by. I knew for instance that if Pascale began to feel tired of my presence, or experienced the camera as surveillance, I would have lost my opportunity to meet the children at this school. I also became very dependent on her, because she was my first gatekeeper (the second was the headmaster) and because I wanted her from the first days in the school to understand the project and, in so doing, create a space for a dialectical engagement.

The teacher is required by the educational system to monitor its members with a close eye and to reproduce forms of transmission of knowledge taught to her/him in the past. Additionally in Pascale's case, her talent as teacher became visible in the institution. Most of her colleagues, especially the strong-willed principal who was proud of his ideology and management style, appreciated and even needed her during those years. She has been authorised, if not encouraged, to sometimes act in a firm if not rough manner, to indicate a sense of equality in the way she educates 'foreign' children. They are not to be protected, but instead pushed into the new, shared bath of French primary education; and this seems to be the outcome of this behaviour. Because she genuinely loves them, her behaviour is not criticised, which reinforces the immediate results of her pedagogy. Most of her pupils achieve an acceptable level and go on to face, with more or less determination, their coming fate in the French educational system.



Figure 5.2 Pascale consoles a child crying for he must leave Cl.in.

These patterns are already anticipated in the first meeting, when parents first enrol their children.⁹ Both principal and teacher take very seriously the quality of the message they want to provide. In the years I was present in the school, the teacher seemed to be expected to receive input from the parents, so that the first contact might enrich both. As part of the process of enrolment, the scholastic background of the new child was surveyed to indicate previous scholastic habits, performances and response to disciplinary rules. If the pupil enrolling already knew how to write in any given language, the school could rely on the pupil's comparative understanding through an implicit translation mode or just using natural comparative skills. If the child had never been to school, never been initiated into literacy, then the teacher described the curriculum for the parents, making them aware that a certain delay in consolidating French literacy might possibly occur. When the parents seemed to care about the achievements of their children and engaged in dialogue, Pascale was obviously more receptive and she entered more into the core of the pedagogy, asking for help in giving attention to the children when they returned home from classes and also during

homework. She was investigating the competence of the parents to see if she could ask for extra technical help in the domain of literacy and mathematics. If the parents reacted positively to her invitation, she explained the difficulties of transcription. She showed how to transcribe in handwritten italic script from a printed text in plain fonts; in arithmetic she described the method of avoiding the use of physical objects (like sticks and coins) to calculate, instead encouraging the children to calculate mentally, without manipulation.

Pascale often emphasises that parents who do not speak French at home (in the case of Mang Mang, Alfa and Alexander) cannot help their own children. Here again the emphasis on the aspects that are lacking are put forward without fully realising the psychological stress that the accumulation of skills which are perceived to be lacking creates in a migrant child. After moving from their homelands and social networks the children miss the power of their parents as their caretakers in the educational sphere. The way they look at their own parents can then be affected and difficult to restore, as many studies have shown (Faulstich et al 2001; Suarez-Orozco and Suarez Orozco 2001; Castaneda 1996).

Integration in Standard Classes

Cl.in pupils know from the very first day, when the headmaster talks to them seriously about terms such as responsibility and commitment, that the main aim is their 'rehabilitation' in standard classes. It is clear that the concept of rehabilitation is hard to grasp for the pupils. They see themselves already striving to be integrated in Cl.in, and they can hardly imagine a future where this might be remembered simply as an easy period. This concept seems to be influenced mostly by a model of adult, moral

and social harmony, which is superimposed as a frame of reference on every action of the pupil. The outcome can be that pupils begin to desire their quick rehabilitation above everything else. This can partially explain why children utilise the term 'rehabilitation' before truly understanding its experiential meaning. It can be said that a child only 'transits' Cl.in; they are taught there that one must 'evolve', but the hazards surrounding this concept are many: is this a synonym of proficiency, metamorphosis, psychological transformation, or simply an accumulation of cultural patrimony? These are abstract concepts, but children retain their own images of rehabilitation, and as in the case of the articulate girl from Guinea, Kadiatou (as later discussed); they do not simply adjust to the crude reality of the dominant educational discourse. Among other things, the 'transition' inevitably leads to an imminent separation, which both pupils and teacher must become able to metabolise, because it usually comes at the climax of their genuine integration within the Cl.in itself. In fact, as the children start to enjoy their position as 'veterans', as they fulfil their daily 'contracts' with growing proficiency and when they finally get the admiration and respect of Pascale and the other teachers and are valorised because they coped with the rigours of the classroom, they then leave Cl.in behind. Each child enters a new class yet again, incorporating a vast arena of new relationships and expectations, becoming anonymous much like the beginning of their sojourn in the new school, and the realisation that once more they are at an educational level which is inferior when compared to that of their new peers, who have the benefit of a standard education.

Each time one of the pupils was to be integrated into an ordinary class of his or her education level and age bracket, the teacher organised a plenary meeting to discuss the child's imminent departure with the other students. This meeting could be relaxed

or tense, depending on who was leaving, who was meant to leave next and who had not been prioritised for departure, and how Pascale reacted to each separation. Occasionally she received pressure from various school authorities to speed up the initiation and achieve a student's proficiency quickly, on other occasions parents wanted to see their children becoming like the others from the mainstream Francophone classes and applied pressure accordingly. Sometimes the process had to be accelerated because the child started to get annoyed at remaining in Cl.in for such a long time and s/he showed an impatience to be transferred. Behaviour typical of this impatience was often manifested in a disturbing attitude to all proposed activities, with some virulent expressions of scorn, rebellion, bullying and sometimes despair. The behaviour of children who acted out in this could also be interpreted as grief for leaving a place where they felt secure, but which one must leave in order to be assimilated.

The rite of rehabilitation wished for, but also feared by the children of Cl.in, provoked many unspoken questions. The main question, which went unasked, seemed to be: 'Why not me yet?' Another, posed by Kadiatou, was: 'Am I obliged to go? Why?' Pascale would then explain why one child was ready for the 'passage' and why the others had to remain in Cl.in. Some children felt ready for rehabilitation, having a good command of French, but Pascale was aware they still needed to improve their literacy. Their varying abilities, derived from their lifestyle before migration, were not considered relevant. Hence, the way Pascale defines some of the issues regarding the previous life or education of some of the children can affect their psychic safety, or simply their pride, for their prior efforts were in the context of exodus, poverty,

insecurity and sometimes considerable physical danger (as in the case of Nawel, Alexander and Cesar, Alfa and Radija).

Pascale often repeated phrases such as 'children who were not lucky' or 'who come from countries where they didn't have this or that' or 'those who don't have the luck of having parents who speak French' or 'it must be terrible for some of you, so unlucky' inducing a sort of self-pity in the children of Cl.in. This way of pointing out what was lacking, according to the worldview of the well-educated, middle class European, is not something Pascale could recognise or comment upon easily. It derived from her common sense, the habitus she had inherited through her upbringing and education, and it partly drove her philosophy in the pedagogy she applied. Thus, she often says that what she wants to provide the pupils with are '*des armes pour vous battre*' ('some weapons for your fight'): she uses the metaphor of the 'outdoor' life, the 'life over there', incorporating that of the ordinary classes, as well as social and civil life in France, all evoked as individual battlefields. This could be seen by the children as exhortation to fight, to survive, to have courage and sufficient pragmatic knowledge, something she equates with the ability of looking directly into someone's eyes. Pascale felt the habit of dropping one's eyes in respect or subservience, which some children retain for cultural reasons, was a taboo she wanted to break in order to facilitate their 'rebirth' in a new cultural and social context. She sees the moment when a child dares to look at her directly as a sign of achievement, showing that the relational transformation in the child is established. She doesn't want to take into consideration that the breaking of such a taboo has different consequences in each child and each habitus (this situation will be analysed in the section devoted to Alfa's accounts, in chapter five). Pascale has talked to me about these subjects and has

discovered the hidden side of these relationships through the filmed images and through the narrative I created within various sequences. While aware of the power of such taboos, she stated that her role was also to help children to acquire the strategies and cultural habits of the social classes within which they would be functioning as adults.

How Pedagogy Shapes Relationships and Vice Versa

In what follows, I will outline how pedagogy shapes the relationships in the class and vice versa: peers amongst themselves as well as pupils with the teacher and children with adults. The class, in this section, is represented as a community of obligation and interest, having several aims (learning, acquisition, order, discipline, production, integration, command, socialisation, leisure, and discovery), and structured into a hierarchy of power (principal, teacher, veterans, new pupils, children ready to leave Cl.in, *volenti et nolenti*). Little by little I became part of that community and my orientation shifted: I assumed initiative, took responsibility, provoked more and was provoked, interwove links with some of the pupils, committed myself to basic tasks and developed an awareness of how to accomplish more difficult ones, helping Pascale on several occasions. In so doing I perceived that she could comment self-reflexively on her own perspective, by reading my provisional reports and by looking at selected images. I was also granted the chance to show my footage in the class during the school day, which was a huge gift given the restricted time Pascale felt she had. I asked to be evaluated by both the children and adults through informal discussions taking place outside the classroom, as well as more formal meetings, to discuss the progress of my research.

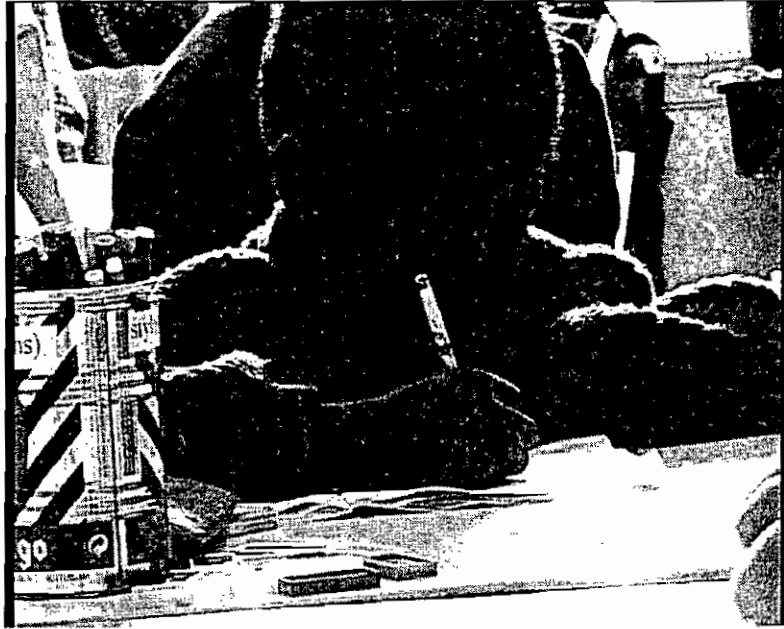


Figure 6.2 Ibrahim concentrates in order to write in a new direction.

I began to document cultural practices in progress in the everyday intimate space of the classroom. For example, Ibrahim was reprimanded in his first week at Cl.in, because he put his notebook in a reversed position (*Pourquoi donc tu tiens ton cahier à l'inverse?*). Because the filmic process allows me to observe recurring actions, enabling a progressive understanding of the logic of the actors, I intuited that the child had probably attended a Koranic school for some weeks. Therefore, I was not as surprised as his teacher about the position of the notebook. For Ibrahim, however, the scolding he received seemed incomprehensible. He had to acknowledge that the way he was used to writing was wrong, and began at once to feel he was mistaking the past for the present, and became confused. The first day he was visibly proud to show that he possessed a notebook and wanted to start work at once. The way Ibrahim wrote, from right to left, and into a reversed notebook, persisted for the first three weeks as testimony to his previous habitus, so consolidated because of his previous experience of school. When given a photocopy with drawings and text to fill or colour in, he

always started from right below and followed the direction right/left, below/above. In this way he attempted on his own to work with the reversed notebook by starting from below, but retaining the Arabic direction of the writing. We can see this adaptation as a form of *métissage* in progress, where Ibrahim tries to make sense of rules which are not explained to him because they are taken for granted in the host culture. This is a small example that only a timely observation can provide; such phenomena appeared daily in the life of the class. By mobilising a pedagogy incorporating a certain, limited relativism, the foreign children could be taught in such a way so as to avoid inducing a 'reset' syndrome of their knowledge(s), instead building upon their instances in continued metamorphosis. Pupils, hence, could experience these patterns as concrete actions. (For example, allowing the child to reverse his notebook alone by appropriating that gesture of change, to understand why he must use it, to discover that different meanings are given to the same material object). Often the pupils yelled the following: '*Pascale, j'ai envie de comprendre!*' ('Pascale! I wish to understand!') This demonstrated their eagerness, their inner motivation which is a condition *sine qua non* for changes to consolidate and merge.

Common Time, Social Order

Among the rituals instituted by Pascale, there is the shift of the calendar, made by using a system of cards, which the chosen 'child of the day' moves along the blackboard, inviting the rest of the audience to recite the following sentences:

Today we are the... (Day and date: i.e.:28th September 1998).

Yesterday we were the ... (Day and date).

Tomorrow we shall be the... (Day and date).

After this moment, when everybody acknowledges a common timeline in a shared space (the class, the school, the city, the nation, etc.) through the ritual of the shifting

calendar, which also shows the children how to conjugate verbs, it is time to queue up at Pascale's round table to receive the 'contract'. This is how daily guidelines and assignments are announced and explained. The 'contract' is a series of 3-4 photocopies with exercises, with a different 'contract' provided each day for each child. The document is then pasted into the child's notebook, and once completed is evaluated, signed and stamped with the current date by Pascale.



Figure 7.2 In line to get daily assignments ('contracts').

Whilst queuing, each pupil listens carefully to the instructions, but s/he has the right to return to the table if, as often happens, some doubts about what to do come up during the assignment. This influx of individual queries is manifold and continues throughout the whole morning, except for playtime and breakfast at 11.00am, which is a free period. The way the 'contracts' are completed is therefore part of a parallel movement: the requests are made to the teacher at her low table, but, as soon as everybody calms down, she surveys pupils writing at their individual desks. The social and relational pattern is in constant movement. This simultaneity is well

rendered in film, more so than in text. In film the *gestalt* nature of diverse intersecting plans show how proximity with the teacher creates zones of density and attention, but also how, far from her, parallel negotiations of knowledge, solidarity, bullying or just indifference, occur among child peers.

The method consists of shaping the amount and type of work of each child according to her level – Pascale is proud of this pedagogical model. Moreover, the theatrical display inherent in her postures makes her method accessible at any moment for the gaze of the curious child. Prompting encourages learning by mimesis. In fact, through the use of this method, the class becomes an arena where children fulfil their own ‘contracts’ by themselves, or queue to ask for assistance or further explanation, and may, at the same time, observe how Pascale is working with their peers. Each time they are in the queue they get to listen and observe their peers performing exercises that are sometimes familiar but sometimes unknown, if they haven’t been done before. It is an ongoing flux of kaleidoscopic images where each child sees him or herself progressing or regressing and in a sort of imaged web, by means of the phenomenon of identification with the child who is working with the teacher. In addition the child waiting her turn can inhabit a position where s/he can see the Self in an historical perspective by empathy with the others. This is not done in the spirit of interrogation, but it can also occur if the teacher wants to startle a child, whom she considers to have a mental or psychological blockage. Furthermore, this method suits informal tutoring, because sometimes in the queue surrounding one of the pupils, whilst Pascale explains the assignment, the children help or correct each other. This encourages pride, more regular self-evaluation, and also a collective spirit of solidarity. Additionally, this process creates a theatrical mode in the display of the

transmission of knowledge in its performative aspect, by encouraging mimesis and reiterating previous acquisitions, which children can fix and consolidate by listening to one of the others' explanations. This pattern sometimes provokes a certain relief in the child who can benefit from others' mistakes and exorcise or sublimate her/his own worries. This method, possible only in limited size classes, resembles more a transmission of bodily skills, because the children can move about according to the teacher's itinerary. They locate themselves around other pupils' desks and interact more freely than if they had to stay in their chairs for hours each day, as in ordinary class, where it is compulsory to remain still.

Furthermore, the use of recurring verbal explanations is supported by Pascale's mimicking abilities and her tendency to use these (as with tourists or others who cannot understand the spoken language in use). This creates a rationalising utterance imprinted through body language and expressed in a performative dimension. Here transmission easily reaches those children who react/respond with their bodies when they spell words for the first time. Pascale uses an interesting device to strengthen this need for more complete involvement of body language by miming each phoneme using a system of signs, moving her hands along the parts of the body that were connected with the utterance.



Figure 8.2 Teacher makes Ibrahim mime "é" by touching his face.

For example: the throat for the 'r', the nose for the 'n' and 'm', the belly for 'g' and so forth. I noticed that the children associate the gestures with the utterance very quickly and this slowly evolves into a fluid 'reading' located in the space and in the body of the teacher. Furthermore, they can feel it in their own body, needing to touch some of it to spell properly. Pascale calls this miming *faire les mots dans l'espace*, literally meaning 'to make words in the space', stressing by this expression the sense of craft, gesture and visualisation of words which are not simply meant to be expressed through utterance nor put to paper. 'To make words' is her original expression because words are never 'made', but told, written, spelled, found, and forgotten.



Figure 9.2 Learning 'faire les mots dans l'espace' as the teacher says.

When Pascale leaves her low table and surveys the children, a queue of pupils start slowly to follow her. Some of them remain with Pascale's initial pupil, whom she eventually leaves for another, and they continue to 'teach' the pupil by mimesis. This informal tutoring consolidates the acquisition of both the new learner and his or her supervising peer.

Of course this is not always an idyllic movement without impasse: sometimes one of the peer-tutors takes over, because of a tendency towards overruling and because some of the children may enjoy this form of empowerment. In some cases the teacher comes back and scolds him or her for having done the assignment on behalf of the learner-child. I should also point out that my role in the observation (with and without the camera) has also been applied to such dynamics as extra tutoring, when the children started asking me for help with their assignments. This often occurred, and always when Pascale was far away and couldn't hear us. I had thus to make clear after a while that I would not help them surreptitiously. My role was then restored to

that of the silent witness. I was accompanying them, understanding the inner logic of their struggle with given tasks, helping only when they were really in trouble and I could not but feel empathy with their impasse. Sometimes, when Pascale didn't notice these invisible events, through my privileged position on the borders of a formalised role I've captured some situations where the child-tutor tries to render his or her assignment work private, and the outcome contains several mistakes. This informal relational flow of varied levels of acquisition works in most of the cases and resembles village schools, Koranic schools and family schooling far more than the current Western classes of post-industrial societies. Using these methods is something that Pascale seems to do spontaneously, as if she was not aware of her bodily skills. Thus, since I passed these remarks on to her, she agreed that she enjoys being physical and expressing herself theatrically. She seems to enjoy being a performer, as her strong mimic abilities, loud voice, expressive gaze and tall, sporty presence confirm.

Jealousy is another emotion expressed repeatedly among peers, especially if they belong to the same nation, ethnic group or family.¹⁰ If for instance Pascale is congratulating the learner instead of the tutor, the latter can react by suddenly pointing out the mistakes of the learner, in the attempt of growing in stature in the eyes of the teacher. It is then in Pascale's power to avoid always encouraging the same pupils despite her evident sympathy for some of them, with the aim of balancing the re-iteration of jealousy, which can push the children-tutors to renege on their roles as soon as she turns her back. This can be observed as a recurrent structure in power relations, especially in micro-societies where the power is centralised and difficult to minimise, unless through a revolution or by applying a 'supreme instance'. In the case

of the school, this role is represented by the principal, the only one who can decide to remove the teacher. Even then, the process must be democratically undertaken and the authority is not solely his. There must be very serious reasons given to remove a teacher from his/her position. Cl.in children mainly showed a strong loyalty toward their teacher, although she was not always tender with them. They are all children who have undergone trials, who needed a strong bond in order to emerge again socially, and Pascale provides, because of her many moods and her loyalty to her job (she was never absent over the whole of the school year) a solid, concrete ground. Moreover, she is the first teacher they met in the new country: no comparison is yet possible. No competition can be installed so far.

A-B-C Patchwork

Among her regular coursework, Pascale teaches vocabulary. The lesson begins through each child making an ABC book. The different letters are illustrated by a patchwork of different fonts, cut out from advertisements, supermarket booklets and brochures: this method, which had a certain success in many disadvantaged schools during that period, was criticised by the media. A passionate debate started among pedagogues and journalists accusing the scholastic system of inducing consumerism among children by allowing the circulation of the brochures at school.

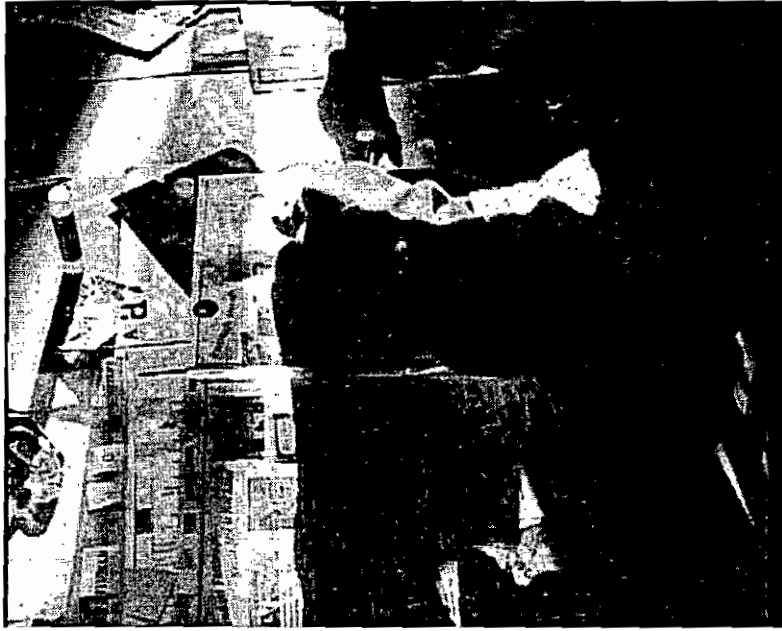


Figure 10.2 Cropping figures from advertisements for an ABC book.

This debate created several different reactions. I will not digress here to describe the various responses, but in the case of Pascale we discussed this issue and she could defend the reasons behind her choice. She felt that putting together these books was a way to make good use of material that was already circulating in the pupils' houses and would otherwise be thrown away. The 'recycling' rationale was her primary motivation; second was the fact that she considered that the children should become acquainted with 'real' objects (and also products) of our time. Better if these products were utilised in the pedagogy, obtaining another use and meaning by the manipulation and displacement of the original context. Pascale's position had a logic which generally characterised her attitude: this was her way of downplaying her intellectualism, since she was afraid of showing her snobbishness, together with a claim for an education rooted in the daily life of the children, whom she loved and hoped to make 'tough' enough to strive and thrive. It is also important to emphasise that Pascale, in contrast to most of her colleagues, lives in the locality of school in a

small flat; she has no car, no television and rarely travels for her holidays. She therefore shares some of the economical and social conditions of the pupils she meets at work; she considers herself aware of the position she occupies in their existential trajectory and her main fear is 'not to help her pupils enough so as to avoid becoming future losers'. In this regard she also attempts to soften some of her rougher attitudes by expressing her sympathy for immigrants, the homeless and the unemployed, as well as the marginalised subjects of her quarter.

Among other regular exercises, the pupils were regularly trained to consolidate the acquisition of words and of technical terminology, especially terms connected with their integration into French cultural practises and customs. The topics chosen that year included Food and the Circus.¹¹ The food thematic turned out to be particularly relevant because it was presented according to the gastronomic different habits of each child and culture: by listing the meals at home and in the school canteen and comparing the type of food eaten on each occasion, the children were exhorted to relate to food with a different awareness.

Meanings Associated With 'Ramadan'

An interesting discussion arose during one of the food-centred vocabulary training sessions, which can be taken as an example of how a cognitive analysis of an event only partially reveals the patterns of its purpose, if divorced from the interpretation of the relational learning process and the transcultural interaction, which verbal explanations of cultural concepts lack when simply translated. Alfa listed, among the categories or types of meals, the term 'Ramadan', to which the teacher responded: 'this is not a meal, nor an edible object'. This time the reaction of Muslim children

was immediate: they loudly expressed their understanding of Ramadan and its meaning for them, almost as if they felt that Pascale needed to acknowledge that they knew more than she. Perhaps they had an optional key of understanding from within their cultural practices and in their present social context which gave them the courage to make these remarks. They probably felt empowered because they somehow knew that they had a real experience of this ritual and also that they were learning to believe in practices beyond their known experiences. The correction was acceptable: Ramadan was not food, nor simply a fast, as somebody suggested. In integrating and combining their knowledge, some pupils described Ramadan as an inclusive ritual where the relationship to food and drink was transformed for one period during the year, but in which it was still possible to eat and drink at night time. Some of the Muslim pupils, those older than nine such like Hedda, Alfa and Kadiatou, wanted to voice their experiences to let the rest of the class understand what the concept meant. It was also a way to demonstrate their authoritative age (a child may fast only if he's older than ten years, as indicated by Koranic customs), which, in an Islamic context, can be appreciated by allowing the children to fast as a rite of passage.

Kadiatou emphasised how much, when she had undergone Ramadan in Guinea, she had wanted to resist the challenge of the diurnal fast, but she had not succeeded. She explained how she decided to pay respect to her grandmother by accompanying her in the fasting period, and how, one day, she had to break the fast by running in the kitchen and eating secretly and shamefully, some leftovers found in a pot. Her grandmother had not scolded her. Rather, she had concealed what happened, because for such a young girl, Kadiatou had been more than clever in resisting for such a long

period already. Her grandmother had hence finally stated that her grandchild had learned enough to practise the sacred fast and the following year she would attempt, perhaps, a longer interval.

The rest of the non-Muslim children, in the meantime, were commenting among themselves that they could have never resisted even one day, and at the climax reached by this unexpected debate, Hedda stood up and stated vigorously: 'Ramadan is beautiful! I like it!' It is only then that Pascale reacted; and this time, slightly annoyed, she explained to the bewildered class that Ramadan was a dangerous activity for children living in France who had to attend class every morning at 8.30am. The empty stomach was an obstacle to the child's ability to acquire knowledge properly; the noise of the belly 'crying' (as she described it) was troubling, the level of attention was diminished and she was very reluctant to allow such young children to follow what their observant Muslim parents wished. Hedda continued to claim that she wanted to do it, saying it was 'beautiful', and even when the teacher told her that 'poor you, then she would have an empty belly', even then she could not realise why her teacher was so insistent. Finally Hedda stated, with a very inspired sigh, that 'the beauty of that ritual made her stomach full'!

One of the cognitive abilities of children arguably resides in the skill of making sense of relational webs of significance by connecting these to their lived bodily experience, as well as to general assumptions learned not only by adults or elder-influent peers but same age peers as well (Toren 1993). The latter influence the child, who listens carefully to them, but they manifest themselves in a dialectical pattern where belief is strongly connected with their living selves and their agency. In case of experiences of

joy, ecstasy and pleasure, children rely on their shared experiences as safe ground, posing a different morality than that of adults; further, this knowledge is solid, because embodied, and forms of pleasure and more generally sensuous experiences can be obtained again and again. Repetition is a feature that children appreciate and from which they learn how to study and remember. These exchanges of knowledge(s) also seemed to function as an age-oriented pattern, where the fact of relying on peer assessments was sometimes more meaningful than being assessed by adults of competence and authority.

One could argue that 'Ramadan' is not a more complex word than, say, 'fast', 'mass', 'joy' or 'time'. Even though it is a term describing a complex ritual, its rendering is no more complex than the rendering of 'future', once a child is given the opportunity to describe the web of meanings connected to a single word. If s/he is allowed to describe word-play, then the hierarchy between terms does not persist as an obstacle; instead it reveals itself as a construction. In the case of Ramadan, Pascale opposes an attitude that can perhaps be defined as stereotypical, usually reinforced by media coverage.¹²

Both Kadiatou and Hedda provided other keys of understanding this phenomenon, showing in the first instance that adults' concealment toward the hardest ordeals of Ramadan is due to children who cannot but break the fast, drink, miss one day at school or simply forget to pray. Concealment is part of the tolerance invoked in the period of penitence, and punishment is avoided, so that children experience often Ramadan as a 'tender' period, even if fasting and waking up in the night. Furthermore, it could be seen that children can learn from such experiences,

expressing sensorial translations of new feelings (i.e. full-empty stomach) and can hence enjoy changes in everyday customs, learning the lesson that a ritual is worth attempting, as is everything else connected to the fact of increased agency alongside increasing scholastic and physical maturity. Pascale has not changed her position on Ramadan, nor has she shown curiosity for others' accounts or convictions on this subject. Her own conviction that Ramadan harms children's health remained in place. Kadiatou and Hedda sat down again, reserving the variety of their accounts and their intimate and situated knowledge for other audiences.

To reverse this image, some of the pupils have tried to break through by utilising forms of more interpersonal communication. Obtaining a response informed by commonsense has reduced the cognitive contribution of children's narratives about Ramadan. As a partial explanation of Pascale's negativity she believed in the utilitarian aspect of this particular dietary exercise and initially intended to create a critical awareness of what one was supposed to eat in the canteen. Throughout the year parents had complained that the standard menus offered by the canteen's caterers were often in conflict with the different dietary habits of the foreign children (especially for the Muslims) and little choice was given to the pupils.¹³ Additionally, this exercise created awareness about the variety of other cultural practices, as well as introducing the idea that the standard French meal is not the only model the children should accept. Moreover, it was revealed that none of the children in Cl.in ate traditional French cuisine at home. This also explained why the menu shown in schoolbooks as 'typical' was quite incomprehensible for the newly arrived children.

In contrast, when the class studied the vocabulary of the weather forecast, a common ground of reference was in evidence; for example, the children noticed that a rainbow was never announced in advance on television and argued for adding it to the list of terms and icons that Pascale had drawn up. The rainbow is certainly a common image for children born in tropical areas; nevertheless, its positive meaning was clearly deduced from schoolbooks, where the rainbow usually arches over a picturesque landscape as an emblem of hope. This example shows how the imagery in schoolbooks had a different impact on each of the children according to the contexts of reception and of desire, and the potential for manipulation of accessible meanings.

Around Literacy

Other group exercises took place in the school library together with other classes. In the library children are free to choose books and comics, sit down in pairs and read them freely. Children, suddenly acknowledging their difference through witnessing the behaviour and autonomy of other children from different classrooms, seek help from other pupils from their ethnic or linguistic group in the hope of obtaining help with translation of the books or comics they were currently reading.



Figure 11.2 A CL.in alumni helps Nawel to read children's books.

I filmed Ibrahim asking Massadio to translate *Asterix* into Bambara and Nawel translating the *Little Red Hat* into Algerian for Hedda. Furthermore, when back in the CL.in classroom, the children are asked to present the books they find interesting; they have to sum up the plot to the whole class, comment on the difficulties of grammar and vocabulary, and the beauty of the illustrations.

Among other regular activities there's also the management of a cash box where the contributions from parents allow the class to occasionally buy extra material or ice cream for everyone when they go out. There is also a vegetable garden in the local cultural centre near the school, where the children help the gardener to grow seasonal vegetables such as cauliflower, lettuce, tomatoes and a variety of herbs. This visit takes place every Friday afternoon, since Pascale considers that the children are weary in the last hours of the week and lack the energy to sit still and learn. The walk to the garden is long enough to enjoy the life of the quarter, the different shops and the

familiar faces of the homeless people living in Abesses Square. The children are always delighted to go out.



Figure 12.2 Cl.in pupils walk in the picturesque Mont-Martre.

They walk holding each other's shoulders, girls separated from the boys, while Pascale puts her arms around the youngest. Sometimes, when the sun is shining, the pupils improvise dances and songs, or they race up the famous stairs of rue Berthe. For decades, these areas on the northern side of the school have not really changed, and in comparison to the lower boulevards where most of the families live, it is a very idyllic stroll, one these children would normally never take. These are quiet streets often used by tourists.

The children also keep a herbalist-book, where they paste dried leaves and flowers and learn both their botanical and informal names. The gardener is very kind, communicates easily with children and has a straightforwardly pedagogical attitude,

rich in patience, humour and proverbs from his countryside. He thinks that teaching to plough and handle plants does not need much verbalisation, which makes him more comfortable with the awareness that the children do not really understand French.



Figure 13.2 Lesson about how to identify herbs through smell.

In this context, the background of the children comes out at once: there is a visible difference between those who grew up in urban locations and those from rural areas in the attitude toward working the land and having a knowledge of plants. Ibrahim and Kadiatou in particular have revealed a structured competence in the handling of crops, the identification of parasites, the manipulation of tools and in their respectful attitude when touching the earth: whispering, bowing, digging and touching the different plants with care and concentration, keeping their hands clean despite working deeply in the mud. This shows knowledge of ploughing, not yet lost, and revitalises their interest in gardening activities. A beautiful event, worthy of mention, is the discovery of a series of worms, which the teacher and the gardener explained were to become butterflies, which the children then started to dream about. In one of the visits they

found a rare chrysalis and brought the whole plant into the classroom to observe the metamorphosis of the mysterious creature.

Such activities replace in some ways the everyday meetings with peers out of school. In fact in many big cities, such as central Paris, it is no longer considered safe to be in the street, primarily because of the traffic. Consequently, parents or tutors avoid sending children out. Homes, with the television playing all the time, often replace the social life in the street around the buildings and the many games children used to play alone, without the controlling gaze of adults. Playtime in the schoolyard, with its resounding echoes of noise and chaos which can be heard outside the high stone walls, is often the only space for children to express their urges far from the constant vigilance of their caretakers. It is also one of the most aggressive environments for the children. Teachers themselves describe the playground as an essential area for children to feel free of their constraints; therefore the control of the pedagogues is rarely applied to calm down the various clashes, unless clear violence or abuse are revealed. The fact that everything happens behind walls, as in many older European schools built on models of penitential institutions, does not help children to perceive the presence of casual onlookers, who could observe the yard in passing and immediately reconnect the school with the rest of the surrounding urban landscape.

Punishment, Resistance, Misunderstanding

In situations of blockage or resistance, misbehaviour or overt confrontation, Pascale expressed a real anger, which the children seem fatalistically to accept in order to cool down as much as they could. They understand how to contain dramas by indicating they did not participate, linguistically and emotionally, in such manifestations of

roughness. The tradition of the punishing teacher is not completely obsolete in France. However, it is not encouraged, but exists and is sometimes justified on the assumption that the children must learn to fear adults and occasionally need to experience humiliation in order to react to reality. Thus, the aggressiveness of a teacher is far more powerful than the body of a punished child. The body and voice of an adult, when overly loud and aggressive, can obviously harm a young person. Adults who are accustomed to being aggressive with children (whether parents or pedagogues) do not often feel how unbalanced the relationship is. In the case of the Cl.in pupils the harm is perhaps greater; because they cannot defend themselves verbally, they lack the words to respond and even to apologise. Silence is often their wisest course of action. It is taught in several pedagogies, that if physical punishment must be used, it is better if it is announced. Explaining to a child that the punishment is given for a reason, however apparently unjust, giving the child the chance to prepare and respond internally to the traumatic contact. However, this is not the case in Cl.in. Slaps can come sometimes as a shock and Pascale's scolding voice can be very loud and overwhelming.

Pascale often scolded Fatima, a Moroccan girl of eight years old, for having spent too long drawing, and once requested her to see what the others were doing instead. Pascale's words implied that Fatima wanted to avoid class-work: 'So, you thought that one could come here just to draw the whole day?' Consequently, the girl was unable to concentrate on her 'contract' for several hours afterwards. Of course she has not dared to draw anymore. From that point on she felt that painting and drawing did not belong to the school realm, that drawing was leisure, not a scholastic subject. Pascale also slapped Alfa because he laughed at Ibrahim's spelling mistakes. She

pushed Ibrahim away roughly because he provoked her screaming. She often physically pushed Hedda out of the classroom, although once she regretted this and searched the whole building to find her again. One day she kept Kadiatou at her desk for hours, insisting she read aloud a dull story, in which the lesson was on direct and indirect forms of speech. Then Kadiatou had to answer some grammar questions; the more she tried, the more she could not understand because of her emotional distress. For some children the fact of being physically shaken works as a warning and is apparently not harmful to them beyond the initial shock, especially when their behaviour is hyperactive. But most of the time humiliation blocks the child from progressing and literally takes away the vital breath needed to overcome obstacles.

One of the effects of the pedagogy that the children seem to suffer from the most, together with the physical threat, is the constant challenging of their firmly held beliefs. This invokes a restless state of awakening, which resembles somewhat the investigative mode that migrants experience in crossing borderlines. This feeling is comparable to their parents' similar responses to entering a new system, a new country and new professional arena. Children in Cl.in often tremble or sigh at the questions they fear. By recording such intimate sounds, I often heard in my headphones the trembling breath of their uncertainty; through the lens their unease became even more palpable. When their teacher addresses them, each child must immediately give an account of what they had learnt, with particular emphasis on spelling and technical questions. The small size of the class made it difficult to escape this constant evaluation. The children of Cl.in were also questioned by adults acting on the school's authority about their age, identity, command of French, country of origin, current address in Paris, or asked for their parents' signatures.

The Cl.in children lived therefore in an environment of constant interrogation, a role my camera could also play at certain moments. The shift from a surveying gaze to a witnessing body, from a distant evaluation to a friendly complicity was part of the therapeutic value of my action as filmmaker. I was attributing value, by filming particular moments, to different expressions in the construction of a new identity, which were separate from the expectations the school had of Cl.in pupils. In this respect, I believe, the filming process empowered some of the children and relieved them from the oppression of never-ending evaluation.

Spelling, Chatting and Reciting

In the domain of verbal explanation I noticed a shift in the attitude of both children and teacher, depending on the formality of the situation they were facing. The various exercises were framed within the ongoing attention of the teacher, emphasised by the silence of her audience: the reception of the utterance was immediately evaluated, corrected if needed, and the spelling of each utterance carefully reiterated. In the classroom the children's original languages are banned. Additionally it would be tiring and complex for the children to make sense within a translation mode in a place with so many other languages. Some of the reasons for this are evoked above: school exercises do not incorporate the terms and images, imagery and jargon of the original language and its cultural context. Further, the pace of the utterance required is slower, more formal, and each child attempts to control the nuance and to choose vocabulary and forms of humour carefully.

Thus, when it is playtime in the classroom or particularly when the children quarrel among themselves, the gap created by their being 'foreign' to each other obliges them to call in the teacher. In these situations the rising emotional temperature, the difficulty in finding ready expressions, the pathos of being understood properly, or alternatively the fear of verbal attack, makes the children revert to their mother tongue. In these cases, the teacher accepts the shift to more informal speech, and she even tries to translate the expressions she understands in the various languages she knows (mainly Spanish, Italian, English and Arabic). For other languages she uses dictionaries, but this ends up being an obstacle, because it slows down the dialogue even further. In most cases, they have ended up using broken French, and here Pascale has corrected only the particularly incomprehensible terms. Of course, the teacher can hardly forget her pedagogical aims. It is a sort of conditioned reflex, informed mainly by her professional commitment. On such occasions one of the speakers is inevitably left out of the discussion, because it is rare that s/he shares the same mother tongue as the peer in focus. The teacher becomes in this way the mediator, the judge and the translator all at once. However, she can also become the receiver of a message addressed to another child, and in these cases she nuances the purpose of the quarreller to smooth the anger and re-contextualise the offence she is meant to translate 'only' verbally. These instances are not only 'utterable'; the emotional charge expressed by the words makes them understood at once as offences by the child receiving them, but their specific meaning is not understood unless the teacher refrains from intervening as cultural mediator. The offence remains. Little by little, the children learn that it is possible to find words to describe a pain felt and this is a relief in itself, regardless of the language used. In this case the potential to

communicate real issues makes the language more useful in the eyes of the pupil as well.

Another place where public utterances risk being evaluated, hence giving Cl.in children 'stage fright', is the general assembly of the whole school, which occurs every second month. The assembly is meant to equalise the levels of power (1 adult to every 10 children), promote discussions and stimulate decision making. Various motions are discussed, voted upon and can ultimately impact the rules of everyday life in the school. Children come with issues formerly discussed in their individual classrooms, as a type of training for models of governmental democracy such as the French National Parliament. Alfa was elected representative for the Cl.in class, thanks to his veteran wisdom, as his classmates saw him. He was meant to read aloud a text they composed together, with some effort, emphasising the public provocations that Cl.in's pupils suffered in the school canteen. The text read:

Some children jostle us and they pass over us in the line; they put water in our dishes, food in our full glasses. There is no use in calling in the co-ordinators because they answer us: You, Cl.in, you are getting on our nerves!

Alfa is seized by panic when he realises he must read this complaint in front of thirty people; he finds 'democracy' a waste of time and reaches the assembly almost unable to function, but once the meeting starts he becomes interested; intrigued, he observes, understands, and finally he votes. When his turn comes and he must report on the 'abuse' which Cl.in pupils denounced in their prepared statement, his voice fails, his cheeks blush; he almost rescinds his obligation. The application of the democratic process, with a plenary assembly, which takes as its model the trade unions, is transformed into an oral exercise, a scholastic task. Perhaps he compares this structure to the elders' meetings under the trees in his native village; he is young, namely too

young to occupy this role. His speech cannot be taken too seriously and there are teachers as well as deputies in the audience of the assembly. What's more, his homework, his 'contract' of the day, was in need of attention in the Cl.in classroom: he was impelled to hurry up. Perhaps training in Western forms of democratic decision-making is perceived as an alien activity at his age; nevertheless, it is an arena where central Cl.in issues are presented to the school as a whole. Pupils sent as representatives prepare their rehabilitation in the public sphere as well.

When it comes to reading, children show very different abilities in picking up the difficulties of French spelling. Alfa was reluctant to learn spelling and, as can be seen in his autobiographical account in chapter five, there are understandable reasons. He had undergone a tragic exodus through West Africa during the Liberian Civil War. During the journey he had learnt several languages, in addition to his mother tongue of Fulani. He also learnt some Guinean minority languages as well as basic English from literate adults met during the various detentions, who provided him with basic instruction, especially in mathematics, English and French. His historical record is known only partially, since neither of his parents could speak French or English when they came to enrol him in the school. His traumatic journey across the war zone was not taken as a platform to contextualise his blockages. When he was introduced in Cl.in and when some cognitive difficulties were detected in his learning attitude, he was consequently considered a child with a structural handicap in understanding and spelling, so that the teacher and the school psychologist agreed to send him to do therapy with a language psychologist.¹⁴

The teacher provides a large number of tools, including drawing, copying of calligraphy, various declination and multiplication schemes, comparative alphabets with capital and italic fonts, a scheme *a fronte* for transcription, different patterns with diphthongs and their exceptions when spelt. The children collect these in their nine months in Cl.in, compiling a rich folder, which is useful for the entire junior and middle school cycle. At times, Pascale wields scissors and glue and has a range of felt-pens available in all kind of colours on the desk. As soon as the class sits quietly, she cuts, composes, lays colours, puts plastic around the sheets and continues to prepare her tools. She is skilled in design, which, as she explains, she developed and imported from her hobby, *art brut*. At home, she paints, makes wooden and sculptures with *papier-maché*, recycles old objects into installations and loves matching violent colours and rough forms. She considers this hobby a good balance to literacy, which is her focus at school. But she rarely shares this practice with her pupils. However, exceptions do occasionally occur.



Figure 14.2 Ibrahim shows his Eiffel Tour collage made with Pascale.

As an alternative to pre-conceived text books for pupils in the Cl.in class, Pascale prefers to make up some original tools herself (she does not believe that there are acceptable text books as yet available). This is her concrete donation to each pupil, who goes away from Cl.in with a thick folder of useful cards and templates. Newcomers especially need these tools from their very first day in order to immediately follow the method of the individual 'contract'. She calls all these papers and the photocopies of the contracts, *nourriture* ('food') for pupils, thereby enacting a metaphor of the nurturing teacher, one of the archetypal figures of the female teacher, in line with one of the recurring images of a 'mother made conscious'¹⁵ (Steedman 1988: 85-87). Pascale, however, constantly discards this stereotype by refuting other attitudes accompanying the ideal of the middle class mothering schoolmistress. She can be critical, punitive, intellectual, and non-protective toward the pupils. She can act unconventionally, roughly and become physically threatening. In so doing she seems to embody in her attitude the most stereotypical male and female patterns of the authoritative teacher and the mothering mistress.

After a long period spent filming and becoming knowledgeable about Cl.in pedagogy under the guidance of Pascale, I began to work directly with the children, documenting their recollections, perspectives and life stories. A number of these ethnographic portraits are presented in chapter five, comprising accounts from Mang Mang, Alfa, Kadiatou, Ibrahim and Nawel. In the following chapter, I move into the classroom in Dublin, focusing on activities in what I call the 'transcultural classroom'.

Notes

¹ The title *La Mémoire Dure* means in French 'Memory lasts', or 'Memory goes on', but also 'Memory resists', or 'Tough Memory', and finally 'The hard disk' of the computer: all these meanings are a word-play which I could not render in English in one single expression.

² Their integration is called in the school's parlance 'rehabilitation'.

³ In this respect I was fascinated by the way Rouch and other visual anthropologists reconciled the 'political' with the 'playful' or the 'advocacy-like' with the 'intimate'. Among the most complete examples emerged by looking at the entire *oeuvre* of John Marshall (Marshall: 1951-2003; MacDougall 2006:256-257) and Jean Rouch (Rouch 2003; Feld 2003; Ragazzi 2004; Padiglione 2005), in their very different styles and locations (Rouch in somewhat 'shifting locations' as much as Marshall in 'bounded fields' (Gupta and Ferguson 1997, as cited by Clifford 1998: 86). Both Marshall and Rouch have shown possible 'altered perspectives' in public contentious circumstances (in their political peculiar sense), but simultaneously in intimate manners.

⁴ I was invited to the University of Ngaoundéré, located in the Adamawa region, by my mentor, anthropologist and filmmaker Lisbet Holtedahl, who had established an inter-university collaboration program called *Anthropos*. Holtedahl had worked twenty years with topics connected to the transmission of knowledge and the formation of political and intellectual *élites* in West Africa.

⁵ A movement of intellectuals and scholars mediating the instances of Paperless with the Government was created by Ariane Mnouchkine, the well known theatre director of Le Theatre du Soleil, and the committee called *Assises pour une politique Nouvelle des Migrations* chaired by Paul Ricoeur.

⁶ CRS is a paramilitary police unit, which is mobilised especially against riots. Literally: *Compagnie Républicaine de Sécurité*. It is a corps allowed to remain anonymous. Hence the name of the officers are not displayed on their uniforms and can't be traced back afterwards if victims decide to pursue policemen for violence and harassment.

⁷ I have removed the family names of the children in order to protect their identities. Their first names have been maintained as discernable in the film *La Mémoire Dure* where they are protagonists.

⁸ Those years in Paris the level of pollution was so high that on some critical days the radio had to announce that it was not advisable to be outdoors for old people and children. In this way, play-time at school was held only indoors.

⁹ Contrary to some preconceived ideas about the passivity of immigrant women, the balance between mothers and fathers was equal in the years I was there.

¹⁰ As in the case of Nawel and Hedda, both of whom were from the same region in Algeria, in addition to Alpha and Kadiatou from the Fulani Guinean language group, albeit in an extended way; or for the two Peruvian brothers. This was not the case, however, for the four Chinese children, who tended to demonstrate certain complicities with each other.

¹¹ These activities were made in liaison with the music teacher and a program with a Romanian-Roma circus established near the school for three years.

¹² Since a decade or more a hot debate in French schools had raged, concerning the opposition to the wearing of the veil, allegedly in the 'chador' form, for Muslim girls in Secular Public Schools. In this way many assumptions on the 'cruelty' of Muslim habits had started to circulate, among them the disappointment for accepting children observing Ramadan fast in the classrooms.

¹³ These complaints about introducing options for diets taking in account religious taboos, and clothes' features discriminating girls from boys, are still today debated in French media and policies and they represent one of the mainstream and biased frameworks in which to describe the social reality of migrant children in France.

¹⁴ See, among others, *The Language Instinct: How The Mind Creates Language* (Pinker 1994). One of the main traits characterising Alfa's blockages consisted in regular inversions of diphthongs, and also in anticipating a whole word by reading only the initials, guessing only rarely the word in question, especially in long chains of phonemes. This brief attempt is known by psychologists of language as the 'holistic' pattern: children learn words by detailed deciphering of each phoneme ('phonological' mode), considering each phonetic segment as a structural unity, as well as through instant gestalt-like patterns of recognition of the whole word as a visible unit.

¹⁵ The concept of 'mother made conscious' as the ideal teacher invokes the nineteenth-century pedagogical philosophy of Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852).

Chapter Three

Trancultural Encounters in a Dublin School

Grounding the Fieldwork

In Ireland, unlike France, where I had lived previously and where I partly raised my children, my situation was more precarious since I was there only temporarily on a research scholarship. My fieldwork therefore resembled a mission to a foreign country, whose history, politics and speech, although relevant to my work, were nevertheless unfamiliar to me. I thus tried to conceive my fieldwork routines accordingly, at least compared to those I established in France. The span of time addressed in the present research comprises two years: 2002-2004, and again focuses on issues of migrant children's experiences in education but also in their households, as outlined in chapter four. Rather than adopt a comparative approach, which could easily lapse into a 'forced' parallel of patterns, I utilise a dialectical posture, where the locations of this European fieldwork can intersect and interconnect but can also be 'indifferent' toward each other.

With regard to social actors, I did not choose to formalise my relation with the children by immediately presenting myself as a special member of staff at school, or as an acquaintance of their parents. I told them I was operating as a researcher with a camera, and that the resulting video would not be sent to the national broadcaster, RTÉ. I began by frequenting the social arenas where migrant children met, both within and after school time, observing with care and curiosity these children's experience of unfolding changes, turbulence and disappearance of the familiar in their daily life in North Dublin's inner city. My particular target groups were several newly arrived children between 7-10 years

of age, mainly boys (the school is segregated along gender lines, with boys and girls located in different sections of the building, with a separate principal and staff for each section). The national and linguistic groups represented were mainly from Eastern Europe, the Philippines, Romania and Nigeria.

Among them emerged a few important social actors, although not 'representative' in terms of the statistical number of co-nationals present in Ireland: Tahar, a nine-year-old boy from Algeria (whose portrait is expanded upon in chapter four); Atillio, from Romania; Séan from inner city Dublin and Mubarak from Nigeria. In the following four clips these boys are introduced.

DVD 1. ch. 3.1 clip n. 1 (1_1). Mubarak, September 2003. 5'45''.

DVD 1. ch. 3.1 clip n. 2 (5_3). Atillio's self portrait. 2'42''

DVD 1. ch. 3.1 clip n. 3 (11_9). Tahar's June 2004. 3'37''

DVD 1. ch. 3.1 clip n. 4 (1_7). Séan December 2003. 2'40''

The Irish New Millennium

Ireland's inward migration has rapidly changed in the last five years with an unexpected increase in the numbers of foreign nationals applying to stay indefinitely. Figures published in September 2005 indicate an increase of 10% of the population in the last three decades,¹ a direct result of this migration. According to Irish media representation, this was an unpredictable phenomenon. Hence, immigration has only recently been acknowledged as a growing, structural component of Irish daily life. Especially in domains such as education, health, labour, union membership and citizenship (see McEinrí 2003; Bacik 2004; Ward 2002), the growing presence of foreign nationals, who increasingly choose or simply end up in Ireland as a destination country, has opened up

challenges to policy making, led to the introduction of referenda and to movements of political reaction demanding changes in the Irish constitution. Similar constitutional referenda formerly focused mainly on internal political issues (such as divorce and abortion). Now there is a turn toward transnational issues, mainly because of external political factors and the tight co-operation with European institutions influencing and/or establishing new social policies, laws and intra-national state members' relations.

In 1979 Ireland received the first official diasporic arrival of 212 Vietnamese people as asylum seekers. That case was taken as the starting point for new policy initiatives in Ireland on the hosting and integration of a large migrant community. Between April 2003 and April 2004 the official figures for immigration, as given by the National Statistical Office of Ireland, were 50,100 of a total population of approximately 4 millions. The European Union in the same year registered an immigrant population of roughly 20 million with an additional 15% circa of immigrants still undocumented (McEinri 2003). In the autumn 2003, for families with a temporary permit of residency in Ireland, the threat of deportation was a central debate. This issue concerned many migrant parents with Irish-born children, as well as migrant adults, caretakers and migrant parents with a short residency permit. In committed periodicals, such as *Metro Eireann*,² one could read letters from public figures or well-known scholars, articulating their perspectives on racism and inequality, as well as letters from non-national 'inclusive communities' (Tam 1998:50). In the following example I quote a group of East-European mothers discussing issues around dual citizenship (Vertovec 2001) and their Irish-born children:³

We are ordinary people trying to make a living in Ireland. We are all parents of little Irish citizens who want them to grow up and become builders, poets, pilots, farmers, singers, scientists and taxi drivers. Our children speak *as gaeilge*, play hurling and dance Irish dances. But there is one thing that makes us stand out from the rest: anxious waiting.⁴

This excerpt gives polished and mediated utterance, shaped into a 'call for tolerance', to the voice of a complex constituency; the words quoted above provide a real and immediate understanding of how quickly these migrant children could be integrated, as well as of the uncertainty with which their relatives have to live because they have a different national status.

In this context I started to research within groups of migrant children similar to each other. Some of them were Irish citizens with parents of non-Irish nationality; others were foreign nationals newly arrived in Ireland from non-EU countries, all were in the process of combining the past and present, acting out multiple identities in both their resistance and adaptation to displacement, previously held expectations or concerns. The state school with its aspirations for multicultural education and social integration (in Ireland offered mainly through a religious ethos and multilingualism) became again my chosen arena to locate and interact with young social actors, migrants, the settlers and the settled. As a site, the national primary school still reverberated with the cultural specificity of Irish history, a history characterised by outward migration from a homeland with a *diglossic* reality, in which English and Irish competed with and influenced each other; in which the religious tensions within Christian conflicting factions (Catholic and Protestant, as well as their diverse internal communities), had made Irish history distinctive in Europe. I therefore outlined my analysis describing Ireland as a postmodern nation state in its particular historicity and socio-economic condition, but was careful about seeing it merely as a mono-cultural state, even if its imagined construction as nation emphasised a certain degree of homogeneity in order to reach a sense of commonality which was opposed to former British rulers. Nevertheless, even today, the concept of homogeneity is embedded in the media and in many politically biased discourses in Ireland. Even now, although Ireland has been part of the E.E.C. since 1973 and was recently led by one of the most enlightened Presidents of Europe, Mary Robinson,⁵ some mainstream discourses utilise a

standard apology for commonsensical adherence, namely that this 'unprepared' nation, previously embodying the condition of the migrant and not of the host and only now experiencing its first economic success and viability, had not really expected this phenomenon of 'massive' inward migration. This is certainly a statement open to dispute, as Ireland was part of the Shengen Agreement since March 1996 and precisely because of the recent economic boom, although that economic success is now waning, Ireland should still have expected inward migration to be as significant as it has become.⁶

Questions like 'shall Ireland reproduce - mimetically - former models of hosting policies inspired by countries with a long tradition of inward migration (for instance the U.K. and France) or could it construct a model with completely new patterns in contemporary European history?' are crucial and need detailed analysis⁷ and investigation in the fields of social agency, policy-making and the daily life of migrants (in their dialectical approach to integration.) Without sweeping generalisations that an ethnographic approach abhors and to an extent outlined above in the opening of this chapter, my intention is to engage with situated communities of interest, in particular migrant children, documenting individual stories as much as collective ones, and to assume, as a researcher, the responsibility of agitating and mediating interactions in a constructive way, with the respect of dialectics which must inform the encounters and or the conflicts, ultimately leading to a more complex understanding of childhood and migration.

The increasing number of migrants in Ireland are often categorised by legal status (such as 'economic migrant', 'asylum seeker' and 'refugee') and these labels then become fixed, although they should be considered dynamic and not always discrete, because they can also overlap (for example, a subject can choose to seek asylum in addition to their current

status because his or her economic status does not allow him/her to buy the protection⁸ needed in the country of origin). Furthermore, the way these categories are kept discrete in order to facilitate bureaucratic formalities and the dispensation of rights brings new questions concerning the status of the children. Are they asylum seekers as well? From or until what age are these rights and obligations to be formulated? How long shall a status inherited through generations remain legally valid? In parallel, nation states currently tend to co-ordinate their administrative responses through a European net of shared policies, although these tend to be focused on the prevention of initial entry; currently these policies are applied primarily to limit the awarding of long term residency permits. Precariousness is currently the standard condition for migrants in most European nation states, a condition supported by the dispensation of short term permits only (in particular for migrants on work permits as opposed to work visas). This makes it more difficult to settle down, rendering migrant subjects insecure and accepting of harsh conditions when the permit expires (often then moving to the category of the 'undocumented'). This short term solution also offers fewer opportunities to invest in the future, which becomes visible when migrant children's investment in their immediate milieu diminishes because of anxiety about their potentially imminent departure. The flexibility and mobility which characterises Europe today are more characteristic of State control over individual movement than of actual ease of migration. Additionally, if some migrants opt for flexibility, commuting back and forth to their country of origin biannually for instance, or changing residence annually in other EU countries according to available employment, this flexibility and mobility which they have chosen is very different to that imposed by the State policy, which is a precarious and confusing mode of existence.

'Non'-Nationals

Policy makers in Ireland identify individuals of foreign nationality, including children, as non-nationals. What does this term, curved as it is into a negative or at least non-inclusive concept of nationality, actually mean in practice? And who, among the children I am conducting research with, is potentially less 'assimilable' to a project of national adherence? There are Irish born children (60% in the school where I conducted fieldwork for instance) who are from the indigenous community of a sub-proletarian class, mainly unemployed and in welfare based income constituencies in the inner city, housed in the 'flats'. These are obviously (Irish) nationals to the policy makers, yet this community perhaps does not adhere to the dominant image of an increasingly buoyant economy and nation, since the parents are mostly living on subsidies, whose children are mainly reared by grandparents who in the past belonged to politicised working class constituencies which impacted inner city life. The bonds with the rural areas from whence this generation originally arrived have been extinguished for at least two generations, and the acquired bonds with a community of neighbours are now threatened by the growing precariousness of the community's daily life, and by the arrival of new migrants in temporary shelters. As these new migrant constituencies no longer anchor themselves in the inner city, but use it as a point of departure to better accommodation in the nearer suburbs, a different sense emerges of the potential benefits, or lack thereof, for children living in the inner city.

In connection to this shift in perception, at the national school where my fieldwork was based, local parents often told me to distrust the school system and not to rely on the representatives of the local parish connected with the school,⁹ because they experienced these institutions as oppressive and deaf to their stated needs. At the same time since the economic boom of a decade ago, the Catholic parish has gradually lost both local power and social consensus, reproducing in many cases an attitude of charity and paternalism,

which clashes with the values and real contradictions experienced by the underclass. Many Catholic Masses in the district are no longer attended in large numbers by the local community. In contrast, when migrant communities attend the weekly Mass, ceremonies are richer in sentiments, sometimes including chanting or dancing and enhanced by the presence of children. Parishes have blossomed anew because of the involvement of migrant communities and also through the financial contributions from larger congregations. Furthermore, in the schools in this area, there are many Irish-born nationals with non-national parents (including Nigerians, Chinese, Romanians and Russians). The term 'non-national' cannot be applied to these children, but they need additional support in English language support anyway. Hence they become non-nationals in this respect: in school they cannot follow mathematics or English lessons if they do not receive special language support. Moreover, their parents sometimes risk deportation but not the children who got their citizenship through *jus loci*.¹⁰ Another group of children technically considered non-nationals, are those born to parents whose Irish parents or grandparents previously migrated abroad. They are now coming back as foreign Irish, so to speak, with children born abroad, but they are not located in the inner city because they are primarily middle class, with the resources to live in the more affluent areas of Dublin. Finally there are non-nationals newly arrived with one of their parents or sometimes both, usually from West Africa, the Philippines, the former Yugoslavia and Russia.

In terms of religious belief, we can distinguish among those parents who profess Christianity and those with a different ethos (Muslims, Confucians, Buddhist, agnostics or atheists, for instance). The groups of foreigners with a Christian ethos form a constituency where a national sense of belonging via an education mired in an Irish Christian ethos, can be rebuilt in the eyes of the Church. Sunday Masses attended by Filipinos and Nigerians,

as described more generally above, add a renewed optimism to some parishes. These communities introduce a new culture or ritual within the Mass, which incorporates music, responsive body language and flower decorations made often with plants. This positive influence makes Christian non-nationals very welcome in mono-denominational schools. However, this engagement with and reinforcement of Christian ritual creates a dichotomy where Irish children from the inner city, together with Travellers and children from Russia and Asia, as well as some Muslims, are now identified as Other to the processes of 'catholicisation' described above. These children then become marginalized and feel threatened as future imagined 'full Irish' citizens. If these children cannot be incorporated within an attitude or impulse of charity or pity for their incongruous attitude, they risk ostracism when these children rebel against both Church and school. In contrast, non-national Christian migrants generally aspire to middle class values, as in the case of Filipino constituencies of nurses and paramedical personnel, whose sons and daughters are encouraged to work hard and to attend the first communion.



Figure 1.3 Palms' Procession in St. Peter's Church, Dublin Inner city.

In this way School and Church consolidate their basic pact of cooperation with these new constituencies and become the locations for the social life of foreign Christian families and co-national friends. Solidarity, childcare after school and various other social resources are exchanged and negotiated after Sunday mass. Catholic non-nationals are a constituency which endeavours to implement or restore a model of a 'multicultural' Irish Christian ethos in the local churches. It appears these practices have been partly influenced by missionaries' various traditions and knowledge acquired over several hundred years of diplomatic relationships overseas, as a certain postcolonial atmosphere surrounds the reverence and respect which the immigrants show to clergy and Christian activists, manifest in a more active and direct way when compared to local churchgoers. The foreign constituency (already accustomed to attending English language masses in their countries of origin from before their arrival in Ireland) contribute to the revitalisation of parish life, which was otherwise falling into a repetitive mode of proselytising and devotion and which appears not so much conservative (as in some upper-class parishes), but seemingly passive.¹¹

In its relation to childhood, the Irish Catholic institution of the new Millennium was irrevocably shaped by a recent public scandal connected with child abuse. The prejudices surrounding research of young subjects in Catholic educational institutions (92% national schools in Ireland were Roman Catholic in 2003) were associated with suspicion of any inquiry, investigation or other interference, and it was difficult to tackle topics connected with children's representation in religious settings without causing fear of exposure. The only way to enable my presence was to explore and talk about these worries with the actors, with tact, honesty, and never in intimate settings. In this respect pupils often expressed that they felt 'cheated' when questions of abuse referring to other children were

hidden from them. They needed to know more about what these allusions meant, to find a way to talk about their fears and experiences, and to exchange ideas on the mysterious terminology used by newspapers and media in general on the subject. A large scandal had recently uncovered the perpetrated abuses of 2,000 minors in Irish religious institutions between the 1950s and 1980s, and the Government was still dealing with survivors of abuse, two and half thousand applicants calling for 'justice' and the financial compensation from the various religious orders (Bacik 2004: 54). The State was also accused of not having operated stricter surveillance at the time of these events, of not monitoring religious institutions which were responsible for the rehabilitation of minors but still under the State regulation. In Ireland there is a tight continuity between State and religious institutions, as illustrated by the law 44, particularly in Article 44.2.4.¹² This was done in order to regulate the co-operation between public institutions and religious orders, which have been so interdependent in the Irish state infrastructure. This was the reason why the Church was allowed to ask for financial help from the Irish State, namely the taxpayers.¹³ In using images of children, I then entered the delicate arena where forms of photographic, filmic representation and exhibitionism could easily be associated with the kind of national enquiry described, rendering fieldwork subjects perplexed and worried about the consequences of being filmed.

The Transnational Family

The children I met in the school have family histories which made me think that their migratory experiences is very different from those I observed in France some years earlier. Most of the non-Irish children have been born in the condition of transnational migration. They visit their countries of origin only later in life, or left it behind as a baby. Almost all of them lived in other countries before landing in Ireland. Despite this complex set of

territorial, linguistic, emotional and historical trajectories, children are bound first and foremost to the family as their micro-nation. The family provides their national emblems, family stories, regional food, languages, dialects, cultural references, hygiene habits and many other rituals, which are kept more or less homogeneous in every place they move to, and often become symbolic capital of parental care, the parental transmission of values identified as 'family traditions' (Faulstich et al 2001). In the age-span I have chosen for this research (namely primary school age), I met children spending more time with their own families rather than outside in the street, with groups of peers encountered in school and in the neighbourhood. But if I had chosen another age-span, this pattern would have been reversed and the 'new Irish' adolescents would have found their resources mainly outside of the family. In the early months or years of a migrant child's experience in Ireland, family resources are firmer and cover almost all the needs of socialisation and knowledge that children need in their daily life after school. However, for older children, after one or two years spent in the same country, young subjects both need and feel obliged to draw a clear separation between the domestic and public sphere, and they rarely enjoy family life more than outdoor social life. For immigrant children in Ireland the formation of reactive, multiple and compatible identities applies mainly to strands of shared desire and opportunities for consumption (desired objects include various gadgets such as video players, mobile phones, play stations but also clothes) or sport (football, martial arts, boxing or hurling). Sport is almost an exclusively male arena, while in the other spheres both genders find equal ways to socialise.

Most of the migrant children I worked with in Dublin (excluding Patrick, Yasmina, and Tahar) have experienced an ongoing movement of migration from their very early childhood. A pluri-migratory movement thus characterises their lives and those of their

relatives and caregivers. This simple and evidential reality was at odds with my expectation of interrogating a tangible demarcation between ‘before and after’ the very act of migration. What, therefore, is the fundamental starting point in approaching questions of migrancy? When and where should I trace imagined lines in such existential maps? Should I simply stick to my idealised linear pattern of migration (characterised by crossing borders, sudden shifts of time-space, immersion in completely different societies and obedience to new rules) or should I abandon these patterns; first of all by letting the social actors indicate the paths to be investigated and avoiding naming the phenomena of migration as such, for instance? Do these concepts make any real sense to children facing migration? These were just some of the questions I carried with me into the field site of the Primary School, located in the inner city of north Dublin.

I

The School

The first day of term after the summer holidays: the school yard is crowded. The school is located in a former working-class district, where one generation seems to follow closely on another and motherhood is usually undertaken at an early age¹⁴ (16–19 years old). The Irish constituency in this part of the city is today defined as an ‘under class’ living on welfare subsidies. Social deprivation, both overt and hidden, is on the increase and hope of a better future is rapidly diminishing. To me it seemed that, from the perspective of the inhabitants, one period had ended, leaving them without any clear idea of what was to follow. As noted above, in this ‘Irish-born’ neighbourhood, a ‘non-national’ (referred to as such in Irish immigration discourse) constituency has begun to develop in recent years: immigrants sheltering in hostels, centres, temporary housing and gloomy flats below pavement level. Manifestations of this new diversity are immediately apparent in the

school. While its architecture is unchanged, inside, however, there are new signs and symbols displayed throughout the corridors. Parents, students, newly enrolled children, siblings and even ex-pupils are chatting and, somewhat tensely, greeting the members of staff, some of whom are new acquaintances. Teachers tend not to stay long in these disadvantaged schools and there is a rapid turnover, giving a precarious air, apparent at first glance, to the socializing. Many young children are anxious on their first day at school, but in general the atmosphere is not too hectic. Almost everybody suspends judgement, oscillating between the fear of being singled out or, conversely, of being ignored. Very few children feel at ease and communicate freely among themselves.

This was not my first day at the school. I had begun my observations the year before and had already started to introduce the camera, so I knew who was new and which nationalities (by and large) were represented; in the previous semester (2003), 56 of the 126 pupils comprised a combination of 'non-nationals' and nationals who were not yet English-speaking. Waiting for the bell, delayed while the children were taught how to stay in line, I came across a parent – the only one – who was taking a picture of his son, a new pupil. I was struck by this caring act, by his pride in the boy's initiation into school and by some different quality to his behaviour. I noticed at once the elegant clothes and careful hairdressing of the mother. I saw that the younger sister stayed quiet to show respect for her older brother as he enrolled and that the boy attempted to hold a smile and a dignified pose for the portrait. The yard was grey, as is often in old schools, and the father was watching the sky, waiting for some sunshine. Suddenly he called to his son: 'Tahar! Tahar!' As the sun's rays pierced the clouds, Tahar's pose transcended the frenzied motion in the yard, capturing an instant of his own history, the first day at school in a new country.

At least one third of the families are visibly non-Irish, although the children of these families could easily have been born in Ireland, especially the young pupils enrolling as senior infants. Sometimes the national status of family members is differentiated even within the same family: for instance, the two youngest children of a family from Beijing have the right of nationality according to *jus locis*, so have Irish citizenship, whilst the rest of the family members retain their Chinese nationality and have no claim to Irish citizenship despite a long period spent in the country. When I met one of the Chinese families in the yard I noticed that the youngest children already spoke English with their school friends, while their parents and elder siblings remained still and withdrawn from the general conversation and received minimal attention from the staff. When they talked among themselves, briefly and quietly, it was mainly in what I presumed to be Mandarin.

Area/Location/Neighbourhood

The area where the school is located serves the council flats situated between Upper Dorset Street and Belvedere Road. The borderline with Parnell Square delineates the southern edge of the area and the North Circular Road the northern one. The eastern edge is comprised of the Mater Hospital and West Dominick Street, which leads to the ILAC centre and shopping mall. This is a flat map and incorporates what I have come to experience as both the physical but also cultural borderlines which children of the school (in both categories, migrants and locals) do not pass through alone and consequently often do not cross for months, because their social life is self-contained within them. There is a children's hospital in Belvedere and two churches, St. Joseph and St. Dominick. But this geographical delineation, if seen as an echo, or attainment, as in the eyes of a child,

deploys a sort of tri-dimensionality, which is the result of the tangible children's perspective in the area. As MacDougall writes:

Perhaps because it is so obvious, it is easy to forget that people not only inhabit social spaces but create them. Our sensory worlds are to a large extent defined by the presence of others. Each human group has its own specific gravity—whether this be a crowd in a subway, a group of university students, or children in a playground. Even one or two people in a room changes it as an environment. Our awareness of others varies according to how close they are, their physical appearance and actions, their actual relationship to us, and how we feel toward them. We may distinguish them as individuals or simply sense their presence as an undifferentiated mass (2006: 127).

My perception of this limited area changed by participating in the children's expeditions, visiting their homes and meeting them in their favourite spots. I could not film outdoors as much as I had wished, because the camera could play a role of instigator of dangerous or exhibitionist behaviours from the side of the children, but I tried to observe these walks and visits as if I was shooting as well. Described from a child's standpoint this area is big enough for wandering about and for hiding places, but it lacks green spaces. Most of the playgrounds are concrete, comprised of inner courtyards. Children have adapted to this landscape, but when they get a chance to escape to places like Phoenix Park, some 5 km distant from the area (as happened when two of them left alone, without authorisation), then they realise how much they lack grass, trees and streams, or places to run and play in green areas. It is important to remember that the Irish-born children of the area have cut their bonds with the Irish rural life of their parents, grandparents or great-grandparents. Children in the neighbourhood seldom travel to the countryside or elsewhere on their holidays. Most of the migrant children have seen more of the world.¹⁵ But both groups lack contact with green areas; trees are rare yet when present they grow in a square in the asphalt.

Dublin's river, the Liffey, is the real frontier, dividing the neighbourhood and the city's south side, where most green areas are located. Parnell Square, where most of the local children are born in the Rotunda Maternity Hospital, is a vast, fenced-in square which children of their age are forbidden to cross; on the other side of it is O'Connell Street, the long commercial avenue of Dublin with its famous monuments marking the history of Irish Independence, including the city's central post office. The new Spire, also on O'Connell Street, is a popular destination for walks with parents and siblings on Saturday and Sunday. The purpose of these weekend visits to the north city centre is to see what's newly available in the shops, what new labels, gadgets, technology or other novelties; it is a day of quick and cheap consumption in fast food restaurants and huge department stores. For migrants the borders remain quite the same, except that they sometimes take more organised tours in the first two months of living in Dublin in order to discover the city from the tourist's point of view. Some Filipino children can say that they visited Trinity College and the Books of Kells (ancient manuscripts in the university's Old Library); some Polish families visited both the Lutheran St. Patrick Church and the Catholic cathedral at Christchurch. Nigerians visited Dundalk or Lucan and other nearby cities where Nigerian communities are well established; one Algerian family went to the seaside using the Dublin DART (the city's aboveground rapid transit system). But in general the environment around Dorset Street, the borders of which I described above, is the sole environment where local children between seven and ten years of age spent their days. Those born there have a larger network and more freedom of action, and know each street very well. They have bad and good memories associated with different places unrelated to their immediate physical exteriors, but they also know they belong to a historical community (even if this history does not seem to share common patrimony with the rest of the city) and none of them ever told me s/he wished to live elsewhere. It seems, by

acknowledging the space through children's eyes, that there is a certain pride in managing to play everywhere, including in adult spaces, not only in especially designed open-air spaces for children. Some council house yards have a single slide, basketball or soccer headboard; some have one sand-basin with a few climbing toys, but in general these places are naked, abrasive, grey to the eye. One needs a colourful ball or a jumping rope to animate the space. To have a bicycle or roller skates could enliven the space as well, but not all the children have these for various reasons (forbidden inside, no storage space, fear of danger or of theft, potential quarrels among siblings in families with one item to share).

When living in environments like these, migrant children learn that they cannot compete with the 'dwelling' ability of their national or even their local peers because in most cases they cannot obtain permission to play outside and end up mostly confined to their own home with indoor toys or in their yards, without access to public parks, nor the streets, where Irish young local gangs still dominate and set the rules for encounters with their peers. In this way a playful use of the environment is informed by the alliances and safety which children are able to acquire as social capital. In those cases, their integration is ensured by their own ability to keep up their initial capital, which is played out in a peer arena: the school does little to facilitate this kind of integration, because the educational institutions position themselves as opposite and alternative to street life. Among foreign parents belonging to the school I observed a certain fear toward what they refer to as 'tough life' of the street and expressions of fear and harassment. The cliché is also an American one, reinforced in movies and heard by returned migrants, and the result of these fears was that non-national parents kept their sons and daughters at home in front of an always on satellite TV or occupied with play-stations and computer games. For my observation, the initial result of such a differentiated relationship with outdoor social life

within the two disparate communities was that I was not often able to meet and spend time with the children (both native and migrant) after school, in order to observe and then eventually film their free play and note their freedom from the control of adults.

Different areas were appropriated (to different degrees) by small, flexible groups of children and the criteria for sharing places and creating borderlines of control over the territory were age-based. The children from primary school had their own areas, rarely overlapping with those of their older siblings. Some of the non-nationals had been accepted, like Atilio and Alberto, two brothers from Romania, and they were part of the local groups; but two cousins from Poland, Monty-Sebastian and Giordàn, of Roma origins, who lived in Ireland on a seasonal basis, were not accepted because of this, and each time they dared to play soccer in the local square they were attacked or their mobile phones and other gadgets were stolen by older siblings of local peers. Samuel and Gabriel, siblings from Romania of Roma ethnicity, were even physically bullied and called on their own intimidating uncles to warn off their peer attackers. Filipino pupils always went home in groups and rarely met outdoors in the afternoons. Meanwhile, their families were guarding each other's children at home in a very well organised network.

Time spent outdoors was more flexible and almost unlimited for local children, who could always rely on relatives living in the neighbourhood if their guardians did not return home, while most of the non-national children I knew had to show up in their compounds regularly in order to reassure their caregivers. Some parents, from both constituencies, could be found in local pubs, at any time of the day. Pubs are crucial meeting points shaping Irish social and political life and they are becoming increasingly multiethnic and revitalised by new customers. Clientele of these pubs is diversified, thus these spaces are

increasingly used in non-traditional ways, because the pub is a crucial arena for integration, providing a way of understanding how friendship, ideas, networks, pleasures and opportunities function and circulate in Irish society. Children sometimes find their parents in the various pubs surrounding the school, which open at mid-morning, but do not enjoy staying indoors for very long (although the 2004 law banning smoking in Irish indoor public spaces makes non-smokers' use and frequentation of pubs much more bearable). The children use the pub mainly as a meeting point to pass on messages at short notice, attempt episodic claims for small change or quick negotiations with their guardians. In other cases mobile phones help in tracing where both the children and adults are at any given moment and to update others of changes to their schedule or routine.

Thus the Dublin location chosen for the fieldwork increasingly revealed itself not as a homogeneous location in terms of social class, or a ghetto situated inside the school, but more as a super-structural ghetto of a post-Celtic Tiger era society. Precarious immigrant parents and welfare-sustained Irish subjects were compelled to live here and slowly became occupied with similar activities. The borderline between the Flats and the rest of the urban fabric was clearly delineated. To split migrants from non-migrants in this context had no political impact from the standpoint of the dialectic of domination. For both communities, the dominating forces or patrons were located elsewhere. In the case of children they were (in both categories) structured as potential consumers, trained to desire indoor commodities: computer games, play-stations, televisions, mobile phones, various electric items and DVDs. Life in the urban city was feared because a particular American model haunted the imagination of many foreigners. Exploring on bikes or roller skates was among the few individual activities children could do when away from their homes.

Football or basketball was among the few team sports remaining in local outdoor social life.

Negotiating Access

Before I arrived on the scene, the school I chose as an institutional body and emblematic location of 'disadvantage' had been the object of short surveys by educational experts and subject to inspections by the parish and some sociology students. However, the staff and pupils had not encountered any qualitative approach, long-term fieldwork or visual ethnographic inquiry. The methodology I intended to implement was totally unknown to them, although I tried to clarify its modalities before beginning. Moreover, the video equipment I used was creating the usual ambiguities in terms of the eventual broadcast of the material. Although still pictures of children's activities were regularly taken by teachers when special events occurred, they were used exclusively to illustrate or put on display, and were not meant to enable self-discovery, nor provide a tool for children to be appropriated for pedagogical use. Practices connected with daily, invisible or ordinary routines were never visualised. These practices constituted the implicit and hidden fabric of the everyday, which was experienced by the children as much as by staff, as absolutely 'non-interesting and non-transportable'. If my presence had any novelty, it rested on the peculiarity that instigated performance and exposed previously unnoticed facts as events. Conversely, I wished exactly for that 'non-interesting and non-transportable' evidence to appear; this was the main interest of my methodology. The fact that obtaining this evidence required a much longer time spent simply waiting or strolling around and observing, thus creating a quite uncanny controversy among the members of staff. They felt, as they often said, that I was 'wasting' time, tiring some of the staff who felt obliged to perform for me and the camera, also that I was witnessing too many confidential

incidents which could threaten the very politics of the establishment. In this way, starting with suspiciously easy access granted by the school board, which revealed a fear of looking too opaque rather than a true interest in my research (undertaken in the way I imagined), I experienced a gradual rejection. Although the opposite pattern can emerge when researching within institutions, namely that those observed gradually become weary and slowly relinquish their defensive attitude, in my case the alert sounded after six months of periodic access and grew louder until the month before I left. I could understand that this was one of the ways institutions protect and preserve their unquestioned rules, as Bourdieu et al (1999) have vividly described; for often the long-term presence of an investigator obliges the community to re-discover its inequalities and contradictions. My aim was primarily to work alongside children, and the growing reluctance of the establishment proved to be a burden during an already difficult process, rather than a neutral background. I did not want to alienate children from the institutional forces at work which framed and defined them. I also wanted to show the quality of institutional power they rebelled against or compromised with. I wanted to show that in a given environment, children teach and learn at the same time and as adults we could enjoy that discovery, questioning our own assumptions and ways of seeing.

Fieldwork Conditions

The suggestion to approach this particular school to negotiate access was provided simultaneously by different acquaintances; other teachers and experts in education, migration or interculturalism. The person who almost ensured contact was the Director of the Refugee Council, located two hundred meters from the area where the school is. I was given the number of the Principal, who was also a well-known local activist and politician. Because of this he could not continue at the school and he suggested I make contact with

the acting Principal. He also thought that this school was a perfect setting for the kind of inquiry I had outlined. The first acting Principal gave me his full trust at once, and I started my preliminary observations without the camera and attempted to introduce myself to the staff and invited them to see and respond to my previous work, shown in a public venue downtown in order to attract feedback. Unfortunately this strategy was in vain, because attendance at the screening was not high. I had a very good relationship with the main teacher, but as soon I stepped out of her field of influence, a sort of hectic, frenzied style marked each attempt at discussion and inclusion, and time seemed to be slipping away. I was then disillusioned to hear that the jovial, politically involved acting principal had departed on sabbatical leave and his replacement inherited my contract in a way which felt as though it were imposed on her; however, she never really engaged with the idea, as she revealed long afterwards in an informal conversation in which she aired her grievances. A few weeks following from the change of principal, a permanent feeling of urgency surrounded every communication I attempted in the school. It seemed as if no opportunities were made available for chats, presentations or careful listening. I realised afterwards that I was to be tested directly vis-à-vis the children. I was under the illusion that I was creating my own cast, observations and evaluations of the location, the children and the staff, but actually, in that transition period, I was the one who was carefully scrutinised in every thing I did. This is of course an obvious strategy, and in some ways it marks the true quality of fieldwork: without this reciprocity between researcher and subjects there is hardly any dialectical encounter or clash. However, the way it was performed in the school was somewhat new to me and I did not recognise the many signs I received because I was too optimistic, while simultaneously weary and empathic. The jovial welcoming atmosphere had rendered me completely naïve, because I did not realise that the staff had a silent strategy to test me in a space of visibility and free access, so that

my curiosity could be prevented. I came to realise the subtle system which the Dublin school utilised only through isomorphism with rural communities and negotiated access under the umbrella of local chiefs and notables. By penetrating as outsider (I was not meant to function as an educator, nor as assistant apart from my private research aims), I realised that the leadership of the school needed its community to stay tight and that I was perceived as a judge, not to the single actors who eventually engaged with me, but for the whole community, including parents and relatives, external collaborators and janitors. I was inevitably attributed a role which assumed I wanted to assess the school's management.

If in France I had been possibly too careful in any single action within the institution and in each idea I expressed to each individual representing authority, I had also waited nine months simply to get official permission to stay in the school from the Ministry of Education. If frictions would ever arise, I had the feeling I was only threatening to individuals, never to communally held interests. In France I dealt with individuals who were never afraid to be pursued within the school, because the authorities seemed to protect the entire corpus; all categories of adult-carers were united against exterior onlookers as they were against parents' recriminations. In Dublin the reverse seemed true. Everything seemed informal, flexible, open and easy; but the school staff, as a micro community, and especially in a top-down direction, felt threatened by my presence as if I was there to personally assess them one by one, so they increased the surveillance. I was not completely aware that I was acting out of my own unquestioned doxa, acquired in prior fieldwork situations in other parts of the world; I had internalised some 'habitus' (in Bourdieu's trope it is the embodiment of social laws), which were hard to discard now, for I relied upon implicit knowledge. Under the informal attitude shown, under the jovial

'How are you?' (albeit whispered whilst the speaker was leaving), further scrutiny was implemented, which did not apply rules and written laws, but the collective gaze of the staff commenting on my presence and articulations, my acts and questions in the boardroom.

I had believed instead that my former work, presented as a text and a film from the beginning, supplemented with explanations, invitations to seminars, and reference letters was the real passport to access this 'new land', and that it constituted a good self-presentation. I was sure of my identity, so to speak, and perhaps of the 'package' I offered in terms of research. I had reduced my level of scepticism, which in return made me blind to the very modes in which surveillance was implemented by staff and mostly by the principals and patrons (of the local parish). But more than anything I had underestimated the comprehension, from the institutional side, of the modalities supporting the fieldwork itself. They had social scientists, journalists or educational experts regularly coming and going in the school, but their surveys did not require more than a few hours to be spent in interviews and questionnaires. Participatory observation had never occurred at the school before my arrival, and they could not foresee what it was like to have somebody sharing the school days with them, usually carrying a camera and microphone, with no known affiliation and no direct or consistent salary for the time 'wasted' in hanging around. I had prudently assumed the right to circulate freely in any classroom I could negotiate access to, as well as in the yard, in the staff room, the gymnasium or on tours outside the school. In so doing, I was perceived more and more as an intruder.

If the initial reaction had been of curiosity and openness from the side of the school, they progressively closed down spaces, eluding my questions and conversations; they did not

inform the families properly when I had a need to tap into their network; they refused to give me access to archives, and finally they confined my activity primarily to Miss Morris' class. Furthermore, I did not manage to organise collective sessions to show the rushes, to invite parents in; there was no interest in creating opportunities to freely evaluate the work in progress, for I had relied on the authority of the school and needed that space to accommodate the families. Hence my claim was perceived as disturbing, because it touched upon the sense of failure felt by the establishment in relation to its liaison with the very society where the school was located. I could not bypass the school's authority because no other arenas than the actual school itself and its environs so effectively could gather the different para- and peri-scholastic constituencies. Symbolically I also wanted the school to be the host for such events of mediation and discovery; in a way I claimed a new use of that location, that had mainly been the site of withdrawal and scepticism for many users, the symbolic arena of class and religious struggles and/or discrimination, which the school emblematically evoked in many parents (especially locals, but not exclusively). I felt more and more neutralised. My ambitions and expectations were reduced. I had to reduce my hoped-for impact by giving out tapes to each actor, with the hope of discussing them after they had viewed them, trying to be invited to family homes but hardly succeeding, or simply grasping five minutes with children and parents, teachers and authorities, when they delivered their flat and rushed comments. My fieldwork became a sort of impossible task.

The second acting principal the following year was shyer and much more intimidated. She, the liaison teacher and the vice principal never agreed to be filmed or to be interviewed off camera, but this was never expressed as a challenge to me, but always by evasion, by slipping away or staying silent (apart from the liaison teacher who said she

didn't believe in interviews, but showed knowledge and ability when informally addressed in short conversations with me). At the beginning I had the feeling it was a question of earning their trust, for every researcher tries to embellish rejection, idealised often as unlucky and/or surely episodic. In this way I was blind, misunderstanding that 'wall' in our communication and I waited and courted them until the moment when it became evident that they would never agree to collaborate, but on the contrary influenced staff not to feel obliged to honour our agreement. Interdictions started to be put up concerning relationships and locations where I previously had access. A priest from the local parish, who at the beginning had accepted my project and filming with flattering tolerance and who was a crucial actor in the research, as member of the board and patron in the school as well as a teacher of religion and catechism, asked not to be in focus anymore, except for his appearance in some lessons where he taught the children how to receive the first communion and in one or two preparatory masses.

I realised that the methodology followed in other places was not appropriate to this particular social and cultural context, and especially not to location's historical determinant. The historical present contained schools still controlled by priests and teachers who had an attitude of fatalism and pity toward locals. I had to work differently. First of all I had to invest time in order to enable time to 'pass by'; meaning here a shared historical span of time in which we (researcher and social actors) could debate the findings and see the pictures from a certain distance. It was not possible here to create a 'closed circuit' of information as it occurred, through showing work in progress in the school, as I had done in Paris. I had to accept the evidence of my methodological limits and find other ways to reach the understanding of the social actors.

The challenge was thus to ground the fieldwork in a historical posture toward the very evidence of my material. It was only that gap, that historical bond-distance that could provide meaning to these representations. Previously, I wanted to adopt a certain mode in research, engaged and portable whilst in progress. But if I kept to that approach I would not be able to transform the dynamics of censorship and indifference, which were neutralising my attempt to become a revealing contributor in the community. To be able to understand the 'unspoken' restrictions of the institution was now of great relevance to me in order to retain the perspective of the children (who are my main research target group) and to render and dignify the human logic of each adult administering that power and dominance, without reinforcing the usual stereotypes about 'nasty' schoolteachers, priests and principals, 'ignorant and rough' parents or 'innocent and malicious' pupils.

An example of the above may illustrate my new approach further. When the school board put limitations on access to events in the Church, I was thus forbidden to film the First Communion. However, once I was at the Church I discovered that the parents were allowed to film the ceremony, but not I. Although I felt both sad and provoked, I realised that at least this 'veto' marked my different role and situatedness, so in one way the power of representation that I had was definitely of a different fabric. For better or for worse, I realised that I was not recording the idealised image the church wanted to represent itself; my manner of pointing the camera and the attention to certain details made my work too independent to be patronised by both interconnected institutions.

After six months in which the silent, restrictive atmosphere grew thicker, the misunderstanding about my frequency of access was finally to be cleared up. I faced a real crisis with the school, which was useful in a sense as it explicitly demonstrated its attempt

at self-protection in its domination of symbolic order. It was problematic not being able to work with some adults social actors, to film them or even show them images, when these people were crucial and present in the 'plot' of the institution. The result was that I had to film very carefully, all the time, and be ready to stop whenever they entered the picture, which was often. Additionally I only had a limited amount of time at my disposal due to the children's frenzied lack of concentration, which made my otherwise meditative shooting a hectic and disturbed activity. Moreover, the idea of creating a portrait of the school fell to pieces because without these veterans the history, power relations, decision-making processes and domination structures within the school were not visible anymore, and in some ways the whole picture of how management operated was artificial, hidden behind a facade. If the film initially rested on the assumption that I had full access and free circulation, as well as trust and encouragement, complicity and respect from the authorities, I eventually came to realise that these initial promises had to be re-negotiated. Consequently, each time I entered the school I was expecting more interdictions and sanctions than on the previous occasion. This expectation in turn exacerbated the sense of denial, rather than encouraging open trust. I was denied permission to shoot parents meetings, the teachers' lunchroom, the religion classes held by the acting principal, the female pupils' area and many other situations in which both the Acting and the Vice-Principal appeared. Only at the end of the second year could I finally negotiate a partial reconciliation, when I (fortunately) filmed a children's performance which the Principal enjoyed seeing at a later date (she was not present when it happened) and where the pupils of the school made a great impression upon several respected external onlookers from the Teachers' Club. Only then did the establishment realise that rather than cause a disturbance, I had instead witnessed some rewarding moments in the lives of their most unruly children, who through this performance had suddenly acquired respect from ex-

teachers and education experts in one of the most 'untouched' sites of the area: the Teachers' Club. I had also wanted access to school archives (documents and reports) from the last decade, but this was refused for reasons of confidentiality, even though I was primarily interested in the historical perspective of the social changes which occurred in the area, and not in search of evidence of abuse or discrimination. However, I could not negotiate access to these at all, even after nine months of my presence in the school, even after offering to collate the documents under the control of staff members.

My entire negotiation of this site, as described so far, could appear as a complete flop. But the quality of the daily observation of Miss Morris' class and my acquaintance with the children who were my main actors and target group, made me realise that I should learn how to listen to the scepticism of the establishment, and significantly, not to take it personally. I could for example, learn much about the worries, fears and vulnerable areas of a symbolic system and social order. The big transformations that were imminent were tangibly felt and perhaps the old order was simply fading away. Instead of focusing on my denied access and looking elsewhere, I decided to remain, even more confined and restricted, and radicalise my situatedness in the very small, fragile community of interest which still appeared to care for me, namely Miss Morris' class. I rolled up my sleeves and started working as a sort of assistant, filming less and instead lending a hand in practical duties. I started again from scratch, from a position of an outcast, rather than of privilege. In retrospect, I see now that, although this was a position without support in the midst of multiplied, sometimes frenzied situations, I nonetheless felt less anxiety about bringing back 'data'. Filming had occasionally led to a sort of tyranny, which meant I was not satisfied if I was not able to film in a way that resembled a 'catching game'. This is what I

call a 'dwelling perspective' when filming, a skill which sustains oneself in the fieldwork, through the craft of digital video work.

At this stage I came to understand what appeared to be a primary lesson that the community of adults in power, namely the principals, patrons and most of the teachers, sought to impart to outsiders such as myself who ventured into the everyday regime prevalent in the school. It was thus important for me to discard my previous and established roles as social scientist and filmmaker, together with the paraphernalia necessary to conduct film fieldwork in order that I may be accepted and sit comfortably at the teachers' table in the staffroom. It was perhaps a Christian motif requiring me to become humble and embody an ideal of modesty, but it was nevertheless culturally embedded and functional. In so doing, I had privileged access as a new assistant, learning how to speak pedagogically to children, to guide two or three classes when outdoors, in public places, to show that I was not allowing children to abscond; also seeing how children were evaluated by their carers continuously, how they were surveyed and framed by a collective plan which had to adapt every single act and changing mood of turbulent subjects, how they were considered and feared, how adults sometimes needed me to stay with them more than the children. I also learned how the vulnerable ones were the intransigent adults who had tried to reject me when I was allied, bound to the pupils by my 'film-cord'.

I had negotiated a form of access, but my film had ended, so to speak. The audio-visual methodology turned out to be easier and better suited to other spheres but it had made my acceptance by the institution much harder. It had obliged me to negotiate with authorities while constantly worrying if I'd be chased out, left me without clear boundaries and

required ongoing alertness for every move I made inside the scholastic compound, and in any public sphere connected with the school. In negotiating the above, I was kept away from communicating with the children. If the institution wanted to demonstrate its openness, it also controlled my actions, (which is of course understandable because of the vulnerable topic of the research and the young subjects involved), but this had been done in such a way that had left me without space to express what I was able to craft. The limitations of my description exist because I must carefully consider what could be said and how, since the ethics of representation are crucial within any visual anthropological inquiry and must inform the whole process to be fruitful. A productive and reciprocal censorship informed most of the process of gaining access, although it was a harsh experience when the degree of restriction was made evident.

II

Architecture, Space, School Structure

Two main borders are identifiable in a self-contained but spacious square dominated by an old white Church, today transformed into offices: on the left are the high walls of a council housing estate, on the right the lower but homogenous walls of an ex-parish seminar hostel, functioning for more than three decades as a primary school. The 'Boys' section is twinned with a 'Girls' section occupying half of the building in a vertical section and benefiting from two separate entrances. The principal, staff and pupils are differentiated, but they share the main yard, the gymnasium, one parents-liaison teacher, one English Support Language teacher and one part-time music teacher. Playtime and sports are carefully differentiated, so that the possibility of boys and girls meeting is avoided. Girls seem to enjoy being supervised, but they do not show any desire to play with the boys. They must follow much stricter disciplinary rules, must wear perfectly

clean and ironed uniforms and keep their hair neat. It should be added that most of the pupils are siblings or cousins, which makes other encounters between the genders in other social spaces outside of school very ordinary. The time in school offers a sort of respite for the girls, but at the same time the genders in social or public spheres are seldom fused, and this appears to most users to be an antiquated discrimination that many schools in Ireland have now abolished.

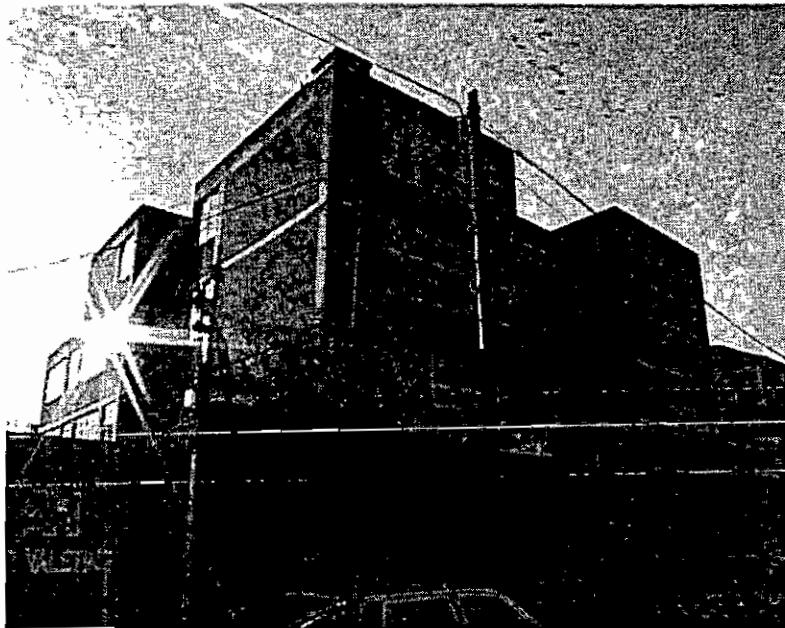


Figure 2.3 All Boys School building.

The 'Boys' unit is managed by the Acting Principal and houses the Vice Principal who also works as a computer-support teacher, in addition to a cleaner and custodian, two resource teachers, an English Support teacher, a music teacher for infants, two infants' teachers, five senior teachers, two special pedagogy caregivers, and three assistants. A mother often volunteers in the morning to help prepare breakfast. 116 male children from junior infants to 5th class were enrolled in 2004. Their parents belonged to the following socio-professional spheres: approximately 7% were nurses from non-EU countries; a large majority were unemployed and lived on welfare subsidies; a small percentage were

janitors; very few were civil servants and three clerks. All of them, albeit only partially in the case of the nurses (with 2/3 yearly contracts) and civil servants, are in precarious and temporary jobs. Many of these children were raised by single parents, but in most cases the extended family provided regular support. The ongoing role of the liaison worker in that particular school was perpetuated by the fact that local children had historically attended the school. The oscillation of the parental guardians was negotiated often throughout the year. Most of the Irish-born children were cousins. 22 of 116 were non-nationals; 26 of 116 were non-English speaking or had only a basic command when they enrolled; 11 of the 22 non-nationals were from the Philippines.

DVD 1 ch. 3.1 clip n. 5 (11_3). Beginning of a school day. 3'25''.

Interior

All the spaces in the building are very narrow and tight (including the teachers' room, the inner yards, staff toilets, kitchen, the Principal and liaison teacher's office, the corridors, stairs and main hall), but there are large classrooms with separate small toilets for each class and huge windows, allowing good light in from outside. The gymnasium is also large and newly renovated. Recently painted walls of bright and saturated compact colours (egg yellow, orange/red, mint/white, deep turquoise, and pea green) make the atmosphere fresh and energetic, especially when compared with the blurred colours outside typical of many industrial inner cities. The paint colours are the pride of Brian, janitor and housekeeper of the school, who paints one section of the school afresh each summer. The space is built in a vertical, ascendant main line, precisely corresponding to half of the building and providing a mirrored double to the other half of the building (the other half is the 'female' space of the Girls' primary school, also forbidden to the camera's gaze) and simultaneously to a range of age groups: the first floor hosts infants, the second 1st to 3rd

grade, the third 4th - 5th grade. Stairs are used all the time by children running out to the yard, individual children rushing to other classes, as well as teachers, resident artists, the Principal, cleaning personnel and occasionally rare parents coming to pass on messages or sometimes to help with a specific task. Parental input of this type is rare, although the school would appreciate parental contributions very much, but merely at the level of helping with practical tasks rather than facilitating intercultural communication.¹⁶ There is thus an objective lack of contact, reciprocity and interest on both sides, as parents rarely feel at ease inside the school and there are no spaces for encounters or time for informal meetings. Furthermore, the staff has developed the habit of mistrusting parents' involvement; there is a basic scepticism when it comes to the role of the parent in the school, an attitude often inherited from one generation of staff to the next.

Stairs are also a no-man's land for children seeking 'escape', who become angry or frustrated, who are looking for temporary places to house small bands, or are simply looking at the walls where pictures of past events are displayed. A very important activity, crucial to understanding management, takes place in this informal space, which lends itself to brief chats amongst staff in order to ascertain how individual pupils are and how they should be framed or helped. It is simultaneously a counselling and a disciplinary arena of the school. Choices are not generally made in an office, by delegating from a top-down position; instead the Principal wanders constantly on all floors, carrying out checks on and dispatching duties, collecting information, and solving emerging problems. More than anything else, stairs are also locations to greet each other. 'Hi, how are you?' is a sentence one constantly hears; but by the time the question mark is reached the interlocutor has already passed by. Stairs are quickly traversed.

One Day in the School Life

The school keeps the doors open for about twelve minutes in the morning, so that children only rarely wait outside the gate. The time allotted to access classrooms is 30 minutes and in this period, children can play football, eat their breakfast or simply arrive at the last minute. Filipino pupils arrive in teams, although the girls must enter from another door of the same building five minutes earlier to access the Girls' section. This policy allows brothers of carers to survey their entrance and then to reach the Boys' gate on time.¹⁷ School starts in a playful mood, and usually the discipline of the collective is somewhat relaxed. There is an atmosphere of leisure time before school obligations begin. The school is a socialising arena *par excellence*. Children who are a little late often arrive alone and usually run into the building for breakfast. Filipino pupils are usually the first to enter the yard where they enjoy lengthy football games, yelling and calling to each other in Tagalog. Concerning the relation between outside/inside, the location of the yard in the school allows for an opening (with high metallic fences) into the main road, a sort of terrace above the pavement. Onlookers watch the children's football matches; the children can peep outside if the ball goes over the fence, much like a theatre stage. Not many pedestrians even turn their head when passing below the level of the terrace. Nevertheless, soccer balls are always sent back by invisible helpers.

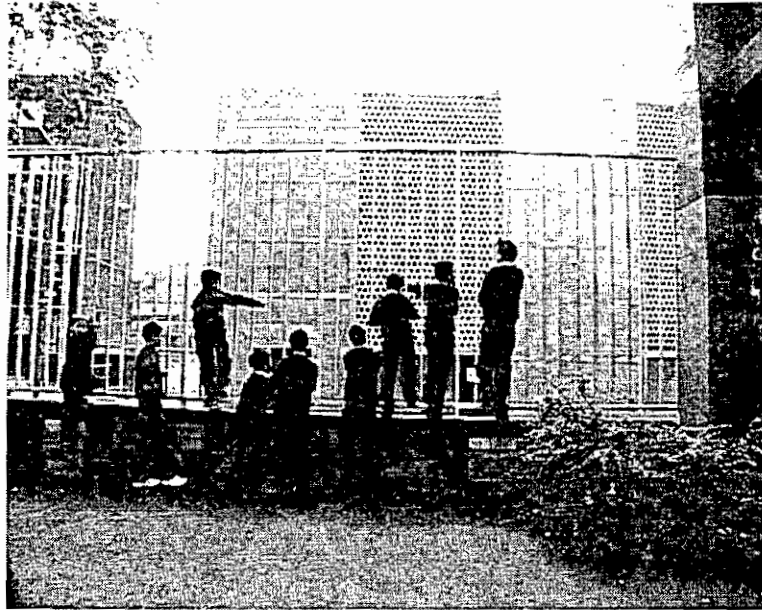


Figure 3.3 Pupils claim their soccer ball through the school's fences.

This period of the day is when the peers' football team takes shape; various alliances are explored, whether through friendship or lobbying. The more Filipinos were enrolled, the bigger the football team became, contributing in turn to a greater sense of alliance together with protection and reciprocity among co-nationals. Filipino children looked after what they considered a safe position to be in, by excelling in class and in sport, and generally being successful in this foreign school, at times provoking jealousy but mostly gaining respect. Sometimes other children joined in the match, especially toward springtime, and also early in the morning, when surveillance from the carers' side was sparse. The most difficult position to take in the yard is not be interested in football at all. During playtime this is harder because there are no real alternative places to develop other games, whereas early in the morning those who are not interested in football can step into the school's buildings and get breakfast or give a hand helping to serve meals.

At this time of day, the Principal remained in the yard all the time in order to have informal chats with parents who needed to pass on special messages to their children or

quickly greet them. This provided a daily opportunity to measure the temperature of the collective. However, parents rarely utilised that time strand for relevant conversations, mainly using that time for messages concerning information for their children. The Principal regularly whistled three or four times aloud in order to mark the beginning of school activities: the school did not have much use for a bell.

DVD 1 ch. 3.1 clip n. 6 (3_5). Breakfast in the Morning. 4'10''.

The common breakfast was one of the warmest and gentlest activities in the school because it was still done in a 'traditional' way: slices of toasted bread with butter, ham and orange juice. Children had their own way of handling food and the obligatory trend was to leave out the crunchy border of each slice (in their parlance called the 'heel'). I have never seen any child who dared to eat them: the common gesture, clearly visible in the film clip, was to throw the crust in the common plate with nonchalance. Bread was devoured as quickly as it arrived: children stood around the table, hands in pockets, or holding their bread, chatting very little and yawning, their eyes often half open. Very seldom had children taken a shower before school. Non-nationals appeared fresher than the locals, having wet hair and somewhat energetic, but this distinction was simply due to the fact that foreigners were more accustomed to wearing their uniforms and these were generally clean and ironed; for children normalising themselves in relation to the rules, being irreproachable and neat was also a basic strategy to gain acceptance, which at least meant also escaping blame.

The teaching activities took place immediately after breakfast, when each child went to his/her classroom and met his/her main teacher. (Later in this chapter I will discuss the pedagogy in more depth.) Another break takes place in the classroom around 10.30am,

when cakes or sandwiches are offered by the school. Each day the menu was different and there was a rotation of five days: Mondays meant chocolate brownies, Tuesday cheese sandwiches, Wednesday white brownies, Thursday ham sandwiches, Friday chocolate cakes. Every day small boxes of milk were also included, which the children drank, but also used as 'bombs' to be thrown in the yard or against teachers' cars. A second and longer playtime followed, organised in two different strands: juniors first and seniors after between 12.45pm and 1.30pm. A packed lunch was brought from home, which revealed the gastronomic habits of each child. There was a pervasive tendency to consume so-called 'junk food', which was eaten standing at the door of the classroom, in the impatient motion of legs and arms wanting to escape and burst outdoors. In the yard, regardless of weather, the popular sport was football, played often in teams divided by ethnicity in two different football match camps. Children who did not like the game, or were not included in the teams, had to stand along the walls. This was the toughest place to be and often very aggressive behaviour was directed especially at those against the walls.

DVD 1 ch. 3.2 clip n. 7 (11_1). Snacks & playtime. 4'58''.

The afternoon activities took place in the classrooms, except for P.E. (Physical Education). English Support Language and Resources teachers come into the classrooms and often work in combined groups, in order to spend more time with the same pupils. School was over at 2.30pm, with a possible extension of after-school up to 3.30pm for some of the children who needed help for their homework.

III

Meeting Children

The following discussion introduces several short portraits of selected children. Unlike my work with the children in the Parisian classroom in chapter five, I have here emphasised

patterns of sociality, since individual stories are rare, nor expressed as purely 'private' or individualised, but always narrated in progress as relational attempts to render the present experiences shared with one's peers. The pedagogy of the Irish school allowed more for these patterns than did the special and closed Cl.in class in France. Even though the narrative parts are fragmentary and arbitrarily chosen, it seems that they always interconnect at another level, where inclusion and exclusion will be played out differently because of the integrated classroom and different histories surrounding these children. For example, in Irish classes newly arrived foreign children are not kept in a separate space in order to present themselves to their future social milieu once they are prepared, but are immediately put in the 'bath' of their non-discrete environment. It appears as if there is not much preparation for these children beforehand, and also less interest in envisioning who they should become or a curiosity as to why they came to Ireland in the first place. The atmosphere of the classroom can be characterised in quick laps of time, swift communication, disappearances and returns, a sort of counselling indifference, anonymity and daily improvisation, and the very rare appearance of a systematic 'xenophobic' attitude.

Here, fragments of behavioural descriptions characterise the portraits of selected children (non-nationals, but also some locals, for tuition is never too individualised in the Irish school). I chose some of them, but with the others we simply got along easily or I earned access for hazardous reasons. The cast of social actors wasn't, in fact, my sole prerogative. I had to accommodate the casual circumstances characteristic of the school as well as the objective life condition of Dublin's inner city. Here a temporary accommodation for migrants meant many non-national children only passed through for one or two weeks. Further, many changes in individual mood, schedules or even interest, made many actors

withdraw from the frame of this research, because they were tired or simply forgetful. Conversely, some children wanted to a disproportionate degree, be let in, and thus became problematic for other reasons, for example, for being too forceful, creating a sort of artificial mode in the relationship and affecting the others wishing to participate more discreetly. The fragmented modalities in the fieldwork process inform these portraits, composing a wider puzzle. In this larger picture each child brings in one of the aspects which are probably emblematic for many more immigrant young subjects residing in Ireland today.

Atilio

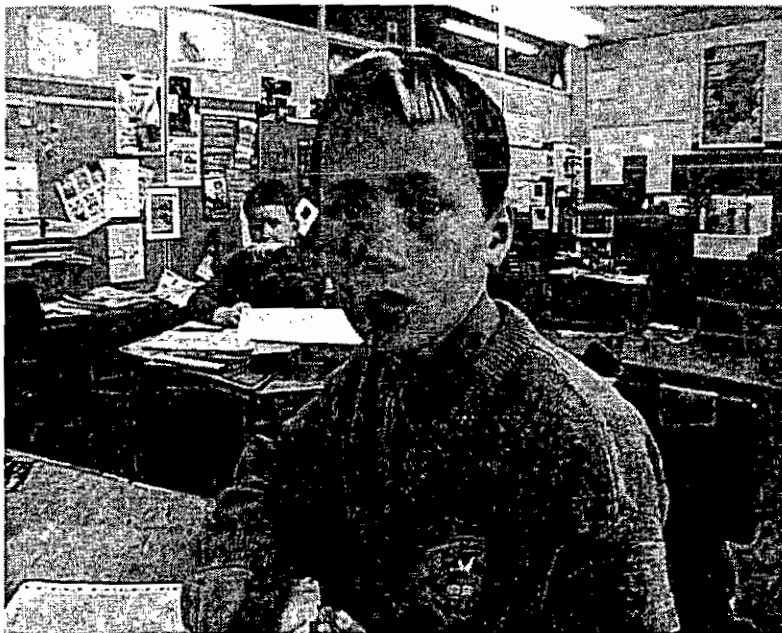


Figure 4.3 Atilio, April 2004.

As his mother told me, Atilio, whose former name was Jon, was prematurely born in Russia, during a dramatic journey in which his Romanian parents had tried to reach Germany for a mid-term migration. His parents were from Bucarest, in Romania and had left weary of misery and harassment, especially in the quarter where they had been brought up. They were both very young, in their early twenties, and had hoped to settle in

any destination country in Europe. The forced stop in Moscow made them fearful: Atillio's mother was kept three months in the hospital, because the baby needed intensive care as he was premature. In the meantime the father had returned to Romania and had left the young mother alone in that foreign context. She remembers those days in Moscow as a gloomy experience of disenchantment although the baby was pretty, grew quickly and, as she states, felt her love for him was already boundless. Nevertheless, once they returned home, mother and father tried again to reach another European destination, but this time they left Atillio (who was called Jon at the time) with the maternal grandparents. The mother was then in her eighth month of a new pregnancy and she had given birth prematurely (again by accident, she said) as soon as she reached Ireland hidden in a truck, perhaps because of the tough journey or because of a miscalculation of the months left in her pregnancy. It was not said if Ireland was really the target of that trip. The mother describes her ignorance of an Irish nation, how she discovered how small it was and how remote on the European map it appeared to her.

A second boy was born far from Romania: Alberto, less than one year younger than his older sibling. The young family had been surviving through a series of small, illegal and harsh jobs, living in temporary shelters, exclusively within a network of co-nationals also recently arrived. After a few years they decided to bring Jon from Romania so he could be reconnected with their life. He was two and half years old when he left Romania, when he was renamed Atillio by his mother's choice. She soon after entered a crisis situation with the father for he had had a relationship with an Irish woman and, as she took the decision to leave him. A long trial across several countries commenced, incorporating Romanian witnesses, embassies aiming to give her full responsibility for the children, securing alimony from the father and eventually securing permission to stay in Ireland, even in

circumstances of divorce abroad. Her knowledge of the new country was shaped by this bureaucratic event and she learned most of the rules of the Irish system through comparison with her Romanian paperwork. She didn't speak any English for several years, only meeting co-nationals and relying on her sons for communication with Irish neighbours or school personnel. The family were living in a council flat (only two immigrated families had ever lived in that compound; the other one was Chinese but with one Irish member) and they had, as their sole income, her welfare subsidy as a single mother for the children's upbringing. Alberto had Irish nationality, but not Atilio or the mother. Another trial had begun in order to access her rights to Irish citizenship as a single woman from outside the EU at that time. She was put on a waiting list.

The mother was ostracised in the community of the flats for being single, for being too open to outside visitors, and on one occasion, someone threw stones against her window as a warning to her, or so she believed. Rumours confirmed that other women blamed her for being too proud and pretty, for not making any effort to learn the language, for letting her kids play outdoors too long and too often, for not once coming to school to receive counselling, and finally for not adequately feeding her children well enough, because they always appeared hungry. The other rumour, often confirmed by evidence, was that the children had a tendency to steal, and even when they were innocent they often became the target of accusations and allusions. The stigma of theft was one of the recurrent stereotypes associated with Eastern European Roma, or so-called 'gypsies', something Atilio detested more than everything else, and which became his main negative fantasy.

For Atilio the main issue in school life was to be liberated from all association with Romanian 'gypsies'. But Romanian and Roma were of course confused by almost

everybody in Ireland and he seemed to suffer for that. He knew the stigma 'gypsies' endured in his country of origin and wished to be clear from any ambiguity in his present life. Atilio, who was usually the most friendly, helpful and open boy of the class, reacted to another boy's presence, Samuel who was a Roma, unexpectedly. I was asked not to film when moments of racist behaviour emerged, between the two boys and more generally. Once Samio and his brother used their mobile phones during class time in order to call for help from outside the school, and straight away three tall men with ample moustaches, all similar looking, arrived in the yard; they were Samuel's uncles. They argued with the hostile peers, who were also shameless and bold, and finally both sides began to threaten each other. Atilio had been called in order to translate, but he had refused to serve any constructive and purposeful agenda of pacification. On the contrary he had allied himself with the other side, that of the hostile Irish children attacking Samio and his brother and bullying them physically at any opportunity.

At that point, Atilio suffered more than everybody else when it became clear that he did not wish to seek any co-national alliance, or even use the language which could be used to smooth communication because his big desire was to be the most Irish of all his friends. This was also his right because he was in Dublin, in his compound and school since the age of three, and he felt more Irish than Romanian. He struggled to help his mother to speak good English, encouraging her to watch TV all day in order to learn. When I met with her next, she had improved and each time afterwards she spoke more fluently thanks to her son's determination. The boy was very protective of his brother's safety, of his mother's integration with the other mothers he knew in the Flats, and he was struggling for a normative frame in which his family could root itself in Dublin; he consequently had no

nostalgia for his origins. When, inspired by a session with a storyteller, he told some of his own stories to Jason and myself and had no tendency to turn himself toward the past.

DVD 1 ch. 3.2 clip n. 8 (3_2). Atillio tells some Romanian story. 10'07'.

In this sequence Atillio tells stories of the '*Swallowed Snakes*', the '*Doll-witches*', the '*Children in the Fire*' and finally the chronicle of the murder of his girlfriend Maria. When he told the last and most autobiographical one to his peer Jason and myself, I made a miserable gaffe, because I commented that the Romanian language in which he had spoken was gorgeous to listen to! But I spoke in full ignorance of the content of what had been told, and I even influenced Jason in his reaction, by empathy. When he translated what it was all about, the criminal assault and consequent murder of a girl, whom he knew well, we realised that he had found our comments upsetting, although he had not shown it. This strange experience, the first time that Atillio dared to speak Romanian at school, ended up a real disappointment. When we then showed the footage to the class with his full approval and even instigation, he was accused of exaggerating his stories and was so sad afterwards that he gave me back the tape saying that he did not want to show it at home. My methodology had completely failed his desire of being plausible and even of keeping a low profile about his origins. In a way I had boosted that same desire, helping his agency in talking 'aloud' about his past, or sharing the images of a past that he wanted to mediate for his class, to astonish or to convey a sense that Romania wasn't easy and that he had good reasons to want to stay in Ireland. But the result had been that his stories were not plausible, that he couldn't represent himself as clever, having witnessed accidents and even tragedies. The risk of taking over a position of charisma and leadership, because empowered by his past courage, was a threat perhaps for some of his local peers, who wanted to possess the toughest stories, who had witnessed the hardest events, and who wanted to keep a monopoly in telling them back. In this way it seemed as

if stories created a capital for the formation of masculinity within the parameters of an everyday where these tragic events, from criminality to 'witchcraft', were not relegated to the realm of fiction, TV or elsewhere. They were happening around them, more real than other imagined events. The only way to survive was to be able to show that one had witnessed, survived and judged. The stories were proof of this process. They belonged to the teller, who had seen them firsthand and couldn't be re-told unless the testimonial aspect of the enterprise was made clear and the protagonist-viewer was acknowledged as the source. These stories from real life could render everything else, from Harry Potter to Walt Disney, as childish and artificial. These boys had already stepped into the stories of adults, as arenas of 'reality' where they would one day be confronted to survive. To tell stories of uncles in jail, stabbings, guns, theft, rescued men, and jokes against cops was the training ground for real life.

Atilio introduced a dimension which suddenly indicated that he too had come from a tough world, but what's more, a world where stories included women and girls, subjects which were rarely evoked in the stories of local Irish male children. He always felt the burden of being the mediator between his mother, whom he loved immensely and protected against the rest of the community, and the world, also of keeping an eye on his brother, who seemed more nonchalant and distracted than himself. That effort was revealed by a tendency to show hypocritical reactions and never expressing what was in his heart, for fear of being treated like a coward. For Atilio the arena for the construction of his masculinity was the playground, but there his brother followed him like a twin, demanding a lot of support and making trouble more easily than Atilio. School was one of his favourite places, he had so much eagerness for social life. He thus never did any homework nor made any extra effort to learn outside of classes. He did learn many things

in a sort of spontaneous way, with a predisposition for languages, but as quickly as he learned, so he would forget.

Atillio could also realise one of his dreams by enrolling in a pop music show organised by the voluntary association of the St. Vincent and Paul charity. That public show became a sort of climax in his turbulent attempt to be seen and accepted as everybody else around him.



Figure 5.3 Atillio sings during a pop music show at Olympia theatre.

The joy of performing for a huge audience of teens from other disadvantaged areas of Dublin had only been possible through deception. In fact his mother did not approve and hence couldn't accompany him to the show. She had given up that maternal duty, once again, because she disliked the staff of St. Vincent De Paul, who had once criticised her openly in front of the neighbours, parents and carers of other children recruited for the show. Alberto, his brother, and myself were the only onlookers he had managed to bring to the show, and his idea of displaying this to the class made him happy anyway, for his class was the arena where he dreamed of being respected.

DVD 1 ch. 3.2 clip n. 9 (10_3) Atillio as pop star at Theatre Olympiá. 4'58''.

The struggle for survival, since his time in an incubator in Moscow, had probably never left Atillio; his joy, liberty and even temperament were his weapons: never turn back but go forward seemed to be his motto. The entire class was left speechless when the show was screened; by chance, we could not see the whole tape, because something occurred, and in the following days more important events took over from his initial desire; he met with a professional storyteller who came to the school and began to perform new stories with his peers, finally relieved of being unable to detract attention from his true personality and life history. In the following excerpt he shows how important for him the storytelling rites became. Atillio was no longer ashamed to speak Romanian in front of the audience, but had found a playful way of introducing his mother tongue as a 'personal' skill, an extra knowledge, a funny and expressive secret language for the rest of his peers.

DVD1 ch. 3.2 clip n. 10 (6_3). Atillio learns stories, which he likes to perform. 3'17''.

Samio (Samuel)

Samio, full name Samuel, is Atillio's co-national. He spent so short a time in the school that it is almost impossible to draw a portrait. He was however crucial in revealing the patterns of domination and a wider 'conflictual' social life among the pupils of the class. Atillio cannot be understood without Samuel as Samuel, like Atillio, explored and used the school as an accessible space and assessed it for the possibilities of protection.

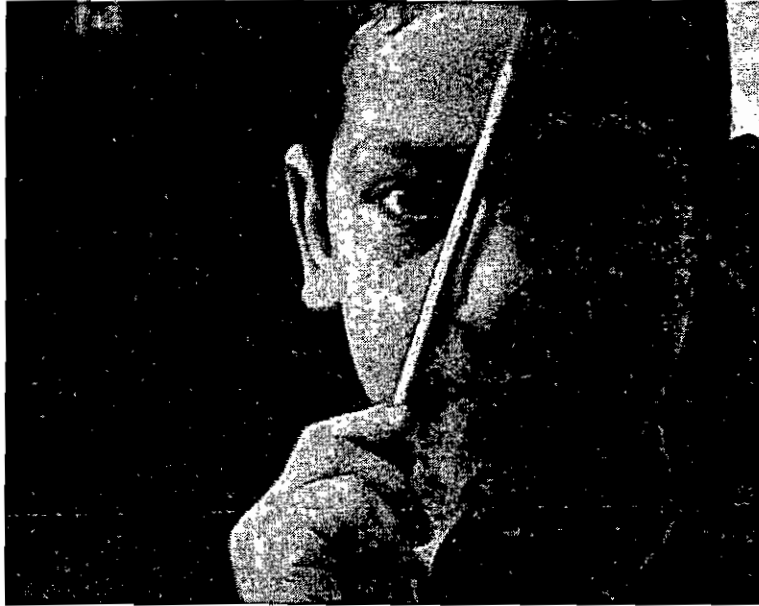


Figure 6.3 Samuel, February 2004

His family comprised mainly of brothers and uncles, yet also mothers and one young sister. The fact that Samio and his brother had relied on their uncles to threaten their peers in the yard, revealed a way in which their parental was expressed and constituted a vital bond protecting each other. Thus their intervention in the school had been perceived as rough and inadequate by children and members of staff together. Samuel himself points out how the affective bonds of his family have always protected him, in every place their nomadic life took them, because the stigma against ‘gypsies’ was not a new phenomenon in his life:

DVD 1 ch. 3.2 clip n. 11 (2_4). Samuel at his first English Support Language Lesson. 7’32’’.

In this conversation one can suddenly see how Samio gleamed with joy when he could speak Spanish and be understood. He insisted many times on the word ‘*pegàr*’ (to punch or bully), describing the recurring method by which his peers approached him in different countries (especially in Romania, where stones were thrown at him, but also Spain). Yet

he also emphasises many times the concept of '*querer*' ('to love', 'to like', in Spanish) and in a way, his use of the word was almost a restorative attempt to show that he is truly happy and loved. He also emphasised something that no child had ever told me before; he speaks openly about the love of his parents toward their own children and the love they felt as a couple ('Mi padre quiere mucho mi madre, muchissimo... y nos quiere mucho a mi y mi hermanos'). He then states he loves Ireland and the school (it is the first time he has enrolled), because bullying seems at least a common and manageable fact here and school is far safer than the street.

Séan

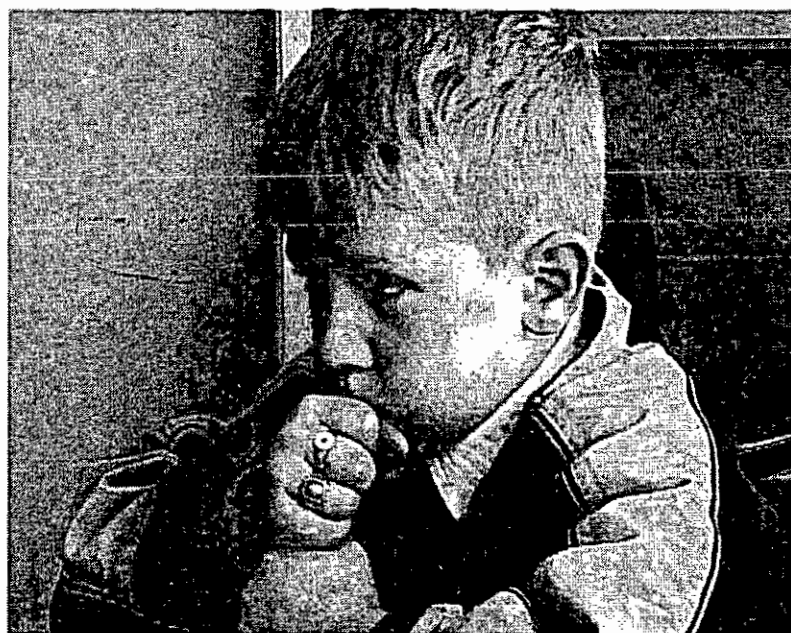


Figure 7.3 Séan, November 2003.

Séan, James, Jordan, Robbie and Gavin are the locals in the class: they have always belonged to the area and in fact very rarely leave it. They have hardly been out of Dublin and in general they remain inside the northern circular ring. In the following excerpt a typical communication situation shows how close and far at the same time the children

can venture with regard to the thematic of migration. They shift the topic themselves with their imagination and talk about catastrophes and floods and also the desire to live in and inhabit the places where they were born. If Séan can eventually think about ‘travelling away from Ireland one year and then come back’, James, his peer, states that the place he wants to live is ‘right here’ and he also adds that ‘people from outside try to get in, this means that it is a place to be’.

DVD ch. 3.2 clip n. 12 (3_6) Séan and James talk about migration and catastrophes. 6’55’’.

Séan and James are physically rooted in the inner city, in their community, yet at the same time they can use their imagination more easily to conjure up other geographical and geological dimensions and the world map is the platform for getting the whole conversation started. These children are loved and feared at the same time by everybody (including adults), since they speak out directly; they cannot be ‘domesticated’ and seem to give to school only a relative importance as one of the many arenas of their full life. Each of them is different, although many are cousins or relatives and share lifestyles as well as jargon. Their intelligence means they are already making personal choices, articulating desires and demonstrating autonomy. The stories they tell sometimes during lunchtime or to the teacher are realistic and dense: everyday something new happens and boredom does not seem a problem in their imaginary.

DVD 1 ch. 3.3 clip n. 13 (4_2). Séan and Robby try to claim their date of birth. 4’04’’.

To be ‘born two stones’ is definitely a sign of authority, as is being older than the others. Séan wishes to be considered a veteran and wants to be influential and charismatic. He is also appreciated by his teachers because he is able to tell plenty of stories which show his sensitivity, humour and intelligence. Séan is undoubtedly one of the most intelligent of his

peers and when motivated by personal interest confirms an incredible ability in learning and retaining data, plots and details, as well as history, literature and English. When he visited the famous high school where James Joyce was educated, Belvedere College, which is paradoxically situated ten meters from his flat, but could never be accessed by any of his family members, because of its high status as a second level education site, Séan seems to get glimpses of the possibility of continuing into higher education. He already knows he is very intelligent and able to learn various methodologies. Obviously his open mind and stubbornness could drive him to succeed. However, the material reality (from the economic to the psychological, to the threat of being rejected from his entire community of peers because 'he managed to step out') and the resultant lack of a social network and the social capital required to access a good job once graduated, make this only a daydream.

Séan and his friends, most of them his cousins, will always live in the hardest conditions. The majority of his teachers think this, referring to records of the inner city, for the figures and some teachers' personal experience tell them that these children will fatalistically follow the footsteps of their forefathers. Even if non-nationals access third level education one day, Robbie and Gavin will have a hard time in order to get there or even to complete second level. Gavin and Robby have the right, according to official records, to have 30 minutes of resource teaching every day. They like the personal tutor, a young, engaged teacher (Miss Audrey) who worked in a school for Travellers before coming to the inner city, and herself is so struck by their proficiency and ability to focus, that she wishes that they could take responsibility for their actions toward others and themselves. She lets them express their values in an open way, but at the same time she is strict and alert and does not allow anybody to fool around. In this way she earns a lot of respect.¹⁸ Séan and

James are also in need of learning resources, although not eligible for purely bureaucratic reasons. Hence, thanks to the goodwill of some committed teachers, they were squeezed into a single slot and are taught by Miss Audrey once a day. The school is aware that the hours of resource teaching are the most fruitful of the day for their self-esteem and objective methodological acquisition. Even thirty minutes spent with an individual tutoring in reading or writing a text counts enormously towards their ability to focus and acquire information. When non-nationals go to English Support Language, the locals in general move too and meet their resource teachers wherever is convenient, for there is no given classroom in the building. Séan, moreover, benefited immensely from time spent with the artist-in-residence Oisín McGann, with whom he created a funny-tragic comic.

DVD 1 ch. 3.3 clip n. 14 (7_5) Séan puts colours on Joyce's glasses. 1'38''.

James enjoyed Joyce's Celebrations and Nicola Sedwizch's workshops to such an extent that he commented afterwards that his future profession could be inspired by his newly acquired skills.

DVD 1 ch. 3.3 clip n. 15 (7_4). Interview with James about what he is learning. 2'26''.

Mubarak



Figure 8.3 Mubarak, June 2004

Mubarak is a junior infant pupil from Nigeria and he does not belong to Miss Morris' class. I cannot provide a properly articulated ethnographic portrait of him because our encounters were very limited and I did not have additional permission to observe and film with him regularly due to his social behaviour at school. The usual data necessary to contextualise his current and past life should be kept confidential and I always respected this pact. Nevertheless, Mubarak was very important for the thematic of the research and I wanted to include him anyway, even under strict conditions. The use of film as the core instrument of my fieldwork means my social actors are recognisable and their identities cannot be completely transformed and invented. This is one of the most challenging aspects of this kind of methodology, but also a constitutive one, because the choices to be made are essentially linked to the impossibility to render anonymous the social actors. I thus prefer to include Mubarak as I could come to relate some of his accounts, even though the portrait is not completely 'rounded'.

Everything I learned of him was through interviews chaired by members of staff such as the one presented at the beginning of this chapter (DVD 1_1). We were never actually left alone and I never found the obligation of meeting him in this way counterproductive for my research, although it was challenging. This was the way I related to Mubarak and the form of these encounters became the form in which I rendered his body language and speech as a pupil in a postcolonial school system. Moreover, I could complement some of the points we had discussed by talking with his mother, but only in-between other events, for she never had the time to meet me otherwise. I could only discover a little factual information about his journeys, family network, ethnic kin and linguistic skills, the family social networks in the hosting country, which I usually do through long term involvement and observation. The school and his mother wanted this data about him, which does not appear here, to remain confidential.

Mubarak's mother is a clerk in a small African clothes shop in the neighbourhood. His kin, who have also immigrated to Ireland, is sizeable and spread across the inner city, county Dublin and the U.K. His father and older sister live outside Nigeria but not with the family, and his mother, grandmother from his mother's side and his younger brother live in Dublin.

DVD 1 ch. 3.3 clip n. 16 (1_2). Mubarak following up with ESL. 6'45''.

With him I gathered improbable but generous recollections, invented stories, brief intersections of unforeseen images in the literary sense, a quality of synthetic thought which conveys metonymical figures and metaphorical representations condensing long digressions in a 'flash of meaning' (Calvino 1988: 31-34). In terms of cinema I was also discovering that the filming process with Mubarak was often characterised by 'going to

the quick', as MacDougall (1998: 50-54)¹⁹ puts it. Here he describes how this perceptive instance is tactile, optical, metaphorical, experiential and cognitive in a phenomenological sense, incorporating Merleau-Ponty's radical assertion that human perception is not provided by separable senses but from consciousness (Merleau-Ponty (1992: 217) as quoted by MacDougall (1998: 58 n.30).

With Mubarak, given the compelling conditions which characterised our interviews, there were few moments of contact at the beginning, but we grew into our own form of communication which was less preoccupied with gathering data, and more with 'stealing moments' of serenity, communication and well-being.

DVD1 ch. 3.3 clip n. 17 (1_3). Mubarak's improvises a song 'I want to go to school'. 8'10''.

Furthermore I could also identify from his singing, long stares and smiles as a quintessential outreach of our long sessions, the 'anti-quick' too, for the energy required to film and watch it, is proportionally less with each new vision of it. I thus consider these moments not only worthwhile enough to shape a portrait, but also important and irreplaceable for my purposes in research through filmmaking, because Mubarak expressed for the world important aspects of the migratory experience as it is rendered by consciousness, through glimpses of recollections, which I strive to describe in texts, not because I lack words, but because the 'gestalt' appearance of somatic traits is perceived specifically by the sensorial apparatus, in its pre-verbalised stage and can be better captured by film as a distinctive medium conveying aspects of the 'quick'. Much of what I seek through filming with children on 'uneven paths' can only appear as such, with unpredictable and constitutive somatic traits appearing while filming. If with Mubarak the struggle was also to be able to communicate with him out of the frame of 'attention

disorder syndrome' which labelled his behaviour in school, I realised that filming provided such a platform for both of us, and not with a therapeutic aim. For me it was never a case of considering the act of filming as a substitute for a therapeutic session. We were both left with our own contradictions and the usual problematic after filming, never with the sense of recovery which healing provides.

With Mubarak the purpose was not the analysis of an exemplar case, for he is the youngest of all the children in migration who met me on those paths. I cannot conceal the fact he reminded me of Azaro, the main character in *The Famished Road*, living in the pages of the entire saga of the Nigerian writer Ben Okri (2003). Creatures like these Children-Spirit did explicitly ask to come to earth, and hence belonged to opposite worlds, the 'born' and the 'unborn', inhabiting in the bends of the visible, beyond the concrete and tactile. Multitudes of 'twins', multiple worlds, the never ending journey and attraction to the deep forests surrounding the villages, and more celestial and dream-like spheres. These children can describe oblivious adults better than anybody else, whether strong or damned or simply unaware, for whom even figures such as Azaro can become rescuers, creatures who can empathise with them, show them another path. Okri's Azaro is the Child-Spirit who links inconceivable worlds. The very human and what lives, but it is non-human.²⁰ These were the resonances I retained from Okri when listening to later recollections told by Mubarak. There was a dimension, in his storytelling, which echoed the archetypal profiles I was seeking to find after I read Pasolini, Okri and Morrison. Nevertheless, I never thought that Mubarak was a book character. I tried to be honest in the face of that temptation to see real people as inventions. Actually, the act of grounding my encounters in ethnographic investigation was also an antidote against the risk of 'romanticising' beyond individuation.

Mubarak had a scholastic profile loaded with superlative labels. *Too* young: first year junior infants. *Too* problematic: hyperactive and deficient focus syndrome. *Too* isolated in his incandescent and overwhelming need for sociality to become a ‘representative’ subject; *Too* protected: his mother did not want anybody to get involved with him, out of shame or pride. Nobody could break the pattern apart from his teachers, who were both very occupied with him. *Too* unique, for the other numerous Nigerians inhabiting the inner city earlier had mostly moved away from that area and in the school only two of them were left, one Ibo and one Yoruba. The last Nigerian Muslim had left right after the beginning of the school’s term. The two remaining were both Christians, but of different congregations, and in any case Mubarak was still too young to enrol in the catechism which prepared children for First Communion.

As I interpret it, obliged by confidentiality to avoid providing the context, Mubarak’s accounts told about the interdependence between migration and childhood, about an imagined idea of ‘Paradise’ which one cannot lose, because it is not seen as such and because the idea of heaven is a remote cultural construction. Mubarak articulates the meaning of an ‘utterance’; he discards the dynamics between ‘silencing oneself’ and ‘voicing multiple selves’; he speaks extensively and in his telling places are conflated, archaic and future tongues are evoked, he plays the renegade and the veteran, the half-brother and the baby, he plays with his fantasy, before landing once again in the concrete world of duties, tasks, learning and productive schooling. There are no better paraphrases for what he, himself, can say and tell. One has to listen carefully and supply the absence of context. One has even to supply the whole body, because I could only meet with Mubarak beyond the desk, like in prison meeting rooms.²¹ The spectator of these shots can never

see his shoes, his legs, Mubarak walking, his daily travel to school and back, eating and playing, his spontaneous behaviour. The school, in accordance with carers, thought that, because the child suffered from a behavioural form of 'exhibitionism' that the camera would instigate his ego, it was therefore better to restrict my meetings with him from the very first day. I completely agreed with them and never forced the relationship. I was thus convinced that creating a space for words to emerge in dialogue, would enhance the possibility for memories to be generated. The problem was that, in a different way from his peers, we could never have these words shared in the class. Mubarak and myself thus had more similar modalities of encounter to the Parisian ones, as indicated in chapter five, rather than in collective and public spaces, the form I had chosen in Dublin.

Mubarak often changed shelter, in the extended family of friends and kin and I never tried to visit his homes, but spoke with his mother in a friendly way every time I met her. She did not have any idea about what to do with the tapes I wished to hand her. She never claimed them, nor did Mubarak. This sign was clear to me, and I never forced my relationship with him; on the contrary, I limited my encounters to a few, very strong conversations covering his first year at school. His uniform is always perfectly clean, his tie tucked into the pocket or perfectly hanging like that of a gentleman. Once the tie disappeared for good, but he said that his mother had broken it and now he was to wait to get a new one. He seems to care very much for his tie. He likes that piece of uniform because it is possible to touch, to manipulate when one is shy, to therefore keep in contact with one's look and extended, public and rehearsed body. Moreover, it provides a masculine effect to his young body. He said once that, although he liked it, he was not sad anymore about losing it. But as said earlier, I do not have the right to tell more - one can only listen to him and imagine the rest.

The following dialogue is one of our last conversations which took place at the end of the school year. I could meet with him only sporadically in order not to boost his 'ego' and carefully allocated my filming to very salient occasions. I started filming when we were already communicating, sparse chatting only. He had just said he felt sick. This recurrent sign, each time the camera was around, made me think that sickness was also a metaphor he threw, a mimetic way of showing he was in touch with the material, the bodily, the here and now. In some ways he referred to illness as a temporary lack of desire to communicate (as he did from the first meeting when he stated: 'I do not speak any language. I never speak at home'). This time the opposite was true as soon as the conversation took off. He enjoyed talking to such an extent that it was then hard to stop him.

DVD 1 ch. 3.3 clip n. 18 (1_4). Mubarak: end of school. 7'10''.

This boost in the tempo of our exchange provoked by the teacher provides a different type of information, maybe more inquisitive, because it appears as if Mubarak's carers were on the edge of being irresponsible, if true that they had left him alone when he was so small. However, as we know, children's recollections (and in general any recollection at all, especially if de-contextualised) are not trustworthy in terms of 'reconstructing' the truth. They render a more psychological perception of the present-past, the past that makes sense for the present, especially some of the dimensions of the affective present. Reconstructing the past is not my objective; instead, to create a space of 'performance' in front of the camera, so to facilitate the expression of some remembrances and fantasy through images of the past, it helps a child to situate his present and to ask for a sensible listener, where the level of communication is equal, because it allows two intelligences to meet and to know each other, to be invited into the stories and to pass them on. The learning process is

finally that of restoring the combination of the existential and the scholarly, the intergenerational (in ethnicity, age, gender) and personal forms of imagination.

IV

Pedagogy

The third grade class where I filmed mostly was that of Miss Morris with whom I always had a very pleasant relationship, characterised by mutual understanding, curiosity, complicity and finally collaboration. Together with her were Miss Audrey, the resource teacher, Miss Linda, the English Support teacher and Mr Kerr, Acting Principal at the beginning of my research, and a series of resident artists. These educators made each day of school a different opportunity for development with the focus on learning but also enjoyment and varying the curriculum. No repetitions ever took place in that third class: the year was very rich and routines did not really recur. The combination of such a pedagogy (open door, so to speak), the interesting and unique social actors, the support of the teacher and her network of colleagues, made the choice successful because I was able to follow up at the micro level what was potentially occurring throughout the school.

Miss Morris has in the location of the classroom an invisible ritual that I was almost the only one to discover.²² She arrives thirty minutes before the gates open, quickly passes by the teachers' room (unless she has breakfast duties, as she does once a week) and spends at least thirty minutes decorating, tidying, watering plants and arranging books in her classroom. The thirty minutes are spent in absolute silence, focusing on implementing projects, which vary every day according to what she wishes to do with the children and mostly through acting within the very space where she wishes to imprint her action before the frenzy of the children dissolve it. One of the basic acts consists of restructuring the

shape of an 'archipelago' of desks. They all appear equally large and are spread out in such a way to enable children to work in small groups of three or four. The teacher allows for complete mobility and agency in choosing peers. The most recurrent teams are: Renz, Patrick and Samio near the door; Jetro, Mark and Jordàn in the second rank beside the door; Atilio, Jason, Jordan on the first rank before the teacher's table; Séan and Gavin, Daniel and James on the two smaller desks beside the two windows and Kris and Jonathan nearby the computer stationary. As we see in many sequences, these teams or casual peer alliances may change, in modular average, according to specific tasks, moods or desires. Desires obviously include a large palette of feelings, from curiosity to provocation, from obligation to weariness. These alliances made over the round desks primarily served the purpose of multitasking assignments, where Miss Morris promotes scholastic duties for pairs, groups or individuals, and hence she is in need of extra desks for episodic activities.

The core method utilised by Miss Morris is called 'multitasking'. In an upcoming sequence we see how such a session is organised and steered. Its duration cannot be predicted, but usually lasts the maximum of 20 minutes. My purpose of keeping a simultaneous focus on several actors makes it hard to follow any task, although achievement is never reached in a single session. It also renders, at the same time, the spirit circulating during the 'multitasking', which appears chaotic, under-organised, even sporadic and inconsistent, when in fact, aware of its rules and aims, one can argue that it is an effective teaching strategy, a productive method of putting children actively to work in the given environment of this particular school whilst managing the multicultural dimension of the group. One should also remember that such sessions happen almost every day. Multitasking in a class where there is a deficit of focus and attention results in relatively good proficiency achieved over the year. I do not wish to 'paraphrase' what is in

the footage; consequently my description adds additional details to what is shown in the sequence below, by connecting the movements that are (inevitably) off-frame. In this way I foreground the 'backstage' of each action, as reconstructed by both the film sequence and the text.

Sequence Analysis

Miss Audrey Devereaux and Miss Liz Morris have already started to frame different activities; two experienced teachers and about twelve children. One of the tasks is to decorate masks from James Joyce's *Ulysses*, which the children have been preparing in various subjects, from English to Art, Drama and Handcraft. Miss Devereaux is allocating roles and names at the blackboard. Séan is investigating what activity could be of interest today; he freely puts colours into cups while Miss Morris is already framing a couple of children in arithmetic. Atilio is preparing another mathematical task at the small blackboard; he calls 'Miss!' without getting any answer, but actually we 'feel' he really does not need help. It is more a habit of his to be reassured by having his teacher assess each step of his work. The way none of the teachers come to check his task shows that his habit is known, he simply needs to ring the bell; it is mainly something he does for himself.

In the meantime Miss Morris is checking what colours Séan chose, just in passing, because she is heading toward the computer corner, where Patrick and Samio are trying to copy a very simple text. Marc and Renz are occupied with grammar exercises and Marc asks Miss Morris to clarify something when she comes back from the computer. Miss Devereaux is calling for the attention of the children currently without a task: Jason, James and Jonathan. Parallel to this she attends to Séan to check if colours are well poured, while

Miss Morris must physically take Jordan elsewhere in order to push him into a new task, because he is lazy. In the meantime Gavin has joined Séan and both are pouring colours. At this time a special needs teacher comes into the classroom with an infant child she is responsible for, asking Miss Devereaux for some information, to which the latter replies, 'no'. She goes away, and turning the camera to follow Miss Morris who must attend some other children, I intercept James' gesture of greeting, willing some attention his way or maybe just pointing out that he thinks I look quite lost myself by wandering everywhere. What am I following by the way? If James was watching the camerawork in order to escape boredom, he must be puzzled that I do not follow anything fully and feels authorised in calling for my attention for a conversation mediated by the camera. The following pan shows that in the meantime Patrick and Samio, having no common language, since they just arrived respectively from Poland and from Romania, have found interest in an educational computer game, demonstrating that this is their common language now and that Miss Morris does not need to guide them further. She turns to see who may be in need next.

After a while many more children have finished their tasks and are gathered together to listen to an explanation of a larger activity centred on Joyce's masks. Everybody in the classroom is invited to listen. Miss Devereaux explains the use of skin colour. To gather the children who had already embarked for painting is not easy, for they seem to be in the bath already. Gavin is finally hooked and has started to colour already. Explanations are crucial because the masks were moulded in the Joyce Museum on their very faces and there are no copies of each mask. Audrey explains, while Miss Morris keeps the children's attention by giving an example of being silent and awake; thus, simultaneously, she still steers Gavin who is very keen on transporting colours to the sink. Her mobile phone rings

while she is on duty and she only answers it when the call is considered of relevance to the classroom activities, as it is the case. Miss Devereaux needs Miss Morris' advice to continue, but she perfectly understands her colleague's need without explanation and becomes preoccupied with Séan's request. James also accepts it and Miss Devereaux can continue with a further explanation about the names of Joyce's characters and the colours to be put on them.

Simultaneously Marc and Renz start a new task, a mathematical exercise that they peacefully share. Jonathan and Kris still wait politely for their tasks. The mobile rings again. James prepares himself to put colours on the mask. He is in the mood to provoke the camera, and he wears a mask bearing his resemblance. I start interacting although I had planned merely an observational shot. James shall play Joyce himself. He jokes about the fact that his and Joyce's are the same first names. He hooks Atillio with his joke and the latter admits he couldn't find his mask. He is looking for a mask which could fit his face.²³ Miss Morris sorts out the other moulds and places Kris's mask at Atillio's desk. Miss Devereaux must leave for her next class. She does so silently. The activities continue. Now Miss Morris must find each mask to be painted. James tries his on again.



Figure 9.3 James wears Joyce's Mask.

Atillio wants to read his teacher's T-shirt, which reveals a very well known character from a children's book. She takes a second to turn her back to allow him to look at the figure and to spell out the text. Kris wants some help too and she checks his exercise while still posing for Atillio. She explains the play with words contained in the T-shirt and simultaneously reads Kris's question. She answers Kris, then Séan arrives with more masks to be painted. He asks for colours and tells him where they are. Jason has found his, returning from a short session with the resource teacher. Samio and Patrick are still quietly intrigued at the computer game-exercise. Patrick seems keen on steering and Samio does not appear impatient to drive himself, so in fact, the collaboration can continue. They also manage to comment on images just by 'showing' and pointing out. Samio makes a tender gesture toward Patrick; he quickly caresses his head. He begins timidly to touch the keyboard. Patrick invites him patiently to involve himself in the driving. Miss Morris is now showing Séan how to create skin colour and in the corner Atillio and James are onlookers. She invites him to try on her own skin with brush and tempera. Séan discovers that skin-colour is made with okra and not with pink by comparing actual skin and the

mixed colours. Liz prepares other colours for Atilio who then asks for my help. I stop the camera involuntarily in order to help him. I have almost forgotten the aim of my shooting, because the multitasking often involves me as an assistant too. Séan is screaming ‘Miss look! It looks like skin!’ I must suddenly change my camera batteries and then Linda comes to fetch Samio for his first session in ESL, which I must follow up. The session continues in real time, but I must film in another room where an important ESL course is taking place.

DVD 1 ch. 3.4 clip n. 19 (2_5). ‘Multitasking’ session in Miss Morris’ class. 8’32’’.

I had tried to film a multitasking session many times. The camera followed up the simultaneous and meanderings activities for several minutes often without being able to ‘be’ with any of the characters. The desire to render the simultaneity (not through two or three cameras, as when shooting sport or theatre) exclusively through my posture was an interesting exercise for me as well, miming multitasking as a challenge for the act of filming. In this particular sequence ‘nothing’ really happens in terms of learning and exchanging. Gradually, the multiple tasks shall be achieved, but the children do not realise this all at once. It is an inexorable project, which escapes the comprehension of all the actors at any one moment. It is more a phenomenological frame allowing others to become ‘immersed’ in the learning atmosphere, a laboratory where the children are awakened. Séan realised many things that morning simply by attempting new actions within the given framework imposed by the teachers, as when he painted Joyce’s glasses in a sequence previously presented in this chapter (DVD clip DV 7_5.) Alliances developed according to individual mood (James and Gavin), usual peer attraction (Atilio and Séan, Jason and Jordan), new interests (Patrick and Samio), established teaming (Renz, Marc, Kris and Jonathan), but also new combination, as in the case of Jonathan, Jordan and James, who usually never teamed together.

The film captures aspects of how multitasking is organised invisibly, put in place and dealt with. What the camera renders is the simultaneous happenings off frame, and the possibility of reconstructing these afterwards, according to memory, sensorial data, notes and footage. Thus film captures the intrusions, breaks and motions that the framing obliges me to follow up or to leave at any moment. I had to become skilled in learning how to film such moments in order to render that constant choice as a meta-level of what teachers and pupils do by ‘editing’ their tasks, composing and recomposing spaces, relationships and brief attempts to learn, to find a position in the collective which is the classroom. At the same time the multitasking shows how the process and not the aim is important; understanding how to learn through the use of the body-mind, and by mimesis with one’s partner, who is further engaged within the short space of a minute by the same task. The teacher appears metaphorically as a facilitator of an improvised musical session in which tunes and canons have been carefully orchestrated, and once begun, must be played out hazardously. All these brief but frequent sessions build up over the year – constituting an integrated and embodied ‘attitude’ to learning, which can shape the desire, intelligence and ability of children to transpose this skill onto different domains, as a method. In this way all children present in the class seem to have the same possibilities and can share their attitudes with their partners, in a playful and peer-reactive way.

DVD 1 ch. 3.4 clip n. 20 (7_2). Spelling. 5’56”.

Here the multitasking functions with the same spelling exercise for all, but dealt with in smaller groups. Two Irish peers, James and Matthew, try to sort out the rules for spelling together, with the help of a phonetic approach in the context of given sentences. The Filipino classmates sitting beside them use the visualisation technique connected to literacy, of seeing the word already written in their mind and then spelling the letters

composing it. The Irish boys start to rely on Renz's, Jonathan's and Marc's knowledge in a vivid moment enacting complementary approaches to a common exercise in which those who are best in spelling at that stage of their education are foreign children, who have learned classic English through literacy training.

Religion Classes

Religion, as is known, is a pivotal aspect of Irish education. In relation to the non-national children present in the school, there are obviously new and diverse affiliations, types of ethos and customary religious practices to be taken into account and this is a matter of fact connected with the population changes occurring in the area.

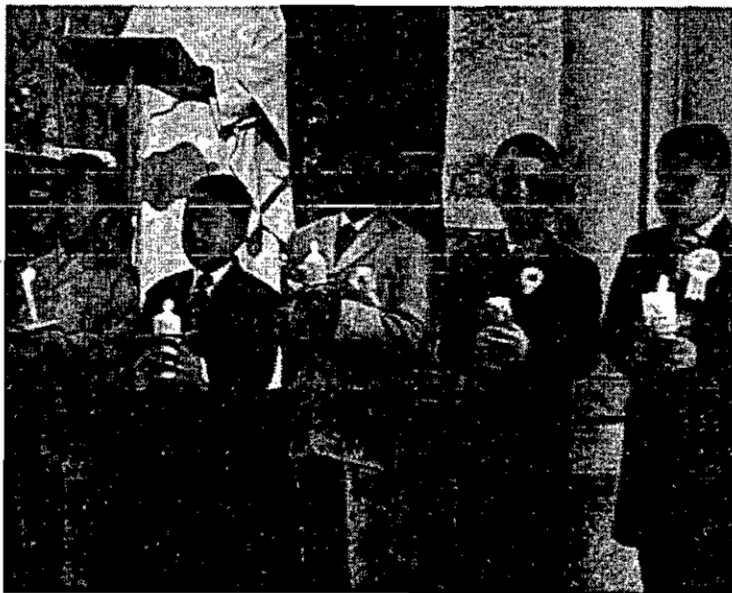


Figure 10.3 Pupils from Philippines, Equador, Italy and Ireland receiving First Communion.

The newly arrived non-nationals, especially from West Africa, the Philippines, the former Yugoslavia and Russia, can also be distinguished from the standing point of the majority ethos: those with a Christian ethos and those with a different ethos or belief system (Muslims, Agnostic, Confucians or Atheists, for instance). All categories of children, including non-Catholics, those with no religious affiliation and the local children, brought

up in the Irish Catholic tradition, only rarely expressed their agency and perspectives about their sense of belonging to a given faith: they mostly indicated that they had internalised and acted freely upon certain religious practices, but felt uncomfortable when their knowledge was examined, albeit at times in a dogmatic way. In the following sequence the example of 'guessing' is clearly performed in the presence of a male tutor.

DVD ch. 3.4 clip n. 21 (3_1). Atillio and Gavin attempt to define the Trinity. 7'15'.

As this sequence shows, even with the addition of irony from both the children and their tutor, pupils seemed to point out the need for forms of storytelling or to address their personal experiences to help them to grow into their involvement in religiosity.²⁴ To be able to define the Trinity is not enough: both Atillio (because a non-Catholic) and Gavin (in rebellion against the authority of the priests) cannot learn more than what is asked of them. In general the request to articulate one's religion seemed primarily to be the preoccupation of adults (teachers, caregivers and most of the parents) and religious questioning emerged more during the visits of the priests, the catechism courses and some related religious subjects taught, rather than after school. This can probably be attributed to the mono-denominational status of the institution and partly due to the fact that Miss Morris was a non-Catholic. In fact she brought to the class a different way of introducing religious topics:²⁵ these were integrated into the rest of the curriculum, raised as part of larger questions of morality and ethics and not extracted and learned through 'dogma', or simply by memorisation. This proved to be a better way of enhancing children's interest, encouraging them to express their viewpoints more acutely.

On the subject of religion, children seemed to reflect some of their parents' conceptions and misconceptions, but they always rebelled or became sceptically resistant to religion

when it was deliberately introduced, when lessons were administered uncritically in a 'dogmatic' form; significantly, they never resisted when personal matters of understanding and comparison, compassion and spiritual need for communion in their own life situation, were in play.

DVD 1 ch.3.4 clip n. 22 (4_1). Father Peter shows how to receive the Communion. 8'08''.

DVD 1 ch.3.4 clip n. 23 (7_1). Father Peter interrupts a lesson to recruit pupils to Catechism. 9'27''.

As evidenced in the two sequences above, the school and church re-constitute their bond through new migrant constituencies and both become key locations for the sociability of foreign Christian families and co-national friends. Solidarity, childcare after school and various other resources are negotiated and exchanged after Sunday mass. Interestingly, non-national Catholics, as in the case of the Filipino constituency who have developed a strong and vibrant church-based social network in Ireland, encourage their children to embrace the religious doctrine of the school, and in so doing, overtly demonstrate exemplary behaviour. The proficiency of Filipino children in the school is arguably a direct result of such parental attitudes. It should also be said that the local Irish children show their own peculiar need for a daily spiritual dimension in a religious sphere, which the more indoctrinated children, those attending catechism, never express. The most difficult children in terms of behaviour, background, family life and educational proficiency seemed to have thoroughly incorporated some of their parents' and grandparents' most deeply rooted religious habits, especially when it comes to aspects related to health, crime and death, which were the central themes of sociopolitical life in

the inner city. Devotion was expressed through a personal sense of faith and customary Catholic practices (which others saw as mere superstitions, but which were realised by being taken seriously, in a performative and liminal dimension, and in each sphere of spiritual hygiene). It was clear that children not attending the parish (inner city local 'deviants', Roma 'gypsies', Irish and Polish Travellers) could more freely articulate questions and find out specific answers and responsive actions connected to themes like transcendence, mysticism, redemption, sinfulness and punishment, devotion and sacrifice, and the sacramental, to note several examples.

The lack of scholarly emphasis on such questions left the pupils more free to be inspired mimetically by their grandparents' speeches, stories and practices of spiritual communion with icons, especially in the domain of manifestation of devotion. Items like images of saints, patrons, angels, shrines, chapels, jewels and holy icons still have a powerful hold on a child's mind. From my standpoint, I was capturing glimpses of how Catholicism was still taught in a somewhat 'old fashioned' manner, albeit within the changing human landscape of its users; how children had a strong need to express forms of spirituality, have practices of hygiene connecting themselves to rituals, how they were able to put words to mystical experiences, just a few examples within a larger need to communicate and understand transcendence, and how the school only partially allowed for an ecumenical pedagogy, for fear of discarding the more traditional and unquestioned content and modalities of Catholic catechism.

DVD 1 ch. 3.4 clip n. 24 (11_2; 5_1; 1_5). 'I want to see Heaven' 3'26''. 'Climbing in a former graveyard' 2'30''. 'Visit to St. Anthony shrine' 5'28''.

Following these sequences Jordan, Gavin, Séan, and Troy are shown to want to give part of their bodies as a pious act, or be devoted to a local shrine, to light candles and pray for those close to them and to articulate some of their own perspectives about belief on an ethical as much as on an imaginary level. Within the classroom, most of the Filipinos (i.e. Renz, Kris, Jetro, Jonathan) don't dare to express any of their own concerns aloud. They speak within the domestic sphere, with their parents, not in the publicity of school and church, when they attend catechism. When the answer is 'open' children at catechism are afraid of being wrong, perhaps because such taught matters are not simply logically exposable, but are usually learned through the priest's words. Conversely, in a hermeneutic discussion, each child can expose questions and deconstruct assumptions, and this requires to have an ability to critique and to articulate one's own experiential awareness.

As seen in chapter one, in the lesson on Ramadan supported by a BBC programme, when the theme shifted progressively toward immortality, suicide, eternal life and redemption, the only child attending catechism who also dared to express his worries about an unknown answer, was Marc, who stated: 'I am afraid to die'. The shyness of his co-national peers can be attributed to their regular behaviour (responding only when directly questioned, and only reproducing the information provided by their teachers); nevertheless in similar situations (as in learning sessions with Miss Morris, who randomly asks questions) they participated enthusiastically in the collective conversation. The subjects of death, redemption and transcendence, in this particular session about Islam, were issues to be learned through catechism rather than spontaneously, when everybody is encouraged to bring questions into a collective discussion, one without answers provided.

The Main Teacher: Liz Morris

‘Never help a child with a task at which she feels she can succeed’
Motto by Maria Montessori (Italy, 1920s).



Figure 11.3 Miss Morris and Atillio discussing the plot of a story.

I came in contact with Liz Morris in the most rapid and effective way. She seemed to realise at once what I was interested in, and she seemed, somehow, to be in need of a period of reflection regarding her professional knowledge. That predisposition to articulate her implicit knowledge and perspectives made her already a very good ‘informant’ or guide according to situational analysis (Spradley and McCurdy 1988; Spradley, McCurdy and Shandy 2004). I found her momentum somehow too immediate, but I simply considered myself lucky. Afterwards I realised that she had imagined that my fieldwork would be shorter and less complex. It could be said that a certain haze surrounding our respective aims characterised our relationship until the last period of fieldwork; but until

then it flourished, albeit through misunderstandings, *quid pro quos* and trials, all the way along.

Liz was one of the few senior teachers in the school; she had devoted more than 20 years to teaching and she was particularly alert to the social changes occurring in Irish society. She looked younger than her age, especially given her dressing style and frank tone with colleagues and pupils. Furthermore she was not afraid of experimenting and implementing the 'intercultural' dimension of emerging pedagogical issues in progress, because she wished to follow the cultural changes of Irish society. She was active in the teachers' union without being too ideologically dependent on political affiliations, but it's likely she voted for the Labour Party. She was active in election campaigns, especially if candidates were women. She defined herself more as a member of civil society, actively responding to the collective struggle than most of her teaching colleagues. At that time her union was ambiguous about sustaining the reform of Irish national schools, particularly in terms of religious denomination. Some of its members were affected by a lack of courage and it is likely she felt the same.

In order to understand this side of Liz more a digression is required here. She always encourages external visitors to engage with the daily activities of the school and to contribute as much as they can. In this respect, she has considerable social and cultural capital, which she puts at the disposal of the school, who benefits enormously. Along with several resident artists who came voluntarily to hold workshops and other initiatives in her class, she agreed to be interviewed for questionnaires and social scientific investigations: the example below concerns one of these visits.

When Dave, a mature postgraduate student in social sciences, originally from the inner city himself, a former postman clearly aware of the cultural context he moves within, came to visit the class with a questionnaire for Liz to fill out, his presence suddenly revealed patterns of sociality which had never emerged so quickly before. His body language, warm deep voice and his jargon, so similar to that of the local children, as well as his provocative grip of questions of diversity and inclusion, made his giant-like figure connect immediately with the children. In the filmed sequence (see below) this sudden shift, where patterns of sociability are played out through direct questions about what the local children know about Atilio's cultural background, Dave's empathy and awareness of cultural codes of masculinity and class manage to attract eagerness, eliciting diverse perspectives and a certain honesty to his questions (Jordan, for example, described his scorn for people living in caravans, which is probably what he has heard about Travellers and 'gypsies'), without being afraid to be judged as racist; Séan admits he has gotten several yellow cards, without showing pride and arrogance as he would usually, but rather modestly. Dave seems to have a deep practice of masculine communication codes and he quickly obtains expressions of affectivity from the children's side. Atilio seems to experience a moment of glory, because he speaks first and shows Dave his own networks and abilities (he is asked to translate some sentences in Romanian) and visibly glows at the end of the meeting.

DVD 2 ch. 3.5 clip n. 27 (5_4). Dave engages with Atilio. 7'58'.

I learned more about Liz when Dave asked for an interview with her.²⁶ He was developing a series of questionnaires to a dozen teachers he had carefully chosen, and interestingly, wanted to show that biographical 'critical events' (Woods 1996: 76) in a teacher's childhood and adolescence could have a great influence on her or his ability to empathise, understand and generally support pupils' otherness and alterity. In so doing, teachers who

had reflected and eventually developed research around their own childhood (Woods and Jeffrey 2002) and discovered some of their experienced critical events, had clarified what had given them the desire to become teachers and were more aware of their existential trajectory informing their professional skills and abilities. Moreover, in so doing, they could more easily initiate transformative pedagogical practices, changes in canonical ways of transmission of knowledge, sensitivity to inequality and injustice toward children, and strength to undergo struggles within the institutional frame. They were increasingly awake to changes, more flexible and open to shaping occasions for alternative sources of knowledge (Steedman 1992: 103-108). In discussion with Dave, we found out that he was born in the inner city, had experienced a similar childhood to that of many current pupils in Liz's class; he could speak their jargon and understand their life and had a strong sense of empathy and political concerns. He suddenly revitalised my relation with Liz as well as between the children and myself. In the hours he spent in the classroom we reached a turning point, where we could finally relate to our respective biographical trajectories and create new patterns for questioning and understanding modes of formations of transculturality. His genuine attention, sensitivity and good temper brought us closer and put words to tensions which were otherwise emerging between Liz and myself.

DVD 2 ch. 3.5 clip n. 28 (7_6). Dave's questionnaire to Liz. 3'50'.

An indication of this was that Liz seemed to show a certain distance regarding my findings, holding back her curiosity, but at the same time often emphasising that I was not present when crucial events had happened, that I had not noticed this or that. Finally she unconsciously made me feel guilty each time something interesting happened which I had not filmed. It took me a long time to understand that her didactical and 'scolding' attitude was hiding a profound care for the knowledge I might be able to produce. This attitude was also a reminder that she knew better than everybody else how to look at and

investigate the life of the classroom, and that I should humbly ask her guidance instead of stubbornly holding to my 'observational' mode. In some ways she was pointing out that I was too passive. And Dave's visit, during which I saw for the first time how an Irish researcher could steer the local dimension of diversity with impetus and tenderness, awakened me in a deep way.

Liz was born in Canada, in the Irish migratory social context in which her uncles and parents had attempted a better life for some years; her mother is a nurse and her father a peasant, both from county Wexford, from an Irish Protestant family. She returned to Wexford when she was still a young girl. She stated that since childhood she wanted to be a teacher and that all three sisters became mistresses in primary schools. But parallel to that, Liz's greatest passion was literature (due to a long-term illness when she was nine, and she was obliged to stay in bed for a year, she began reading books compulsively and never gave up since). She held both passions ever since: primary teacher and children's literature expert. I learned at once that she was an expert in the domain of children's literature (Morris and Coghlan 2005); as a translator from English to Irish and a reviewer for various bulletin, a collaborator- animator of many Irish specialised publishers and associations for children's books.²⁷



Figure 12.3 M. O'Brien, L. Morris, S. Coghlan, and F. McGrath at the launching of 'Cross-Currents'.

During the first weeks, when I was mainly observing without filming, she had already evoked many aspects suitable for a comparative endeavour: she explained how she had noticed that non-national boys seemed more solid and structured in terms of family, affective life, domestic safety and hygiene than their local Irish-born peers. She illustrated the differences in the kind of meals pupils were bringing from home, comparing junk food (again the Irish constituency) with more simple traditional and tasteful cold meals brought in and consumed by foreign nationals. Some distinctive behavioural problems, such as discipline disorders and the inability to concentrate were again manifested more acutely by Irish children. The prospect she offered seemed to reverse all expectations about the possible stigmatisation of foreign children because of their perceived inability to adapt. It seemed that the focus was on the Irish community of boys, penalised for generations by the social environment, the religious affiliations and the school itself, and the arrival of non-nationals had not really made it any better or worse for them, nor for the newcomers. A sort of state of emergency was introduced concerning discipline rather than learning

itself, and the first aspect seemed to inform every action, need, project and expectation expressed by caregivers and pedagogues.

Liz seemed normally at ease, having a predisposition toward 'xenophilia' rather than 'xenophobia', in control of the class without being authoritarian and truly an expert in managing simultaneous communication among various group situations, instances, requests and visitors. The atmosphere seemed cosy, light, almost too relaxed; nevertheless, after a deeper observation, one realised that she placed a strong demand on one's intelligence. This was also a sign that there was no time off from teaching-learning, although it seemed a very informal mode within the classroom.

Liz seemed genuinely interested in children's emotions, stories, perspectives and creative impulses and she was thus not inclined to simply give total freedom to the pupils. Discipline was well maintained. Without appearing to, she managed to have eyes and ears everywhere, but not in the way children detest and tend to challenge a priori. Because pupils were open with her, they rarely felt blamed or judged for reasons they did not expect. They could tell personal stories, recount events, use certain forbidden words (they were corrected at once but not in a judgemental way) and talk quite openly about what they felt. Everything was told in public, but discretely, in amongst other topics if the child was shy. The teacher had the tact of not pushing an issue directly through allusion or accusation, but always via a diagonal mode. She rarely showed complicity and never showed any special protective measures toward her favourite pupils in front of me. None of the boys were marked out for particular attention, but were mostly given points (positive or negative, which were then collated) in expectation of disciplinary rewards following a positive balance (as decided by the board, not by her personally). Freedom

from desks and chairs was not forbidden to the boys: they could move around the classroom. Parallel to this freedom they had to develop an awareness that would prevent them disturbing their classmates. No sense of seclusion emanated from her pedagogy: if the room was without walls one would not feel any difference. That ability of smoothing constraints is usually the sign of long-term experience in classroom management.

When I decided to work in this particular inner city school, it was already shrouded in debates surrounding ‘multiculturalism’ and ‘anti-racist education’, and this was one of the reasons for my choice. Thus, I found myself relatively lucky in my encounter with the main teacher. Her profile seemed to me highly relevant: she was in a period of her career in which she had capitalised thick knowledge, experiences of diversity management, and she had even chosen to go on teaching, to return to disadvantaged primary schools albeit following a career break. She showed awareness and determination: namely, the hope that the children would develop an ability to participate, contribute and accept feedback in literacy domains, with a view to their civil participation in society, reckoning with questions of discrimination and failure, all of which kept her in the school (Steedman 1992: 60). Moreover, she possessed a distinctive mode with which to articulate her perspectives, which made her communication itself a ‘signature’, having a particular style. In the film sequences this distinctive style emerged, I believe, and the moving image helps to depict the dimensions of this unique style.

Literacy and eloquence were abilities she wished the pupils to acquire. The ability of naming, expressing and recounting the ‘etymological’, ‘poetical’ and ‘effective’ in speech, all had relevance in her teaching. Her pedagogy emphasised how to put words on what children felt, knew and sought; furthermore, this attitude helped the young subjects to

appreciate words in their texture, meaning, history, and hopefully how to produce new words. This was the same for locals and foreigners: it could be applied in any language and literacy domain. It was a 'thirst' that she hoped each child would feel. Liz had worked to teach them how to become critically involved in children's literature. She was helping them to discover their skills as readers and their responsibility and influence on the cultural life of Ireland as future citizens. She could see the interconnections between these two poles, as in the past European tradition in which intellectuals were formed, a tradition that partially echoes Gramsci's perspective on the difference between education and instruction,²⁸ developed in the 1930s but still applicable today.

Nonetheless, she could well have chosen other career paths. She was in her second mandate, after fifteen years spent in another school, located in southern Dublin, in an upper-middle class district with a well-off mixed primary national school. She had taken a sabbatical year in Spain, spent some years as an independent reviewer of children's literature and was back in the school in a disadvantaged area of the inner city for the past year when we first met. As stated above, she had accumulated more than 20 years of teaching practice and fielded a career adjustment, and she was now trying to invest these combined attributes in an intercultural setting. Her career break was also the consequence of her political involvement in INTO (Irish National Teachers Organisation), arguing for a multi-denominational Irish education system. The reasons underlying her position had to do with strict censorship operated by the establishment where she had taught, concerning the non-Christian ideology of one author she had invited into the classroom to meet children and read his own works to them. This episode opened up a crisis in her professional identity and was clearly catalytic in her professional development.

Liz, unlike the teacher Pascale Lantéri whom I worked with in Paris, was acutely aware of her failures and shortcomings and was proud of being an intellectual. Moreover, she enjoyed her job and knew that her work as a teacher was worthwhile. It also incorporated her love for literature, because children were the most important target of the books she loved. Because she had been educated in a period of change, a time possibly imbued with more utopian hopes for a better society than today, and had participated in Irish civil life without being affiliated to a party, she remained an idealist, although concretely acting from her praxis. Hence, the contact with the school, in the day-to-day, harsh condition of Dublin's inner city, provided a social platform for her political and moral involvement.

Her meetings with publishing houses and other professionals involved in children's books usually took place far from her teaching social arena. She managed though to bring them into the school itself, offering children the possibility to participate in public events – an arena in which they would never have participated. If I had to cast, according to Spradley and McCurdley (1988), a well profiled key social actor, she had most of the requisite attributes; her specialised networks, sociability, ability to recount her past attitudes and challenges, and finally the skill to see herself within the social patterns traversing her deeds, interfacing the historical dimensions of education and instruction, together with understanding the content of the research. She was also a good actor in the sense that she was shy but relatively spontaneous in her behaviour when I was observing and interacting and filming. Moreover, I had the fortune to motivate her even more and gradually she became my inclusive and generous guide to children's literature and literacy and, not least, into a certain Irish cultural life of the 'intelligentsia' and milieus connected with education through literacy and narrative, as well as to people networked through publishing houses and cultural events. The American-Irish storyteller who was an artist-in-residence in the

school was also her acquaintance. All the invited authors and illustrators who worked with children on a volunteer basis, did so significantly in response to her charisma.

Nonetheless, she was also preoccupied with interculturalism, having adopted a critical position in relation to multiculturalism, to which I was sympathetic. She was not abstracting her work from internal tensions: she was assuming courageously some of the conflicts around the school's denominational ideologies, and furthermore, was not hiding her aspirations for a multi-denominational school system. This had made her position more difficult to relate to, since it obliged me to take a position within the institution as a consequence of my interest. At the same time I became increasingly certain that my presence had made her more acutely aware of aspects of her behaviour and ideology, which she herself stated afterwards had been 'only implicit until that time'. This I gradually learned in conversations where she reflected on my ongoing comments from the informal slant typical of long conversations in pubs and restaurants, in meetings with friends and colleagues, to more formal questionnaires in the classroom and discussions in her home. She showed a pragmatic perspective, based perhaps on her subject position (as a minority female subject from an Irish Protestant upbringing with a university education), tending to normalise difference, almost to the point of denying any differences among her national and non-nationals pupils, if not concerning linguistic command, which she felt could be resolved in due cause. She showed herself to be clearly critical of any narrow nationalism; nevertheless, she seemed frustrated if she could not transmit the richness of Irish national literature and history, through the use of facts, myths, legends, novels, poetry and old manuscripts. For her the written word was the primary foundation for any further advancement and literacy was highly valued as the crucial turning point for a child, necessary for an education in aesthetics, politics, philosophy, literature, and most

practically, a methodology for integrating oneself in Irish further education. She philosophically adhered to a certain form of neo-Enlightenment. In this respect she was similar to Pascale from Paris, and many other teachers of Western background. (A complete conversation between Liz and myself about these topics is transcribed in Appendix A).

English Support Language (ESL)

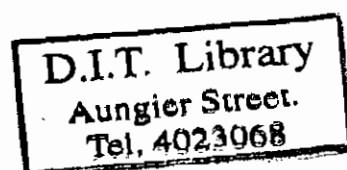
What if children of immigrant workers end up with only impoverished command of two languages; that of their parents and that of their present country (for example, Moroccan children in the Netherlands)? The practice of most linguists in the U.S. is not to draw conclusions from such facts. The notion of effective equality of all languages and speakers is too highly valued as a weapon against prejudice and a justification of uniform practice. ... The study of oral narrative can extend understanding of potential equality and at the same time deepen understanding of forces at work in shaping actual competence (Hymes 1996: 191).

In the United Kingdom the term 'ESL' – in which 'S' initially represented 'Second' and subsequently 'Support' – has been recently substituted in policy guidelines with EAL, where 'A' refers to 'Additional', as in English Additional Language classes. In Ireland, where interest and contact with British education exists through numerous migrations of Irish teachers to the U.K., the preferred and official term remains ESL. In the school the location of the English Support Language facilities was established in the library for the practical reason of lack of space. It is hard to establish today if this was an *ad hoc* arrangement at the time, but it resulted in interesting outcomes at the pedagogical level. In some ways, because of the conflation of locations (namely library as classroom) in their pragmatic and symbolic use, new forms of learning and social life were established. It is now interesting to analyse what this meant for the teaching and integration of 'non-nationals' and it is possible to do so in more depth thanks to the help of the filmed

sequences. When the sequences were filmed, I did not yet know about these aspects of the location.

My assumptions about linguistic assimilation policies in education were also somewhat challenged by this encounter with the school: educational proficiency in the inner city was achieved relatively easily by migrant children, while the local Irish pupils were somewhat penalised by the school frame. Additionally, if English Support Language was technically needed by non-English speakers, migrant pupils were more successful at attaining the Irish Gaelic certificate (required for employees of the State) because they seem not to question past relations connected with imagined Irish national identity, urban-rural movements, identity values in vernacular Irish, or the current 'pragmatic' use of a little-used language. They study Gaelic in a more playful and distant mode, without affection or investment, but at a purely pedagogical level, evidencing an approach to learning a new language. Arguably, their acquired 'Gaelic' functions akin to developing competence in a minority language in their country of origin.

Interestingly, teachers and caregivers did not notice linguistic tensions and differences among co-nationals pupils who have an ethnically heterogeneous mother tongue. Therefore it is important to be alert to sociolinguistic factors, asking questions and seeking clarifications of what operates as children's implicit knowledge. A visible, indeed audible variety of language groups were emerging in the school among Romanians, which incorporated Roma and Romanian languages; for the Filipinos, there were Tagalog and other minority languages spoken to negotiate; for the Nigerians, there were Ibo and other languages. However, in the case of Polish, Chinese, Brazilian, Latvian, Russian and



Kossovar communities, the dominant national languages were mastered and shared among co-nationals.

As an example of the complex dynamic of ‘assimilationism’ to be explored in the ethnic or linguistic background of each foreign national, the following sequence shows the teacher coaching a newly arrived Polish boy with the help of a co-national who had already spent one year in the school. The latter, Monty-Sebastian, is a traveller Roma, the former a middle-class Pole: the negotiation of language, dominance and cultural translations are more complex here.

DVD 2 ch. 3.5 clip n. 29 (2_1). A Roma-Polish boy helps a co-national to write a plot for comics during Oisín McGann’s workshop. 14’10’’.

Here Monty was called in to help the newly arrived Patrick, who is impervious to learning English and thinks he can only rely on the help and patience from his teacher. Monty who, in Poland, given his status, would have never been consulted about helping somebody like Patrick, is now suddenly in a position of providing translation and assistance to school staff. Patrick does not seem to acknowledge his help at all and at the end, although Monty-Sebastian has managed to be inserted in the story Patrick is drawing as a super hero (‘Montyman’) the younger Polish boy seems to identify with the monster, who keeps at the end a Polish name ‘*Frajer*’ (literally ‘Lonely Man’). Although the two boys seem to negotiate a plot between themselves, Miss Morris keeps a constant eye on them in the midst of everything else: she directs several groups simultaneously without leaving Patrick and Monty’s desk. She also ensures the pupils respect hers and McGann’s guidelines – no violent murders, no escaping into other realms, no use of well-known stereotypical heroes. Patrick, for a while, is encouraged to bring in the transcultural aspects of his ability to translate his pictures, but he does not seem to be interested, while Monty gets excited and

participates, although he respects Patrick and doesn't appropriate his work. The follow-up session does not see these two children together anymore. They return to their roles and previous status, which are indistinguishable in the new school.

Changes in ESL Routines

During the time I spent in the school, lasting eight months spread over two academic years, Miss Morris managed the ESL class. The library/classroom had a beautiful atmosphere; one felt welcomed by the many signs, and it was clearly visible that the children were developing a specific *savoir faire*, a thirst for literacy, and an identification of books they wished to read including multicultural literature. The book, although a precious and beloved object for the teacher and her pupils, was never 'fetishized' as the ultimate goal of the class activities, but was instead inserted into a larger environment, the reading environment, with its rites, specific modes, rules and larger patterns. Miss Morris motivated foreign nationals and non-English speakers through the reading of books and the milieu connected to literacy. She thought that the thirst for competence in English or Gaelic language could only develop through exercising the curiosity of children to read the books in the library: a utilitarian, practical philosophy, which drove the otherwise difficult process of spelling, writing orthography and grammar, and learning rules by heart. The modalities of access were original and conceived by some of the teachers deliberately: if the school had the vertical shape I described above (see section 'The School Structure'), where meetings were mostly outdoors or in passing on the stairs, the open library provided a space with open access during ninety percent of school time; the time span of a brief pause, a quick read, or simply a full immersion in other people's collective lessons and readings were allowed and indeed encouraged.

The following year Miss Linda ran the library and subsequent ESL activities, since Miss Morris was needed as teacher of 2nd and 3^d grade pupils. The school board, but also the new teacher, who had less confidence and experience, changed the imprint of the activities. Miss Morris prepared many tutorials for Miss Linda in order to consolidate the routines she had conceived and implemented in the past year. Thus, the change shaped the activities very differently because the guidelines of this kind of teaching are quite elementary and rely mainly on the prior competence of the teacher. In other words, as happened in the French case, the thirst for literacy which Miss Morris considered the source for motivating language support, became subject to a more technical teaching style where texts operated as a reservoir for the discovery of new words and concepts. Books, therefore, became textbooks in the most traditional sense attributed to them in European schools dating back the last century.

(Appendix A to Chapter Three, 'Interview with Miss Morris')

English Language Test

In the following two sequences I depict two language tests that occur as preliminary steps informing the choice of the specialised teacher who must assign a level of proficiency to be reached through English support special teaching. I wish to show the amount of information and the quality of knowledge that such routines carry, although there is only a very low command of the dominant-majority language. What do children manage to tell adults, who have a prerequisite form to be adhered to, with a series of standard questions? In the portraits of the children, their tests in their ESL lesson demonstrate the particular and culturally embedded utterances taking place in the classes.

DVD 2 ch. 3.5 clip n. 30 (5_2) and (1_6). First English test: Jetro 4'53'' and Patrick 3'40''.

Storytelling

Thanks to Miss Morris's network (as explored in Section IV under the subheading 'The Main Teacher: Liz Morris'), the children could benefit from a series of artistic residencies with well known artists, among whom was Jill Perdue, a teacher and poet, who helped the children write collective poems which were then performed in a children's library in south Dublin, in front of an audience of middle-class school children.

DVD 2 ch. 3.6 clip n. 31 (3_4). Children reciting 'I do not want to be loved!' 4'48''.

During the year Miss Morris also invited Nicola Sedwizch into the class, a well-known children's books illustrator, who taught useful tricks on how to draw a highlighted apple, a spark in the eye and how to animate different figures. Her workshop was followed by one with writer and illustrator Oisín McGann, who taught pupils how to draw comics. The longest residence that year was from a literacy expert and storyteller, from the United States named Brett Dillingham, who taught pupils how to invent, learn canonical plots and perform oral stories.

In September 2003 and May 2004 Dillingham visited the school; of Irish origin, Dillingham is a storyteller living in Alaska, working as a visiting lecturer and advisor in schools all over the world, especially in Alaskan-First People communities and in urban disadvantaged schools throughout the U.S. Dillingham had a very similar profile to those described below by Mello:

Storytelling is also a performance art, one that has been revitalized in recent years and which has developed into a neotradition throughout the U.S.A (Zipes, 1995). ... It is the closest thing we have, in modern contexts, to the orality of our preliterate ancestors. Modern storytellers, therefore, like their ancient counterparts, continue to rely on their manipulation of language in order to relate an anecdote and often make use of dramatic skills such as characterization, narration, vocalization, and mimetic action (2001:1).

The following sequence shows his abilities in this domain.

DVD 2 ch. 3.6 clip n. 32 (5_6). Brett tells an Inuit tale (*Amik's Catch*) in front of a thrilled audience of pupils. 8'49''.

His acquaintance with the school was immediate, and his storytelling performances in the gymnasium provoked a strong impact on almost all of the children, even those who could not understand English, because his mimic abilities allowed for immediate empathy, operating beyond mere verbal communication. He nevertheless commented that the level of attention that day was one of the lowest he ever had experienced from a young audience. Since he was playful with his charisma and totemic symbols, he was at once beloved and feared by the children, more like a character than a real person. This was compounded by the fact that despite the children's curiosity about him, expressed through a series of searching questions regarding his personal life, he resisted divulging private details of his background and present circumstances. His collaboration with Miss Morris grew developed beyond the workshop, both finding common interests surrounding pedagogy and storytelling.

DVD 2 ch. 3.6 clip n. 33 (3_3). Brett discusses his storytelling method with Miss Morris in the school kitchen. 5'50''.

Oral storytelling was not a subject on the curriculum. Consequently, Miss Morris was intrigued by it, as she thought storytelling could provide a complementary approach to literacy, since the understanding of reading is more effective when one can perform narratives with one's body, using vocal tones and strategic pauses, silences replete with meaning. Dillingham created a basic rhetorical device to be shown to the children, a sort of mental template for imagining and performing simple stories which helped, methodologically, to implement his teaching and capture children's attention. He also

taught via using a visual template, a basic pattern to be followed in order to develop a simple plot and avoid getting lost in never-ending digressions.

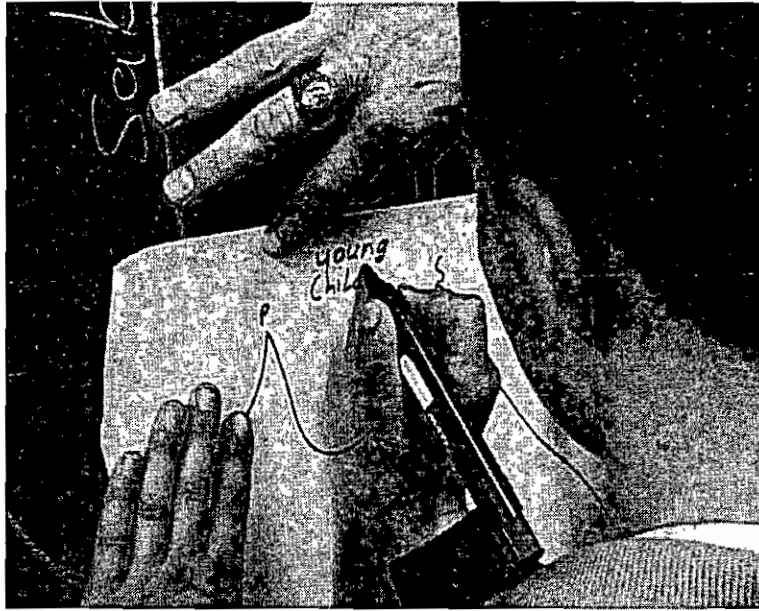


Figure 13.3 A pattern to conceive and to write a basic story.

The scheme was quite elementary and did not render the complexity and gestalt-like shape that narrations call for. Digressions in telling stories can be hypothesised to be more important and easier to memorize than the very plot, as storytelling with very young children often shows. This mindset accompanies intellectual growth, and even though adults can rationalize the plot and are able to summarize it in a few words, the impact of digression remains more vivid and 'open' to creative reconstructions, constituting the real performance and ability expressed by the teller. In other words, any story can be told as a canon, a template, a frame, but what is unique is the way in which the plot's structures are kept together by its variations, which have to do with digressive styles and skills. While Dillingham demonstrated this assumption very clearly in his performances, his written techniques suffered from such simplifications and 'schematism', yet it can be also added in his defence that they did not really constitute the core of his teaching, but were an

exemplification of a basic strategy to get children started. The most fertile environment in which children were trained to tell stories was provided by the performative, bodily and mimic stimuli he showed when he recounted. The critique following each performance, as instructed by Dillingham, always had to begin with positively-charged input. The audience could appropriate and return patterns displayed in recounting; a sort of reactive mirroring which helped children in their somatic rehearsals.

In fact children grasped immediately how to train and perform, especially through mimesis, for Brett always started the day around rites of storytelling, repetition, concentration and self-respect which gave the pupils the opportunity to modify their usual habits and behaviour in the class. Nevertheless, when it came to foreign children with no command in English, his method perhaps suffered from being used previously only in multicultural settings in the U.S., where he always had the help of co-national translators for those children who could not yet talk and tell. In Ireland, in Miss Morris's class, he was not able to communicate with a number of foreign pupils who lacked competence in the English language. The specificity of his subject could not be taught without the pupils' command of language and rhetorical ability.

In a few weeks, after each session, I recorded the transformations and elations, the acquisitions of skills and the performative instances and the rewards of those pupils working with Brett. Some of the school's teachers became interested in learning from his practice, especially Miss Morris, Miss Devereaux and a few others. The most striking event, which can also be analyzed in terms of transcultural experience, took place with a reduced number of pupils outside of school and in circumstances which are still quite controversial. Dillingham had been invited to many cultural events as a keynote speaker

and performer during his time in Dublin. Such event was the opening of the 'Irish Storyteller Association Festival', which took place at the Teachers' Union Club in Parnell Square. Given its location (in the school neighbourhood and in front of the Rotunda Hospital, where most of the children were born) and because of its symbolic status (a club where teachers gathered without being disturbed by parents and children) the Club's threshold was difficult to cross. The performance was well received, albeit with a certain paternalistic attitude which pointed out the exceptional nature of the event as being entirely due to the open minds of selected adults, not the desire and free will of children challenging class and age borders.

The children had gathered in a specific location outside the school. I went to meet them and hoped to talk to their parents and invite them too, but none of the carers had been willing to step in. At the beginning, when seven excited children, in a state of heightened expectation passed through the entrance to the Club, I attempted to alleviate a scene of rejection, since the porter did not want them to come in. I intervened, explaining that they were due to participate in the opening night proceedings. Only after Brett had come to discipline and prepare them, were they able to climb the stairs to the fourth floor. Upstairs Brett taught them how to say 'hello' politely and shake hands to a predominantly elderly audience. In this way the children had begun a sort of transformation of their usual behavioural mode, and suddenly appeared well brought up. The following sequence shows a long excerpt from that evening.

DVD 2 ch. 3.6 clip n. 35 (6_1). Storytellers at Teachers' Club. 21'11'.

The performance was very well received and children had been, in the space of an hour, the centre of attention for many onlookers. Yet, the reality of being in a place out of their familiar environment meant they were still not completely at ease. The following day they

had forgotten all about shaking hands and possessing polite manners like little adults. This, I believe, was due to the fact that they had performed a role in order to fit the context, but in a different context they were well able to realise that such manners were artificial and out of place.

Dillingham shaped the reaction of his professional storyteller colleagues by depicting the children as 'good gentlemen' who could or should be accepted because they had deserved it. However, because he really believes that young subjects should access every arena where the intergenerational can be expressed, the space of the Teachers' Club had been worth visiting, even though the parents did not dare to step in. According to Dillingham, for a so-called disadvantaged school to function as a place not only to learn but also to socialise, the link with families, foster-parents and the families of the neighbourhood are crucial elements which should be enhanced. The school is not only a place where children 'consume' education, often with rage and conflicting attitudes passed from one generation to the next, who have each experienced socio-political marginalization and inequality, but is conversely also considered the central cradle of intergenerational sociality (bell hooks 1994).²⁹

Building on this Egan (1997) sees in the educational purpose of storytelling in schools a way to enhance an integrated and educated mind, linking the more imaginative and logical modes of knowledge acquisition. Children should be encouraged to tell stories, telling them thoroughly, learning the rhetoric of oral performance, enriching them with personal variations, creating them anew, and passing stories on to their peers but also to the generations surrounding them, as a collective cultural value. These forms of transmission and performance help develop primary skills required for social life, mutual respect, self-

esteem and pleasure and as such, enrich the whole community. They are symbolic bridges connecting persons, events, times and spaces, which are otherwise never in contact with each other.³⁰ In so doing children commence discussing the digressions or plots of these stories, making unconscious comparisons and links with their own experience. In terms of cultural psychology, Bruner (1990) has analysed the ways in which these 'transactional relationships' create patterns of interplay between memory and the act of memorising, narrative imagination and reality. This is not only a way to express autobiography in imaginary terms, but it is a true way of knowing: what children know is utilised as context for what is unknown, and audiences make sense with the teller by discussing the stories together afterwards. The cognitive and the emotional are patterned, enabling new abilities of knowing. Storytelling in this way can be said to be highly educational and not purely entertaining. This tradition, having different forms of transmission but with similar aims, is also that described by Bâ (1994) in West African schools of initiation, where tales are always the same, but the ability of the listener to decipher esoteric knowledge varies with her age, whether in circumstances of initiation, training telling and retelling, interpreting and listening.³¹

V

Teachers' Stories

In addition to interviewing teachers and steering conversations about topically based issues of socio-political integration, proficiency and literacy, professional self-biographies, local communities and pupils' records, I also literally 'hung around' with small groups of teachers in pubs, cafés, restaurants and attended parallel events organised by Miss Morris, with whom I became very friendly, especially after she left the inner city school for an Educate Together class at the end of my film fieldwork. These events consisted of

meetings of teachers and former teachers, writers, librarians and intellectuals, taking place at summer schools, seminars, book-launches and conferences, award-giving celebrations and other happenings surrounding the world of children's books, children's intercultural literature and teachers' ongoing education. Rarely did I participated in the teachers' union informal meetings, because I believed that unless I dared explore this area I would never emerge with a comprehensive understanding of teachers' politics in Ireland. Since it was such a large topic I would have drifted away from the life of the children, who were my primary actors after all. I thus discovered that in most of Miss Morris's colleagues, and certainly within herself, all these dimensions were constantly intertwined. Trying to disentangle them was almost an exercise in vain. I realised that one of the great talents of this milieu of teachers-activists (especially cultural activists) was that their utopian aspirations for a school system to address the suffering among Irish communities, namely the inner city schools, the immigrants in precarious shelters and the Travellers' constituencies. This endeavour was enhanced significantly through their ability to socialise, meet after school, participate in anything on offer in order to better experiment interculturally, but especially with human exchange, social life and personal relations. The configuration of a pub-centred public sphere, as much as a parish-centred one, which both characterise Irish society were strongly reinforced but in different locations: the pub remained, yet the local pub could be replaced with an urban café; and the parish was replaced by the publishing and literary organisations, ex-colleges with their denominations (mostly St. Patrick College, which is of Catholic denomination and Miss Morris' own college of education, the Church of Ireland, of Protestant affiliation), where more or less the same members met regularly.

Attending these happenings, I learned to investigate (by engaging in attentive listening, observing, asking naïve questions and sometimes filming) how teaching competencies were formed and exchanged, how the social life of teachers themselves contributed to their growth and awareness of each pupil's learning stage, need and temperament. These activities, driven by Miss Morris, who constantly interfaced between sectors of the publishing industry, teachers and lecturers, and colleges for teachers of different denominations, had one common characteristic: they only rarely included children. They took place in the public sphere of adults and educators in which the child was the centre of every sentence, thought, story and aim. For teachers involved in providing care at school, an arena without the presence of children afforded free time, not least because many teachers had children themselves (not Miss Morris but those close to her, including her best girlfriend and her sisters, who had many children, which she also helped to educate) and they needed to meet and socialise in a different atmosphere, more relaxed than one characterised by constant vigilance and responses to children's energy.

In these arenas new ideas, perspectives and information circulated; more relevantly, stories and anecdotes were constantly told and retold. I realised how important these stories were when I finally decided to stop filming. What inhibited people from speaking about and telling stories of children when I was filming was the high confidentiality surrounding their content. It would have been the same degree of confidentiality as if I was filming during the break time of medical doctors in a hospital: accounts of patients, similar to those of pupils, were not for public consumption. They were nevertheless, differently from patients' records, not 'secret', but only in the context of an oral transmission to other members of the profession. In this way teachers could circulate them. Actually, storytelling was the real activity underlying the pedagogical practices of

the teachers. By telling these stories of everyday pupils' life at school and in the street, teachers were orally producing an ongoing, thick and collective ethnography.

Entire dialogues heard by the teachers were re-told, jokes were developed, connections between children and carers were hypothesised, history was reconstructed, the topography of the quarter surrounding the school was drawn and re-drawn through children's movements, their social milieus, habits, beliefs, physical descriptions and many other aspects, which form the essence of ethnographic inquire, were described. Each evening I spent with a group of teachers I got to know the children more and more through their perspectives, but also through facts that became stories, not because these teachers merely needed to gossip (although this is also a necessary and vital activity in human communication), but because through storytelling the sense of private knowledge of children's expressions could become a publicised way to a common understanding, in view of sharing hypotheses, informing pedagogical skills and receiving counselling, approval, amusement and useful integrations from other colleagues. The stories acted as a platform for blame, assessment, comparisons and sharing, and in this way, provided a complementary arena in which teachers could be truly evaluated outside of the classroom. Stories also served political aims: norms, decisions to be taken, disciplinary frames to be invented, implemented and removed were tossed around and assessed at the hypothetical level, forming an imaginary plot surrounding children's actions. The stories were real, but they also served the function of foreseeing, because they were always in progress. Anticipation remained at the end of each story, where usually some of the most fatalistic conclusions showed that one couldn't do much to better certain social conditions, but one could still see through the stories how deeply they affected the teachers' imaginary and their will to help beyond their public role.

These highly professional teachers enjoyed this oral communication more than everything else; however, at the same time, although seemingly at leisure, they never stopped working, even in their social life outside of school. For the knowledge produced through these social events was clearly informing their awareness of the children, implemented already for the following day. Moreover, a deep continuity at the level of pedagogy was in this way enhanced. This interest demonstrated that teachers such as these, who were becoming rare among the new generation, had chosen their work as a psychological vocation, a humanistic mission and also from a perspective of political engagement. Teachers like these believed in the intellectual emancipation of the pupils, in the social betterment of inequality, and firmly considered school the safest place for most of their pupils, knowing that the everyday life surrounding them was highly affected by criminal violence, social disadvantage, religious oppression and affective loss.

Because of the love for storytelling and oral performance characteristic of meetings among teachers, I soon discovered that the main actors of these stories remained local children, Irish-born. Nothing but local children's stories were enjoyed, and if any of the foreign nationals children appeared, it was always in the narrative frame of an interlocutor of an Irish born child. Foreigners were still perceived as a catalyst for certain events to occur; revelatory agents, in some ways, but rarely protagonists. And this is not because teachers were racists or biased. The reasons were deeper and less obvious.

Obviously local stories contained a far thicker degree of information about languages, jargon and social features which enabled the narrator to enjoy the aesthetic craft of the 'telling', here conceived as an art. The literary continuity with one's stories, with 'our' (all

the Irish teachers together) stories was expressed as a pleasure, a need, a skill to be performed. Facts and dialogues were understood also by isomorphism with other, 'timeless tellings' already heard. In contrast, with foreign children featured the stories were always uncertain, the details never double checked, the fear lingered of saying something which was not definite, which could appear as biased or discriminatory, clearly inhibiting if not challenging the skilful storyteller. It seemed as if a healthy worry about reproducing stereotypes was creating a self-censoring dynamic in the tellers. One could also hypothesise that, because all these Irish teachers had a strong historical awareness about how their own co-nationals had been stereotyped in foreign contexts of migration in the past, such a pattern was not going to be reproduced in the present moment – here, at home, with new migrant constituencies.

Local Irish children in the school never hesitated to verbalise aloud their stereotypes (probably heard from their carers and adults in the street and at home), making jokes, bullying and ridiculing Travellers and Roma. In so doing they demonstrated a need to identify certain ethnic categories as more stigmatised than their own. Teachers were obviously aware of this mechanism, preferring not to articulate descriptions of foreign children in to greater depth, expressing a form of self-censorship which they also imparted on their own pupils. Because oral storytelling in the form chosen by the teachers involved descriptions of each child, whether in terms of temperament, physical features, taste, abilities or speech, unavoidable stereotypical construction were evident across all stories, revealing a performative dimension of culturally specific frames of references and expression. One could then make jokes about one's own society, community, family, because the jokes seemed to contain a certain degree of self-irony. Joking stories about foreigners, on the other hand, were less funny and did not contain any levels of self-irony.

When a foreign child started to be included in the stories, it meant that she had stepped into another degree of social acceptance and path of integration. She subsequently became part of the stories and could paradoxically benefit from stereotyped depictions, as a sign of inclusion.

I should note that the stories were mainly intended, or at least interpreted, as signs of love, of interest, attempts to express positive emotions of empathy, to increase one's understanding of unacceptable, paradoxical actions. Only when told in the public sphere, circulated and taken back at the end of a certain period (possibly a night, a week or a month, and certain stories circulated all year long), were those stories moisturised with aesthetics. Furthermore, the reactions and contributions of peers (teachers and friends, all occupied with pedagogy and children) enlarged collective understanding and empathy, made them better (because more aware) teachers, creating a sense of catharsis for painful and violent events which had happened thus reinforcing connectedness and collusion, further re-describing and re-distributing roles, enriching the community of interest which was that of Miss Morris.

Through the film fieldwork I was perhaps assisting in the salvaging of each non-national child one by one. Each time that one child could enter into a story with dignity, that true information circulated about him or her, that the child was respected even throughout jokes and dramas, I felt that he or she was growing into Ireland. Probably none of the parents (locals and foreigners alike) was able to create stories like those of the teachers. Pupils lent their features easily to characters, to personae, and their ability to constantly be in action, responding in their own jargon to the adults' stimuli, was the fabric of many anecdotes and almost all of them challenged authority, norms, cultural misunderstanding

and disciplinary frames. Teachers needed to sense that liberation for many reasons. That was one of the insurgent sides of children they profoundly liked. If they were obliged by their roles to keep those frames around their pupils, they could indeed liberate them through their agency in these stories. In this way, to share them with their colleagues was an act of relief, which gave teachers a boost for going back 'there'.

Storytelling was the art of these Irish teachers; their pride and their skills made them special because one could easily compare the new generations of teachers and see that they were no longer representing such a dialogic community, unlike their predecessors. The formal teacher clubs were frequented mainly by older teachers. It seemed as if these modes of political activism characteristic of Miss Morris's generation (aged between 40 and 55), based on a culture which had localised itself deeply into imaginative skills, into the politics of orality, rhetoric, performance, utopia and political activism, was indeed in crisis and was experiencing and undergoing a rapid transformation.

Conclusion

Conducting fieldwork in this particular school made me conscious of new ways in which the stories of individual children could be portrayed through glimpses, in the very fabric of their everyday lives, of their sociality in progress and within the material conditions shaping the atmosphere of the site itself. Film became more of a laboratory, an empirical instrument than a device for capturing and rendering a given narrative. The relevance of the action enabled by film was that of capturing emergent transcultural formations allied to innovative pedagogical practices in an inner city Dublin school. The required adaptation to the contingencies of migration make the actors represented in this chapter a compelling group of children along with their teachers.

In the following chapter, the film fieldwork moves into the space of the migrant family home, where I am led out of the Primary School setting by a young migrant Algerian boy named Tahar. In this domestic space we encounter yet another set of stories, reflecting layers of intergenerational memory, co-relational and collective migratory expression.

Notes

¹ See *Irish Times*, 9 April 2005.

² *Metro Eireann* is the first, monthly multicultural newspaper of Ireland. It was established in 2000 and provided a central forum for intercultural communication and debate. It organises every year the Media and Multicultural Awards in association with the National TV channel RTÉ.

³ *Metro Eireann*, November 2003.

⁴ The letter addressed to the then Justice Minister MacDowell continues: 'We are non-Irish national parents of Irish children, who had applied for residency in Ireland, whose fate has been placed in your hands. The uncertainty of our situation is causing anxiety and suffering for many thousands of families...'

⁵ Mrs Robinson was the first female president of Ireland (elected in 1994). She remains concerned with immigration policies in Ireland. When invited to give a public speech in the context of an Irish Migration Council of Ireland conference, she foregrounded issues surrounding family reunification, the regularisation of undocumented migrants, reform of the work permit system, the feminisation of migration.

⁶ A critique concerning the 'double-edged' discourse inherent in the print media surrounding the 'influx' of immigrants into Ireland is outside the remit of my discussion here. For a critical engagement with this topic, see McEinri (2003, 2004) and Ward (2003).

⁷ Deegan (2004) puts forward a relevant critique of discourses circulating in some of the education and welfare policies made in the last five years in Ireland. He notes that the tradition on policy discourse in Ireland comprises attempts to delineate diversity among children in welfare. In particular, he develops a constructive critique of one of the most recent documents on the subject produced by Irish Government known as the *White Paper* (1999). As he writes:

The conflation of the logics of disadvantage without reference to advantage and exclusion without reference to inclusion generates considerable conceptual confusion. Until the recent publication of research on asylum-seeking children and social exclusion, for example, there was a tendency to conflate and relegate asylum seeking children's issues and concerns with those of their parents (Fanning et al 2001). Indeed this matter of seeing children as extensions of their parents continues to be a contentious one in popular and academic context (2004: 230-231).

Deegan further scrutinises some of the philosophical assumptions of other important documents like the *National Children's Strategy: Our Children, Their Lives* (2000). While the paper shows a more subtle awareness of a changing nation according to social reality, Deegan draws attention to the fact that the child-centred holistic perspective by which new policies claim to be inspired hides

an idealised profile: a white boy, future adult, productive, self conscious and individuated; behind the term 'child' although not essentialized, there is one model, not plural models at the end. The emerging 'global child' does not cover the profile of all the children in Ireland. Little mention is made of asylum seeking immigrant children or in general children with other abilities, profiles and aspirations. Travellers and ethnic minorities are often associated, but there is little recognition that the first have been systematically hidden in policies making in the last two centuries and within the latter, categories like asylum seeking need in Deegan's view a specific recognition and profiling-policies, in contrast with a generalised categorisation as ethnic minorities. Alternative conceptualisations are invoked and the work of policy, the national discourse on children's welfare and transcultural education need for this reasons, more complex representations. He argues that studies should be gathered in the very loci where children's identities, power, knowledge are negotiated from a standpoint of diversity.

⁸ Protection is usually needed for the family of the threatened person. Protection can be obtained through a more effective and safe mobility, being able to live in hidden sites, buying the collusion of those knowing, or by continuously travelling or/and by being able to obtain the weapons needed to defend oneself and the group, or elsewhere by buying the counterpart to be kept out of revenge. Protection must be economically sustainable.

⁹ In Ireland the Catholic Church still owns 99 % of the walls of many state schools and it maintains its non-secular representatives in the various school boards.

¹⁰ This law about deportation should be soon modified, but for these parents it is not clear as to whether they can benefit from an amnesty because they came to Ireland over 5 years ago.

¹¹ Most of the activities observed, evident in the parish's bulletin, together with my conversations with Irish inhabiting of the parish and with some of the most prominent priests administrating them, showed that most of the initiatives (including Bingo gatherings on Saturday) were conducted by volunteering for managing the church. These voluntary deeds mainly involved collection of money for the church maintenance, recruitment of children for catechism, organisation of social events, practices of devotion (like journeys and pilgrimages), collection of second hand objects and their re-distribution to the needy. Youngsters, after the confirmation age (12-13) up to the age of parenthood (mainly mothers, in this latter category) were no longer affiliated to the parish. This constituency of people, deemed 'deviant' by the church, only returned temporarily to the parish through their own children's rites of passage (baptism, communion, confirmation).

¹² Article 44.2.4 of the Irish Constitution states: 'Legislation providing State aid for schools shall not discriminate between schools under the management of different religious denominations, nor be such as to affect prejudicially the right of any child to attend a school receiving public money without attending religious instruction at that school'.

¹³ The Church had in fact stated to have a shortage of finance and could only pay 127 millions euros over the 1 billion requested, so that the Irish State was called in to backup the remaining sum (Bacik 2004). The case was not yet solved, but apart from the political aspects, very astonishing and somewhat paradoxical, there were the psychological and sociological factors, which teased children's imagination. That had also contributed to a rising suspicion toward priests and nuns approaching youngsters. In another context, but very media-oriented, even the case of a pop star, Michael Jackson (a well-known American singer accused of child abuse in 2003) had contributed to children's curiosity about these issues, translating, transposing media language into concrete examples. Nevertheless, their questions, concerning these issues, was censured by the school teachers and I was asked to erase the tape onto which I had filmed it. The fact that these questions came unexpectedly, made the teachers carefully consider that some of the answers could be misinterpreted because the context for a real debate was too limited.

¹⁴ This is, paradoxically, the area where Dublin's most important maternity hospitals are located: the Mater and the Rotunda, Europe's first public maternity hospital, established in 1745 and relocated in 1757 to its present site in Parnell Square.

¹⁵ Semi nomadic Roma children, who enrol for periods in the school, travel back and forth with cars from Eastern Europe (especially from Romania and Poland). They seem to be assigned some of the stereotypes attributed to Irish Travellers, but not only from the side of their non-Roma co-nationals, but also of Irish common sensical ethnic 'stereotypisation'. Filipino pupils of the school have returned home once or twice, most of them were born or had spent part of their life in Saudi Arabia. During holidays they travelled to Eurodisney (bypassing Paris to the Disney resort nearby). Nigerian mononuclear families and other migrant children from North Africa managed to spend one or two days at the sea side, not overnight, accessing beaches using Dublin's Dart transport's system. Ireland appears a small country for most migrants who move around relatively more often than most local inhabitants of the inner city.

¹⁶ One of the main factors explaining the absence of parents, as I learned through observation and in conversation with parents and principals, in addition to the liaison teacher whose role is to include parents, is that mothers and grandmothers do not feel at ease in the school: they often were themselves pupils in the same institution and have bad memories about that time. Furthermore they in general have many other younger children to mind and there is little space to implement any alternative activity. Non-national parents must otherwise work hard, and if they do not work they search for work and must recover many administrative tasks. Moreover, their lack of fluency in English limits their good intentions and possible contributions.

¹⁷ It is hardly surprising, since this is a socio-cultural habit in all European schools where families from the Philippines are enrolled. Because carers' professions (nurses, maids, janitors, mostly), usually start very early, in general there is one parent accompanying several children, and this is

organised in turns, similar to the shifts or 'duties' in a hospital. Children look mostly fresh, wear neat uniforms, commonly have wet washed hair and are eager to start their day.

¹⁸ She is also directing a theatre group in her spare time and has an MA in Film Studies.

¹⁹ The 'quick' is one of the six attributes that Italo Calvino (1988: 31-54) considers the most important in literary style, rhetoric and metaphorical representation, as in his 'Six Memos for the next Millennium'. David MacDougall refers to this quality in 'The fate of the Cinema Subject', in the subsection titled 'The Second Self' (1998:30). The quick is a very important phenomenon and specific quality, peculiarly in film form. It is actually one of the most mysterious perceptive experiences that filmic rendering provides, because the optical (through the shutter speed and iris) and the perceptive are in this case supporting each others ability to capture what is extremely ephemeral but indeed persistent in our vision. When one manages to inscribe these moments as meaningful in a given plot one can be surely proud and lucky to have used film as form of representation.

²⁰ Okri's closing prose in the *Famished Road* reads as follows:

In my sleep I found open spaces where I floated without fear. The sky was serene. A good breeze blew over our road, cleaning away the strange excess in the air. It was so silent and peaceful that after some time I was a bit worried. I was not used to such a gift of quietude. The deeper it was, the deeper it was my fear. I kept expecting eeres songs to break into my mind. I kept expecting to see spirit-lovers entwined in blazes of sunlight. Nothing happened. The sweetness dissolved my fears. I was not afraid of Time. And then it was another morning. The room was empty. Mum and Dad were gone. And the good breeze hadn't lasted forever. A dream can be the highest point of a life.' From the *The Famished Road* by Okri (2003: 574).

²¹ I never filmed Mubarak elsewhere in any of our other sessions together, reminding me of Truffaut's film *Les 400 Coups* (1959) in which Jean Pierre Léaud-Antoine Doinel's interrogation happens in a long shot, where he sits behind the psychologist's desk.

²² I observed this ritual on many occasions, but wasn't allowed to film, since she always claimed that the subjects of the research were the children themselves and not herself.

²³ In reality Atillio had panicked when they moulded the chalk bands on his face, and had run away from the Joyce Museum's session. The outcome is that he now has no mask to wear, but this information does not emerge in this sequence.

²⁴ A very well known Irish sound archive and later in an animation film demonstrating the ability to re-tell and personalise Bible stories is *Giv'up yer all sins*, where children from the inner city, in the '70s, had performed for the recording of a series of biblical tales in a very funny and unique

spirit, where jargons, perspectives on their own life, society and values were expressed in their performance.

²⁵ Her education in a Church of Ireland Protestant College of Education partly explains her choice. It is nevertheless important to remark that, in this case, she was the only non-Catholic teacher in the whole school and her minority status reflected her struggle and strongly held convictions. They were expressed in every domain, from the way she spoke to the children to her ability to answer through critical analysis. This required from her to be explicit, transparent and stubborn vis-à-vis the school board in order to show that her attitude was not harming children and consequently their parents' sense of denominational belonging.

²⁶ He was most probably influenced by the British School of Symbolic Interactionism.

²⁷ A large number of initiatives were promoted by her during the course of my research project. An exhaustive list is impossible to provide here, but the websites of IBBY, O'Brien Press and Reading Association of Ireland among others, contain many events where her name figures. A further note is a document concerning intercultural pedagogy written by Liz Morris, as well as her most recent work as editor for a guide to Intercultural Children's literature titled 'Cross-Currents' (see bibliography).

²⁸ Gramsci writes on the subject:

La coscienza individuale della maggiorparte dei fanciulli riflette rapporti civili e culturali diversi e antagonisitici con quelli che sono rappresentati dai programmi scolastici: il "certo" di una cultura progredita, diventa "vero" nei quadri di una cultura fossilizzata e anacronistica, non c'è unità tra scuola e vita, e perciò non c'è unità tra istruzione ed educazione. Perciò si può dire che nella scuola il nesso istruzione-educazione può essere solo rappresentato dal lavoro vivente del maestro, in quanto il maestro è consapevole dei contrasti tra il tipo di società e di cultura che egli rappresenta e il tipo di società e di cultura rappresentato dagli allievi ed è consapevole del suo compito che consiste nell'accelerare e nel disciplinare la formazione del fanciullo, conforme al tipo superiore in lotta col tipo inferiore (Gramsci, Quaderni dal carcere 1929-1932: 1542).

²⁹ It was interesting to discover that Dillingham teaches exactly the same courses to children in their teens and to university students and graduates, teachers, colleagues, and to writers. I followed all his activities in Dublin over a three weeks period during which time he performed, taught, and was interviewed. He helped children develop the ability 'to rap the mouth around words', increasing their basic bank of words estimated in disadvantaged areas to be approximately a thousand words.

³⁰ Dillingham's engagement with stories and storytelling resonates with theoretical perspectives in the sociology of the education, in particular, the work of Bourdieu (1984) where the relationship between cultural and social capital is outlined. Stories contribute to maintaining the symbolic order, acquiring symbolic capitals through their performative, somatic, and linguistic dimensions.

³¹ See discussion in chapter five of the Fulbe philosopher and writer Amadou Hampaté Bâ.

Chapter Four

In the Migrant Family Home: The Intergenerational Performance of Cultural Identity



Figure 1.4 Tahar and his sisters on first day in new school

The picture above shows a boy and two girls in a schoolyard. The Algerian boy, Tahar, who I noticed the first day while his father was photographing him and his sisters, wearing their uniform and showing their new look (see end of first section in chapter three), had just arrived for a family reunification after two and a half years of separation from their father. From the very beginning Tahar shaped the

modalities of our encounters, introducing me to his family and encouraging me to follow some of his daily routines. He seemed to be very aware of himself, of being only 'a child', but he also had the natural authority to ensure that he would be respected and whenever he wished, to be left in peace.

His facial expression always seemed to say: 'Why me? What's interesting about me?' Yet because he was at ease, sufficiently conscious of his identity and inner self to remain independent of his teachers, peers and me, I never felt that I was pressurizing him. He had already been at school for several days before anyone found a common language to speak with him; I spoke French to him, but he didn't really understand. He sat silent, observing, smiling sometimes, but mostly perplexed and locked in his own mood. In the first days at school, priority was given to imposing a strong disciplinary frame around the children, for in many ways the children were still behaving as if 'free' and on summer holiday. Tahar, calm and obedient, was unable to take part in these little rebellions, which were clearly a residue of the holiday period. He was left more or less free to listen, to tune in to the situation without been over-stimulated and yet, as a result, was sometimes forgotten.

I was looking forward to speaking with one of the members of his family and finally, after a few weeks, I met his father in the yard, Mr Mourad, from the Petite Kabylie area of Algeria, who told me a great deal about the life of his Berber-speaking family during the very first conversation we had. He immediately understood the focus of my research into the modes of integration and multiple identities of migrant children and thought it a valuable project. One day as we

talked on the way home from school, he revealed many of the feelings he had experienced as a refugee and spoke in detail about the long, desperate wait for his family to join him in Dublin. He had left Algeria when his youngest daughter was just a baby and it had been two and a half years before he had been able, the previous summer, to hug not only her but his son Tahar too, his elder daughter Yasmina, wife Karima and his mother, Nualà. For reasons, which I learned later, his father had not been able to accompany them. Following this conversation I was allowed to film Tahar during his first days at school.

DVD 2 ch. 4.1 clip n.1 (10_2). Tahar's answers the rollcall in Miss Morris's class. 1'58''.

My Relationship with the Child and his Family

Even for a child memory is the cement that binds the elements of an improvised 'home'. One puts there visible and tangible artefacts of memory –still pictures, souvenirs– but the roof and walls protecting them are invisible, intangible and biographical (Berger 1985: 2).

The family invited me into their home and the camera was accepted easily, if not actively wished for, especially by the wife and the older daughter, because they were hoping to send home (to their relatives in Algeria) video footage of their present life in Ireland. Tahar's family were interested in this possibility (at least in the initial stage when the footage was still a novelty). A form of reciprocity grew along with our relationship, with ups and downs, and of course not without some caution and scepticism when boundaries between friendship and professional tasks had to be blurred, as often happens during the fieldwork period. Tahar enjoyed being trained to film and was always intrigued when the camera was around.

Tahar offered to show me his home in which the expression of the whole family's agency and alchemy was displayed and performed, thus positioning himself as if appointing himself as spoke-man for the family.¹ His grandfather and grandmother from his father's side, both national heroes of the FLN, were decorated after Independence was proclaimed and the FLN took the leadership over other factions of the resistance and civil war (1954-62). The grandfather spent two and a half years in prison under that 'first'² war, and the grandmother, three months. She was sentenced to be executed, as many *moudjhidate* women-fighters of the resistance were, but was pardoned the very last day of the year, an amnesty not given to many prisoners, as she herself recalls.

DVD 2 ch. 4.1 clip n. 2 (9_6). Grandmother tells about her past as a member of the FLN. 7'12''.

During the earthquake, which destroyed their family house in Regaya in 2003 just before quitting the country to reach Mourad in Ireland, Nualà, the grandmother, lost the certificates stating both her and her husband's national award as good defenders of the Algerian nation; their medals were, however, rescued. Their son-in-law sent somebody to try to find those important remains under the detritus of the destroyed flat. She refers to these medals several times, as part of her living body and her past. Nualà is currently ill with Parkinsons disease. She often states that she at times can barely survive the pain accumulated in the last decade in addition to what she had witnessed in the Second Algerian War. It was/is unbearable and the 'vase was too full, it had swelled out', she says describing her condition by way of metaphor. With her knees refusing to collapse, she was nonetheless shaking in her body for weeks when she came to Dublin and had to lie down semi-paralysed in a common

bed with two small grandchildren, often expressing her desire to fade away. Yet, in Ireland the son and his wife took good care of her and her health improved in a few months.

Karima is Tahar's mother. She comes from a family of peasants in the mountains of the Petite Kabylie. She was in her village before Mr Mourad married her, according to a traditional deal between the respective parents.



Figure 2.4 Karima shows her traditionally henné-coloured hand.

She moved to Regaya, her husband's town, where she took up the role of wife and daughter-in-law, bringing up three children and devoting most of her time to housekeeping, cooking, looking after her parents-in-law, making crafts in her spare time, in particular painting textiles and sewing. These crafts were never sold but were always offered or accumulated, because their status as middle class showed that they did not need an extra income to facilitate a better lifestyle, at least according to the socialist model of the FLN dominant leadership. Mrs Karima is younger than her husband and speaks mainly Berber and Arabic sometimes. Her

French is very basic, but she likes it more and more and realises, now that she is in exile, how useful it would have been if she had learnt it better in primary school. She says she does not have the courage to enrol in an English course for migrant women in Ireland, although she was offered an opportunity to do it and her husband agreed that she attend it weekly. She is, therefore, often confined to the home because of the language and because of the need to take care of the grandmother, often very ill, and the younger daughter, Sarah, who is not yet in a pre-school.

Yasmina is the older sister of Tahar. She is in her full puberty and is a leading character in the family, very much allied with the father when it comes to family issues and decision making, further acting as an ambassador representing the family's interests to the outside world where she performs a multilingual role, one that comes to her very easily. In a few months, for example, she was fluent in English and she still remembers her French from the Algerian school. She uses Arabic and Berber at home and has also started to speak a few words of Irish.



Figure 3.4 Sarah showing her picture as a baby

Sarah is Tahar's younger sister. She was just one-year-old when her father had to leave Algeria and she landed in Ireland ready to enrol in pre-school. She is lively and sociable, linking all the members in a collective knot through her movements from one to the other.

DVD 2 ch. 4.1 clip n. 3 (8_3). The first accommodation in Parnell Square, Tahar and family 4'20''.

Although I struggled to keep Tahar as my main character, the rest of the family continually 'intruded' into his space both on and off camera and I became bound up, at the boy's instigation, in the relational web woven by all six members of the family, a kind of revelatory agent of the inner paradigms of that small community. I was literally directing the camera at unfolding psychological bonds and formations in progress and, in a way, generating them by my ongoing attention. In this way I experienced what MacDougall describes so precisely as the situation one finds oneself in when the fieldwork pushes you in a very different direction:

Ideas do not develop in an orderly fashion; they begin with a notion that gathers authority until it is altered by experience or some new understanding. This can result from a discussion with others, but it can also occur quite naturally in the thinking of any one of us. As it is in our minds, so it is with our projects. It is rare for a plan to be followed through without modification, and often the modification calls into question the very idea we started with. This is why so many projects seem internally inconsistent, as if they were trying to accommodate the transition from one way of thinking to another. Any project—any work of art or science—is nearly always better viewed as a process than a statement (2006: 134).

I strove at the beginning to narrate the already repetitive and apparently 'non-plottable' unfolding rhythm of day-to-day family life yet was aware that what was interesting to me, those patterns of sociality embedded within familiar roles, would perhaps appear as nothing special or exceptional for viewers. For example, Tahar's ethnographic portrait, originally conceived, as my work in Paris had led me to

expect, as the figure of an individual struggling and performing in a world of adults and confronting new experiences, was vanishing little by little. Instead, he was asking to be positioned within the context of his family home, where an attempt to rebuild both a real and a metaphysical hearth (*'foyer'*) – a physical and mental location accommodating questions of history, gender, class and ethnicity in the migratory experience of exile – was 'happening' before the gaze of the camera and as a partial consequence of the persuasive presence of the camerawoman. Instead of the participant observational mode characterizing my filming of children in Paris, or my interactive mode in the inner city school in Dublin, I came to use a more *verité* style, a slightly stronger participant action, through filming various performances of loss, re-enacted remembrances (Benguigui 1997) and sensuous everyday practices and habits in a day-to-day, 'everyday is the same day' frame.

Reconfiguring Intergenerational Relations: The Earthquake in Algeria

On 21 May 2003 an earthquake of sudden and terrifying proportions, registering the highest levels on the Richter scale, killed more than 2,300 people (with more than 7000 injured and 130,000 homeless according to *Libération* 04/07/03), destroying dozens of buildings in Regaya's downtown and surrounding region. This is the city where Tahar's family from his father's side had lived for more than 50 years and where all the children were born.³ Mr Mourad was already in Dublin but the family was at this point waiting to migrate to Ireland for a family reunification. The recollections of this dramatic moment were spontaneously performed in front of the camera in a multi-vocal session. I did not initiate this, since I was absolutely ignorant of these facts. What is recorded in the one-room flat in Parnell square, therefore, unfolded as I filmed. At a later point (in Swords), I filmed other

recollections, but on this original occasion we were working with a video tape which had unexpectedly been given to Mr Mourad some days earlier, by an acquaintance passing through Dublin from Algeria, travelling to another destination.

Tahar's father was not present during the time of the earthquake, since he was already in exile for two years, yet he explains the facts as if he had been there. His desire to share that turning point, so highly dramatic, with the rest of his family, seemed stronger than some of his interpretations of the event. For some reason, it appeared to be an attempt to show that not only were political paradoxes destroying their beloved country, but also natural phenomena, perhaps a more fatalistically acceptable interpretation. The other family members added details, corrections and complementary information, all the while listening to his version and legitimating his descriptions. What happened also, which I could not have foreseen, was that on this occasion Tahar suddenly spoke extensively for the first time to the camera. Of course I was expecting one day that this 'movement toward' the camera would happen but not as early in the fieldwork as this. He talked in Algerian Arabic and described the scene when his 5th floor flat fell down. He had literally seen the whole scene from a vantage point in the square below, where he just happened to be.

Tahar's life had been saved by chance; he had gone to the shops to buy a notebook. The moment in which he recalled the event, the sudden shift from shyness to exuberance, is visible in the upcoming sequence. He performs a telling of that traumatic experience, speaking vividly and awaking his former 'self'. I felt sure I was the first non-family-member in Ireland to witness this elicitation, for since

migrating to Dublin, had kept a very low profile outside the house. At the time of the earthquake, he was speechless and semi-paralysed for several hours. Worse, he was separated all night from the rest of the family, who were trapped in a hole underground. The four women of different generations (the mother, the grandmother, and Tahar's two sisters), were trapped for the entire night; they were also separated from Tahar's father, unaware of the event because in exile in Ireland. The succession of viewpoints during the experiential retelling of the earthquake disaster was therefore multi-layered. As mentioned above, Mr Mourad was particularly anxious to be the one to re-tell the tale, his desire to share this memorable turning point with the rest of his family appearing stronger than concern for the credibility of his account. Behind him stood Tahar, who had also experienced the event from outside, impotently watching the terrible scene. The women, on the other hand, had in common the shared experience of being trapped, injured, under tons of rubble. Tahar, in a different way, had seen the building fall down, but nevertheless had to imagine, all alone in his heart but also in the power of his mind, the feeling of being already in the grave, half dead, among a dozen or so agonised neighbours. The father, however, only able to imagine and reconstruct through archives, internet, radio, and recollections, was even more powerless and cut off from such a significant episode in the life of family – the loss of all their belongings and the domestic hearth. For Tahar's father, this completely destroyed materiality, experienced from the standpoint of exile, was simply unbearable.

Neurologists and psychologists who assessed the rescued children and assembled the people in temporary camps suggested that their mother should send Tahar and Yasmina to the countryside, where their maternal grandparents could look after

them, providing care and food and allowing them to speak of their experiences. The doctors had urged the children to verbalize their reactions, where possible, to people close to them rather than to hospital's staff. In a few shaking minutes Tahar lost nineteen schoolmates who had gathered to watch a football match on TV in one of the highest flats. All of them died in the desperate carnage as ceilings and walls collapsed. Coming to terms with this bereavement took a long time. It was never fully expressed since the young boy had to move through a series of events following this trauma: leaving Regaya for long time in order to eventually reunite with his father.

Gradually the earthquake became the core experience, retold and shown on videotape or still pictures from the Internet each time I visited the home. The tragedy became a locus of convergence for many other untold themes concerning the past and future of their country, their collective memory and social status, their loss and the constant threat and violence with which they had lived for decades. Tahar's grandfather remained in Regaya, waiting to be allocated new accommodation. By staying there alone, he reduced the risk that the family would lose their chance of getting a permanent place of residence in the rebuilt city. Tahar's mother and her children were entitled to be re-housed because they were in Regaya at the time of the earthquake; had they already left for Ireland, they would have lost that entitlement.⁴

DVD 2 ch. 4.1 clip n. 4 (8_4) Tahar evokes the earthquake in Parnell Square. 8'02''. and clip n. 5 (9_4). Swords: Video of aftermaths of earthquake. 12'05''.

Re-appropriating One's Name

The 'utterable' origin is the multiple origin, the one which can be puzzled by speech and thought; the one from which one can receive a message, without that being the first word, unspeakable, neither the last word, fatal.⁵ Sibony (1991: 127; my translation)

As discussed later, the in-between of an allusive mode of communication, a type of '*mâ*'⁶ was performed by Tahar – *mâ* being the principle of a void left among material components in the consolidation of a solid structure. In the case of the young Chinese girl, Mang Mang, whom I filmed in Paris (as analysed in chapter five), the *mâ* worked as 'the untold', but not in the sense of a conspiracy of silence. The modes of learning and resistance shown by Mang Mang in the Cl.in class were in contrast to the attempts of 'persuasion' typical of the French style of rhetorical teaching. Whereas in Tahar's case, the *mâ* materialises the perspective of another type of 'in between', more spatially bounded to the places that the young Algerian boy left behind or was abandoned by in the sense of his world falling apart, disintegrating if only to be later 'restored'. To leave for exile in such a state of bereavement after such a catastrophic event as the earthquake, could indeed have the potential to make him speechless, bordering on a form of aphasia – for nothing more could be said. This was one possibility. But the love expressed by those who survived, the sense of a future which was restored by the reunification with his father in Ireland helped Tahar to move on.

Endeavouring to describe an event or phenomenon which is not based in linear time, but rather by way of an uneven pulse, closer to the way remembrance operates, the shared time of the family, with its tempo and rhythm, resembles an oscillation in which one can trace a line between a 'before' and 'after' of Tahar's

circumcision, a before and after the exile of his father, a before and after the earthquake which destroyed his quarter, his neighbours and peers, a before and after the journey which made him leave his country for a long time. While all these transitions can be read as borderlines, I think this interpretation simplifies what is perhaps more dynamic: what is an 'in between' space-time, allowing Tahar to move fluently, if not with his speech but with his desire to talk. In fact Tahar talks through his body, his dreams and reveries, his love for sports, running, football.

DVD 2 ch. 4.1 clip n. 6 (9_5). Running siblings, Tahar's body language. 2'20''.

Working with film made it possible to cross these borders of memory, consciousness and present life with more ease from his side. Film allowed for this phenomenological motion to be captured in context.

DVD 2 ch. 4.2 clip n. 7 (4_4) + (11_10). Tahar's first ESL test with Miss Linda.

Tahar commenting some months later looking at my video. 2'40'' + 2'52''

On one of his first days at school Tahar's new Irish primary teacher, Miss Morris, asked him how to spell his family name correctly before the roll-call (DVD clip 10_2). Such tact and attention is rarely shown to immigrant subjects and constitutes, in my interpretation, a crucial but often implicit understanding of a need to be acknowledged. Children can maintain continuity of identity by regarding their name as a visible piece of their body; in this they differ from adults, who know that names are or can become a convention. Many migrant children I have met (though not Tahar) have been forced by practical circumstances to change their names. Reasons vary: false passports, the need to smuggle subjects across borders, political persecution of family members, a more accessible spelling of names perceived as

'difficult' in the host environment, a quasi or complete 'assimilation' into the host language.⁷

The 'double' names of the children I worked with (Sebastian-Monty; Nawel-Kheira; or Atillio-Jon), were sometimes revealed, sometimes hidden; it is a question I address with caution and determination after a long period spent in building trust and reciprocal confidentiality. It is a telling point, marking a tangible borderline between 'before' and 'after' migration; one name belongs to ancestry and the mother tongue, the other marks the migratory move to a new form of kinship, more imagined and idealized. The former, if not 'secret' name (which sometimes cannot be revealed because clandestine) of many migrant children becomes the name of the 'former' self, the child before the journey, a protagonist of other stories, a twin in another space-time.

Irish carers and peers could easily pronounce Tahar's name, unlike many foreign names, but he had a problem in accommodating it in terms of Western written forms. In an early visit to the family's one-room basement in Parnell Square (inner-city Dublin), I observed that Tahar could not hear and write 'T', the initial letter of his name. While studying Berber phonetics and systems of notation, I had encountered the sound T (t) of Tamazight, and noticed that the phoneme 't' is attached as a prefix to the word Amazigh (a Berber), T+Amazigh, meaning the language of Imazighens, to make Tamazight (the Berber language). With Tahar's father's help, I learned further that, according to recent work under the auspices of the emerging Kabyl cultural-national movement (Kabylie is the name of the region where the family lived in Algeria and the variant of Berber spoken there is called

Kabyl), that Amazigh probably means ‘free human being’, whose plural is Imazighens, in the ancient Berber language; the Berber letter representing the ‘z’ sound in Amazigh is the current symbol of the Kabyl liberation movement in the Maghreb, appearing on flags, CD covers and modern jewellery.

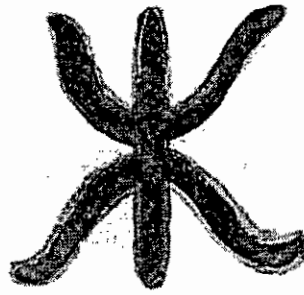


Figure 4.4 Amazir alphabetic sign.

Ethnic identity, separation movements, cultural diasporic trends and ‘Arabization’ policies have provoked tensions in Morocco and Algeria for decades, and in Algeria they have exploded even more violently during the last ten years of civil war.⁸ The Algerian-Berber diaspora is estimated at 1,000,000 people in France alone. Some Berber musicians and poets, like Matoub Lounès, were recently murdered or imprisoned when they toured from France in Algeria.⁹ Following the riots of 2003, the Algerian government has tried to come to terms with the Kabyl Independence Movement and there are indications that the government intends to introduce Tamazight as a second language in primary schools for Tamazight-speakers or for those who recognise themselves as Imazighens people.¹⁰ I emphasise here the belonging to the Kabyl ethnic and cultural movement because Tahar’s father explained this to me at once, when I first visited the family. He presented with his own words his sense of belonging. What follows is a transcription of his explanation in the context of a conversation we had very early on in our relationship. In this conversation, which took place in the presence of Tahar,

Yasmina and Karima, his wife, I recognised some parallels about the way he looks at Irish and Berber linguistic histories in the context of hegemonic cultures. This brought me to further analyse some other political parallels, like those between IRA and FLN. But this speculation goes beyond Tahar's portrait and it was addressed during informal talks when I did not film.

In the dialogue outlined below, he speaks French and English with me, since we always used the two languages from the outset, shifting without even thinking and according to the topic, or because there was a word we were not sure about and replaced and tested it out in the other language (this is why I kept both languages as they were uttered in my transcription). As in the case of most multilingual speakers, the terms in use in a specific context and in a specific society are utilised in the majority language or vernacular jargon of that society. Moreover, if we happened to utilise acronyms,¹¹ which inevitably are only understandable for locals, including major ones like IRA, FLN, we would often shift to the languages in which these acronyms belong, moving back and forth fluidly. With Mr Mourad and later with Yasmina, we often practised this *paso doble* form of talking, making it hard for external onlookers to follow all what we said yet nonetheless creating a lively, sometimes unpredictable form of communication. I thus tried at times to constantly come back to French in order to allow the grandmother and the wife a better understanding of our conversation, such as in the following dialogue:

Rossella (R): '(What about) the other languages of Algeria, the minority languages, like you have Arabic as the dominant language...'

Mourad (M): 'Yeah, the first language.'

R: 'But then, you have Berber...'

M: 'Eh...'

R: (*Switch to French*) '...Vous avez le berbère?'

M: 'Oui, mais on a le berbère, disons la langue berbère qui est étudiée pour le moment à l'école universitaire.'

R: 'Oui.'

M: 'À haut niveau, et récemment après les événements qui se sont produits dans le Pays, les affrontements, le peuple, disons les Amazighs, la gendarmerie, l'armée et tout cela.'

R: '... Oui.'

M: '... Ils viennent d'adopter une loi que le Tamazight sera enseigné, je crois, à partir de l'année prochaine, mais il y aura, disons elle sera incluse dans la constitution national...'

R: 'Mais c'est quoi le Tamazight, c'est une autre langue?'

M: 'Yeah!'

R: 'C'est la langue berbère?'

M: 'You know... quand je dit Tamazight, c'est la langue. C'est comme si je disais 'Irish and 'English.'

R: 'Voilà.'

M: 'The Irish is a language, but when England, the British, invaded this country, so they ruled it, and there was no Irish after long time, so now they speak English. But they are not English they are Irish.'

R: 'Yah...'

M: 'We still watch (*the national TV*) and you hear the Irish.'

R: 'Yah.'

M: 'It is the same thing for us. Like, I am a Muslim, I am from Algeria, we are Algerians, but we are not Arabic, we are Berbers.'

R: 'Ok...'

M: 'We are Imazighen, as we say. But we have the chance to speak Arabic, Tamazight, French, and English. And we are learning Russian, Italian...'

R: 'Yeah' (*laughs*)

M: 'So, you know, it's good for us, for my kids especially. So I always encouraged them to learn languages.'

R: 'Absolutely, it creates a form of richness.'

M: 'Yeah, bien sur, bien sur...'

R: 'And now the Tamazight will be included in the constitution you said. Before it was a language that was banned from school.'

M: 'Yeah actually, during Boumenès era... the president Boumenès...'

R: 'Yes...'

M: 'It was categorically forbidden'.

R: 'So you could not speak at school?'

M: 'Impossible not even outside'.

R: 'Even outside?'

M: 'Yeah!' (*Stressing the nodding with his hands*). 'Even outside. You gonna speak it at home and that's it! Otherwise if you go out and you speak it, like you got in...'

R: 'Troubles?'

M: 'Yeah, you are really in trouble.'

R: 'Oh, I see...'

M: 'But hopefully... like... you know you got also in Algeria the freedom to express yourself. Sometimes it's not that large, it's a little bit tight. But hopefully now they are getting open...' (*Perplexity, embarrassment, irony perhaps*)

R: 'Yeah...' (*clearly ironic*)

M: 'So, like, what happened this year made the government think otherwise, because it's not that fair. And after many people died, on the... like... riots, between the police forces and the Imazighen people. They had a talk and they decided, they agreed that I think after next year it will be included in the program.'

R: 'Yeah.'

M: 'Like, from primary, middle, second degree and whatever! But still the Arabic is the dominant language.'

R: 'Yeah, of course. But there is still a tradition of Tamazight... written?'

M: 'No, no. We got the alphabet!'

R: 'Ok! There is an alphabet!'

M: 'Definitely, we got the alphabet and if you get the chance in Paris you can go to a library, and ask for Tamazight books, Berber books. And you will find, we have writers, we have poets, we have singers like Idir, Lounès, etc.

We got great names also. There are poets, singers and also got writers, see? And it's written in Tamazight. And we got a great poet who is called Mammeri. I don't know if he's known in France, but in Algeria he is. And he has written great poems actually, and books.'

R: 'So, actually, people who cannot speak Tamazight, in order to read these poems, have to have a translation in Arabic?'

M: 'Well, I didn't study transcription, I didn't have to study the alphabet, but when I got the book I could read it. You see because, you use your imagination. You see

what I mean? Because I'm speaking English actually, but I also speak Berber fluently. Because we speak it at home, though we speak Arabic, also. But we speak Tamazight, so I could read it and I had never ever studied, like the Tamazight alphabet.'

R: 'It's an alphabet like a Latin one?'

M: 'Eh...'

R: 'Or it's like Arabic?'

M: 'No, no, no, it's not like Arabic. If you go to Latin it would be nearly, nevertheless, the same. C'est plus au moins les mêmes.'

Since the family's Berber identity was emphasized, and also because I was interested, 'Kabyliaphilia' became a theme performed by all the members of the family except Tahar. He had refused to speak Kabyl at home since arriving in Ireland, sticking instead to Arabic. There was a nostalgic moment during the fourth birthday celebrations for the 'baby growing older', Sara, when unexpectedly all the onlookers started to listen to a CD of a famous Kabyl singer, the *chansonnier* Idir.

DVD 2 ch. 4.2 clip n. 8 (8_6). Idir's song. 3'20''.

The song is powerfully nostalgic and draws attention, in very lyrical language, to the political oppression endured by the Kabyl people. It was sung first in Tamazight and then in French, bypassing Arabic, as Idir does intentionally in most of his songs. While they listened to the only CD they had brought with them to Ireland (everything else was lost in the earthquake), each person in the living-room seemed to be absorbed in his or her own mood. I wandered about with my camera, capturing this condition of suspended exile with great intensity. The emerging sentiments from the various members of the family as they discussed their lost

homeland – Kabylia, Algeria – in front of and for the camera, allowed for lyrical and open speculation about that imagined land as perceived by three different generations, for whom the song had very diverse meanings and evocations. Nothing was really discussed on the spot, apart from two swift comments from the mother: ‘It is terrific, isn't it? It's gorgeous, but so sad;’ and the daughter: ‘It tells about a sad past, things which have faded away.’ I captured the way it was expressed, experienced and re-enacted through the body language of the different members of the family, looking for or losing contact, coming together or drifting away, as well as through the feelings of solidarity evoked by the song: Tahar trying to get his sister to dance, the mother receiving and tenderly holding a doll from Sara the grandmother still melancholic, Yasmina observing, the younger daughter looking at pictures of herself as a small child. Textually, this sequence can only be rendered partially. One must definitely watch and hear it: for its temporal duration over space and through the movements of the camera, framing and rendering my gaze as a participant and a freshly arrived member of the audience,¹² embeds the very meaning of this collective moment.

In the beginning I found Tahar's behaviour enigmatic; he directed my attention to his form of sociality through a very limited and episodic verbal address. He seemed to me to be expressing acceptance of his fate as being the only boy in the family, inheriting the values of a constructed virility, which in Kabyl is named *redjila*, having an identity specific relevance to the rearing of a male boy. In this respect, the upbringing based on masculine sport performances was the emblematic locus of his success following the tradition of his relatives, and the sphere in which his father's expectations could be revealed. In Regaya, for example, Tahar had been

selected for national competitions and had hoped to become a junior karate champion. His ability in this martial art showed him to be strong, able to overcome the traumatic experience of the earthquake and eager to let the body ‘speak’ through the postures of staged combat. In the short moment with his father, seen earlier in the sequence of the house in Parnell square, this playful moment of ‘dialogue’ through karate enacts a ‘familiar lexicon’, a common past and a passion for the same sport shared by father and son; it is also an attempt by Tahar to restore extra-linguistic communication with his father. The fact that his father had practised the same sport represented a bond between them. This bond was the living heritage which Tahar had brought with him, along with his karate club membership card from Regaya – his real passport and emblematic sign of continuity, a document which had meaning and in which his name sounded pleasant and full of praise, the initial letter restored: T+Ahar. The name thus symbolises and reconfigures two temporal dimensions which had fallen apart in his actual life.



Figure 5.4 Tahar’s Karate National Team membership card

During their last months in Regaya, perhaps because his father could not support and check out the formalities, the mother explained that Tahar was excluded from the last combat lesson and could not reach the brown belt certificate competition. Arriving in Dublin he could not immediately find the right gymnasium and acceptable milieu to continue his lessons in martial arts. The quarter in Parnell Square had one centre, but much older boys used it and Mr Mourad thought it was simply a place of exaltation for aggressive defence and attack training. It was not a location in which to learn as a young child, the love of the sport as an art in itself. Evidently he did not wish Tahar to frequent such a social milieu, which he thought encouraged martial arts to be also 'practiced' outside the gymnasium. He thus tried to cultivate his bodily memory of some patterns, which they shared as a game and as the sequence (DVD clip Dv 8_3) presented earlier shows.

Religious Ethos and Customary Islam

My research with the family occurred against the wider background of war in both Afghanistan and Iraq (2002-2004). This family was defining its own 'Islamic' ethos as pluralistic. In this way they express themselves across a wide field of practices which cover religion, customary laws, rituals, culture of the senses, elite's and popular knowledge, gender boundaries, age and class organisation, none of which support terrorism nor any of the regimes in power in several Middle Eastern countries. For example, Tahar's family was not part of a network connected to after-school or Friday (Muslim holy day) activities within a mosque, in the larger Dublin Islamic community. The father preferred not to attend the Mosques of Dublin, for fear of being singled out and because he liked to keep a low profile. Neither he nor his family ever went to the Mosques in their town in Algeria, so this non-attendance

was not a result of exile. Sometimes the need for social contact and the empowerment a religious affiliation affords migrants in foreign contexts is indeed necessary and appealing; it often encourages migrants to embrace a different attitude toward their 'faith' in the context of their integration into a foreign country. In this respect Mr Mourad could have discovered that he was a more devoted and observant Muslim in Dublin, thus benefiting from a wider social network or perhaps find consolation or help in difficult moments in the Mosque's milieu. Instead, he chose not to do it, explaining that he was not accustomed to this in Algeria and had no need to change this practice. He did not see why he should modify his customary practices of Islam and expose himself to regular visibility as a member of the Muslim community in Dublin.

The family never commented about the lack of public social occasions, neither did they indicate that they missed key-events, such as Aïd or the end of Ramadan, because they were not accustomed to marking such events by going to the Mosque even in Regaya. Customary prayers during Ramadan were nevertheless respected, as well as the habits of cooking special food connected with the feast. Yasmina gave knowledgeable and sensuous recollection of when she was a child participating in these intimate Ramadan rituals and special occasions in Regaya. While giving a literary account of the diversity of tastes, colours, feelings and expectations of a young girl, who is able to render her knowledge in a very precise way, she also evokes the concrete manifestations of freedom that this period of fast symbolises for women, in contrast to the popular and common sense perception of Ramadan's gender rules, as constructed within certain discourses of Western Orientalism (Saida 1998, 2001; Maizi 2000).

DVD 2 Ch. 4.2 clip 9 (11_8). First Ramadan in Ireland 2003. 6'49'.

Furthermore, the family was able to amuse themselves by watching the film rushes of these rituals. They remarked on the way the children were learning the customary prayers during Ramadan, as seen in the sequence linked above. There was no censoring or enforced sombreness (as some anti-Islamic stereotypes often illustrate), as the family watched the children praying with a carpet. One could joke in a relatively light mood, and the level of self-irony and miming of the 'awkwardness' of some movements in bending and bowing over the floor, was very evident. Laughter on my part was also welcomed. The father never forbade me to film when some of the family members were praying in their private rooms. And since I had already filmed in Muslim communities, I was expecting more censorship. But when Mr Mourad saw that I knew where to position my body in relation to the Mecca and the prayer, he felt he could allow me enter the room. There was an implicit agreement between us that in some respects this representation was being made in order to perhaps bridge the gap of misunderstanding between the Muslim and non-Muslim world. In some small way, we entered into this contract knowing that the camera could act as a mediator between these worlds, offering a different portrait of a much misrepresented religion and collective cultural practice. Tahar's father was fully aware of why this representation, this intimate habitus, was critical at this moment in time, in Ireland and elsewhere.

Second Ramadan

The following DVD sequence was shot in the second Ramadan and is kept mostly in *plan sequence*, since it is interesting to analyse what the cinematic engagement can capture and reveal on such occasions. I was not aware that this particular phone call would in many ways illustrate or at least instantiate a sort of 'crossing point'. The sequence appears as if it is a somewhat banal, long, typical phone call from one migrant family to its counterpart in country of origin. There are no crucial revelations from the actors' standpoint, but the fact that I shot it paying special attention to the inscription of para-verbal and extra-verbal aspects of the communication partially explains why this is one of the longest sequences of the DVD.

DVD 2 ch. 4.2 clip 10 (Dv 9_1). Second Ramadan in Ireland 2004. 10'40''.

During this familial event a number of migratory experiences of long distance communication were performed, raising issues of gender, transgenerational and psychological /affective exchanges. In addition, we see a tactile dimension concerning the several languages at play within the family, what I would call 'family-familiar lexicon', age-based idioms, which then allows for a more socio-linguistic analysis. It is interesting to see and hear these linguistic actions, which are captured here in what I would call a 'performative density'. Space, place and thematic converge in a dynamic exemplification: the kitchen is situated as a laboratory of sorts, where the *métissage* between important practices of the country of origin and the new practices within the host country both emerge and merge. The sequence was taken during the third day of Ramadan. Because this was the second Ramadan the family were celebrating after they had been reunited in Dublin, I had a

historical span of time in which to measure the event, aware that my relationship with the family had grown over this period and where changes in the attitude of each member of the family were literally audible and visible.

I want to lead the reader/viewer into the event as if experienced in 'real time'. It is almost 7 pm and time for breaking the ritual fast. Yasmina has tried to call Regaya all day long without succeeding. She utilises a land-phone, but with a pre-paid card, which allows the caller to talk to Algeria for 25-30 minutes for 5 Euro. Here we see the individuation of one of the principles of diasporic attachment (Gupta & Ferguson 2000), whereby cheap means of communication allow for relationships of participation, co-presence in two or more places, creating new objects of consumerism and a transnational community of both users and producers – in this case involving those who have a mobile or have access to cheap phone cards, like many youngsters in diasporic urban milieus but also their peers in urban Third and Fourth World countries. Through online chats, emails, cheap calls, pre-paid cards, and in the case of this particular Algerian family, where children are rapidly becoming youngsters, one could argue that these tools enable an easier integration in Ireland because the connection with the place of origin can be constantly fed with regular communication. This technology also provides a radical transformation of the familiar stereotypical image of the migrant standing outside the public phone-box, talking hectically for five minutes having saved the money for the call over many weeks. The fact that one can now chat for more than 20-30 minutes, given the affordable price, allows the caller to enter into a degree of detail, previously impossible to convey. Since the card is temporally limited, it also creates a sense of

an event, with participants talking extensively without having to plan in advance the content of the chat. It is, therefore, more improvised, as evident below.

This new form of communication allows Yasmina to begin to explain to her auntie just how to use the greetings gadgets of her Algerian mobile phone. These cards offer the possibility, as well as the illusion, of being completely 'there' where one calls, in the same city, so to speak. Yet phone connections remain as a non-crossable frontier and do not allow for a sharing of other forms of somatic communication. A long phone call across such a distance, in which one can explain to his or her interlocutor how to use an artefact or tool, or to relate in detail a particular point of view, creates a different mode of presence and absence and despite the distance one can compensate through extended and regular verbal contact. Yet, in some instances, the trauma of distance interrupts the flow, when in the above sequence Nualá becomes suddenly aware of the great geographical distance and begins to cry, and perhaps due to a feeling of frustration and grief, she gives the phone to her daughter in law. I was not completely at ease filming this passage, given that Nualá is so shaken. I visibly hesitate in a form of self-censorship during this obviously intimate moment, because I do not speak Tamazight and cannot understand what is confidential. But it seems to me that part of our tacit agreement, embedded in the performative mode of such an approach to filming, consists in developing a series of signals so I do not point my camera directly (such as, turning the shoulders, moving into an inaccessible room, looking at me and signalling something by way of a gaze). It is a sort of *paso doble* where I must be immediately aware not to abuse the trust and openness of an entire community but rather respect the privacy of a space where I can otherwise move at ease. While it is

not forbidden to film, it might not be desired. In some cases it is perhaps too desired, that is when the performance is artificial, such as the excited moments of the phone call where I am visibly invited to record how happy, close and communicative they all are, inviting me to celebrate, through film, their contact, in Ireland as much as in Algeria. However, it should also be noted that I maintain the ritual of the 'feedback sessions' after some weeks, where the whole family is invited to look at the rushes and to comment, react and eventually censor some of the shots. So that I feel quite comfortable with the fact that whether before or after, what must not be revealed to a wider world, will be detected.

It is possible to imagine the auntie in her kitchen in Algeria inhabiting a parallel space for the breaking of the fast, as witnessed in Yasmina's house: two kitchens, each containing a social gathering that is shaped by an abundance of food and joyful celebration. Unexpectedly, when I went to change my batteries, I was given the phone to speak myself with Jamila, the aunt; I was the only new acquaintance in both gatherings. Yasmina filmed me greeting in French, the members of the family in Regaya, who I knew only through Tahar's family stories. Yasmina said she wanted to send the shots of this exchange to them in order to see 'who was the lady talking to them'. This shoot became an attempt, therefore, to show various self-reflexive layers but also to convey a meta level in terms of transnational temporality. How, for example, can these film images build a sense of the future?

'Send this tape one day to Algeria, they would like to see you' Yasmina says, and by so doing, attempts to close the gap of reciprocity, the riddle of the camera-lady speaking, un-visualised from Ireland. Levels of simultaneity become so intertwined

that they swell into a time beyond the film, toward a use beyond the research purpose. Roles and platforms are turned upside down. I exist to film and the film exists to show who actually filmed it.



Figure 6.4 The researcher interviewing, filmed by Yasmina

At the level of emotional register, we see that the women wait for their turn with impatience, cry for grief, smile, and laugh when they are told about the typical Ramadan TV sketches; they get involved in long explanations about how to use a cell phone and exchange descriptions about the way the food came out that day. Yasmina describes her recent exams; Tahar describes the outcome of his last match, and they also gossip, show curiosity, suspend judgements, and sigh. Yasmina is the only one able to speak all the languages evoked during the long session. She is also the one who hands the receiver to each member under her grandmother's supervision. The chat seems gendered, predominantly feminine in its features, tempo, language and contents, and although Nualá's gaze is strict and censoring at times, there is less stiffness between the women, probably because the father is not

at home. The point for me here is not to capture everything said, that is complete conversations, but to leave some of the parts inaccessible, to let the social actors keep some space for themselves, for example, when I do not follow Karima going to Tahar, and I film the boy talking in the distance. Whilst Karima cuts the traditional flat bread, Yasmina carefully coaches her aunt in the enterprise of activating SMS gadgets in her new phone. All these gestures and criss-crossing actions occur in these twinned kitchens, several thousand kilometres apart. Several sounds off frame enrich the simultaneity of these co-presences: the grandmother's voice, Tahar's TV, Sarah playing, and Karima cooking. This off frame material is not external to the phone communication but actually feeds it. Film allows for a gestalt-like intermingling of planes and renders the complexity of what could be described as a private, intimate communication between two subjects making a phone call. But in this case, the phone call is acted upon and performed by two communities. Although Yasmina is the pillar around which all this happens, we negotiate visually and aurally, the complex interplay of more than five actors involved in the choreography: aunt Jamila, her daughter Silia and her son Nassim, Tahar's cousins, the grandmother Noulá, Karima, Yasmina, Tahar and Sarah.

In many ways this is a fairly obvious and ordinary phone call during the time of Ramadan for those in exile. It can also be viewed as emblematic of research on the subject of transnational migration. By putting together several other sequences and comparing, analysing, and translating dialogues, I can start to map and theorise about the construction of domestic female space: a space of conversation, creativeness, where knowledge is transmitted, where expressions of gendered agency and intergenerational communication occur. Thus, the time of Ramadan,

perceived in some stereotypical representations as a period of obscure austerity, purification of sins, boredom, repression of sexuality and the denial of any pleasure, is here shown to also be a completely different locus for joy, marked in contrast to the bodily experiences, desires, practices of hygiene, and modes of sociality, which during the rest of the year do not have the same type of intensity. When Karima realises that more than 25 minutes have passed by, Yasmina smiles, since she is sure of her budget through the pre-paid cards. It is as if her agency is again expressed, ensuring that her command of fast and cheap communication technology is competent, thereby contributing significantly to the new family life outside of Algeria. She translates this competence into a wider arena, bringing the extended family together and therefore performing a complementary role to that of her mother.

Algeria Inside, Outside, Between Us

Fifty years have passed since the beginning of the civil war of Independence, so well illustrated in Pontecorvo's acclaimed film *The Battle of Algiers* (1964). The Algerian Nation underwent many social and political crises due to the firm leadership of the FLN, which did not allow for opposition but rather practiced a form of both pursuing and purging opposition since its establishment (Boserup 2004). When the deep economic crisis appeared in the beginning of the 1980s, with a parallel rise of organized violence in all strata of society, inevitable clashes came to the surface and Algerian society went through a very traumatic decade.¹³ Hence the motives behind Mr Mourad's application for exile abroad are not discussed in this text, for reasons of safety; yet because visual anthropological research does not

allow for 'anonymity', images, voices, people filmed are obviously recognizable and this productive tension runs throughout this account.

Tahar's father is indeed a complex figure and the more I research recent Algerian history, the more I feel I am perhaps belittling the motivations behind his exile and consequently that of Tahar, Sarah and Yasmina's past and future. Yet at the same time and because of these sensitive issues, I must downplay and not probe the background behind his departure. Simultaneously, I was also aware of a prevailing nostalgia on the part of Tahar's father and indeed the family for a certain image of Algeria, which circulates on the internet and is itself an interesting object of study with regard to Algerian identity; here a certain love of songs and films provides a cultural marker of Algerian dissidence. However, dissidence, in this context, is not always associated with left politics or is necessarily humanitarian in its sentiment. For Algerian dissidence comprises both a mixture of hate and frustration and can even occupy a conservative position. It illustrates a complex identity, made up of layers of plural and conflicting instances, especially since there are not as many exiled Algerian subjects if one compares figures of exiled subjects from Argentina, Chile, Cuba, and Soviet Russia. In many instances exile is associated with economic migration so that political motivations and circumstances are covered and camouflaged, for fear of recrimination. It is often considered too dangerous, but also too public to ask for asylum abroad and Algerians often claim the opportunity to move back and forth between Algeria and the host country. One always prefers to justify migration as an economically-driven decision, even if the motivation for exile was indeed political. But Tahar's father did not and it often seemed to me that he regretted this choice.

I often wondered what type of challenges Tahar's parents would encounter if new children were born in Ireland following the family reunion. How would issues of dual citizenship (Vertovec 1999) be handled? At the beginning, he spoke very positively about Ireland and Irish friends, but little by little it emerged in my eyes that this was his polite way of holding back a sense of frustration, sometimes bitterness and slight scorn for having lost his status of once being a 'respected and powerful man'. For he had experienced the painful expressions of racism¹⁴ in some of the pubs where he thought he had new Irish friends. He admitted that social life as a single man in Ireland could not be tolerated unless he went regularly to pubs, socialising and drinking in the company of new acquaintances. This, he added, had helped prevent him from falling into a deep depression following his first months of exile in Dublin. The administrative paperwork involved in bringing his family to Ireland demanded that he wait every week for new and repeated administrative tasks, in addition to the fact that his material conditions were so unbearable in relation to his previous lifestyle. So when his wife arrived in Dublin, she encountered a husband with new habits, almost unknown to her in their years together in Algeria. There, Tahar's father used to work as a French and English language and literature lecturer in middle schools and was respected as a wise man, chief of his quarter, sport's champion and so forth. The ordinary life as subsided isolated single man in Dublin, doing small jobs, living as an isolated single man in Dublin, doing small jobs and living in one room underground, was of course a shocking change.

He presented himself in the stereotypical mode of an 'alien-alienated-alienating' subject (Fanon 1963). 'Alien' in juridical terms, because of his uncertain political status in Ireland (he had as yet no passport after three years of waiting), as well as in popular stereotypes (as a Muslim subject in Ireland); 'Alienated' since he was split from his community and also mentally afflicted from having changed his social habits. (For instance, he explained that when he went as a Muslim to Irish pubs every night, he often experienced overt expressions of racism, threats of violence from customers who were drunk, in addition to encountering problems with the police if he came upon arguments after the pub closed). This was also 'alienating' since his right to safety and freedom to be in his own country and community was now severed. For political exile means a sacrifice for a cause – not merely personal or individual but serves the political struggle of a larger community of people. For them the exiled person raises his or her voice, takes risks and pays with his or her own alienation from that same community s/he belongs to so strongly (culture, nation, ethnic minority or political group for instance), perhaps forever.

Tahar's father requested that I not inquire about the political reasons and implications of his exile and I respected the confidentiality of what I learned. Yet, other aspects concerning the socio-political conditions of Algeria often played as metaphors for the ideological 'untold'. One of these aspects materialised in the earthquake, which destroyed the region of Regaya. Furthermore, I felt I should not investigate in depth his political background, because in the case of Algerian asylum seekers, the purges operated with brutality and precision through civil servants' information and spies. I think Mr Mourad wanted also to protect me from

knowing 'too much', in case one day he was in trouble, for the sake of his own family safety.¹⁵

For the other family members joining the exiled chief and father, it can be said that they came to be their loved one and did not know much about what the new location would look like. Most of their ideas about Ireland came from him through letters and pictures, often rehearsing a decorous life and exhibiting picturesque places. They welcomed everything new in the beginning, and I came into a family where these things were everything was unfolding afresh. The meeting and recognition of each other and the platform to build a future was literally being laid down. In the following sequence, we see an episode that sheds light on some of the patterns encountered after family reunification, relating to the sense of waiting and receiving images of Ireland sent back to Algeria during the father's years of exile. Mr Mourad had promised many times in his letters to take the children to St. Patrick Day parade, the most important Irish festival, occurring annually on the 17th of March.

The shots capture the father and children literally traversing the event with a somewhat confused if not surreal air. The long awaited festival resulted in a situation where probably Tahar and Yasmina, and later surely Sara, will want to go with their new Irish friends and not with their Algerian kin in the future. It is an event that could be better experienced among peers, and most definitely Irish youngsters. The family here seem out of place and are essentially onlookers. The difference between the generations, parent and children, remains marked. This is often what happens to migrants who have undergone family reunification. For it is often the case that the second generation eventually 'fit' in well to such rituals and

the first generation remain on the margins, always categorised as the spectator rather than participant.

DVD 2 ch. 4.2 clip 11(Dv 5_5). Father and siblings at St. Patrick Day. 6'46''.

Yasmina: Tahar's older sister

When I first began to meet with Yasmina, in a one-room basement flat in the inner-city, she wore her school uniform all day long, perfectly clean and ironed. She kept her hair in a bun, was often smiling and exhibiting a certain form of shyness.



Figure 7.4 Yasmina in the first period in Ireland

After some months I noticed she had freed her long black hair, wore coloured dresses after school and was feeling less stiff when talking nostalgically about Algeria, expressing a somewhat sensuous evocation of her origins through her body language. When she then moved to Swords, to the outskirts of a middle class suburb, she started to resemble every other girl in her school, wearing teenage trendy clothes, asking to buy them as much as she had previously asked to buy notebooks and pencils, and putting much effort into being like everybody else, even

by cutting her hair in a new fashion and showing her trendy mobile phone at any occasion. The mobile phone occupied much of her energy and became a sort of fetish, a constant reference in her manipulations, especially when exhibiting 'boredom' in the domestic sphere, where she was never asked to help much with domestic tasks, in order to preserve her time and energy for studying.

The mobile was her sole toy, the sole toy which she carried through her new Irish life. Having lost everything during the earthquake, her personal wealth was nonexistent, and she seemed to avoid accumulating other objects. The mobile was the only object she wanted.



Figure 8.4 Yasmina enjoying her new mobile phone.

By getting more and more acquainted with the whole family, I gained access to daily conversations, ordinary events unfolding in the domestic sphere, the even reached a certain form of reciprocal interest. The social actors started to ask me about my own life and conditions of expatriation; moreover, the discovery that I was a parent of children who were far from me while I was conducting fieldwork,

made them very worried. They would say: 'When you are in Dublin, please, come here. We'll make you feel at home!' Thus, I realised that my presence and role as researcher, because established on the premises of a study on migration and childhood, started to move out of tune with my ability to perceive their meaningful actions, as bearers of identity-making in progress. From one perspective, I often essentialised Tahar's migrant identity by addressing him under a limited definition of his public Self (as a young migrant child), a condition he was trying to traverse and seemed to struggle against more and more. From yet another perspective, I tended to look at Yasmina as if she still occupied the role of a young migrant girl, the one I first met in Parnell Square; yet she did not appear to be that subject anymore. She herself wanted to be seen as somebody who had grown into adolescence, unequivocally and immediately. One telling sign of this was that she had regular communication with me through SMS, phone calls and emails, autonomously, and clearly aimed at becoming acquainted with me independently from her mother and father. She responded to puberty with all her best range of choices and constructed identities: as an Algerian Muslim, careful in her social gendered attitudes, serious and competent in her studies, obeying her father and grandmother's wishes, as well as being a European, free-thinking teenager. She was thus integrating into an Irish group of local youngsters and facing her future in the local high school with the realism of somebody who is there to stay and will succeed. These multiple levels of identity were expressed in her self re-presentation in the various contexts where she was acting. These issues could coexist, her agency made them both intertwine and feed each other's standpoints. Yasmina seemed to maintain her agency through all these parallel locations because she could analyse her dilemmas openly, such as in the clip presented below. She could

situate her historical condition, putting herself in the position of others and even of similar-selves (as in the case of her friend Karima, who was part Algerian but did not sympathize with this identity) and could even envisage a palette of choices and behaviours at her disposal.

DVD 2 ch. 4.2 clip 12 (Dv 9_3). Yasmina talks about her friend who has an Algerian father and Irish mother. 6'10''.

My incessant focus on Yasmina and Tahar as social actors undergoing migration was to a significant degree resisted by them, urging me to consider other dimensions to their everyday lives unrelated to their migratory experiences.¹⁶ I obtained this insight only after having filmed for several months. As before, filming helped me to situate our reciprocity and 'coevalness'. There is a certain level of mutual evidence when the camera is acting in an observational participatory mode and even the actors themselves detect this. One might say that the images of these transformations could not be disguised. And this was also because the methodology in use, namely cinema *vérité* permeated every shot. Yet now the positioning of their identity and habitus had shifted; they wished for a representation based on a life among the Irish, among the middle class kids of Swords Manor, maybe also among relatives in Algeria, even if for a summer holiday trip. Hence I came to realise how strongly I had frozen that frame, mentally and physically, on a certain given phase of their integration and growth in Ireland (when they were still caught in the initial phase of literally being culturally at odds with their new environment), and I now had to catch up in time. They seemed to point this out to me politely but unequivocally.

DVD 2 ch. 4.3 clip 13 (Dv 11_9). Tahar and Yasmina speak about the idea of returning to Algeria for holidays. 3'37''.

In this sequence, Tahar is tackling some aspects of his agency in maintaining his multiple identities while wishing to evolve in that he sees himself as a well-established junior champion in the field of Irish football. With such a target in progress, life in Swords seems to be, in his eyes, more worthwhile. He sees it almost as a mission, enabling him to live far away from Algeria. The sport almost seems to justify the longing, the pain and awkwardness he felt at the beginning. He now has a project to pursue and realise, which allows the rest to fall into place, school included, because at school sport is well respected. His English, with local inflections, is learnt through the sociality of football's events and milieus. Because he is said to be the best player of his team, his charisma is reinforced beyond the fact of being a new foreign acquaintance for his contemporaries. Parallel to his self-realisation in the social sphere of football, Tahar was admitted to a local group of lower-middle class Irish both boys and girls. He is, in fact, part of the same local gang as Yasmina. One could argue that both siblings attempted to socially integrate via a completely different palette of social skills and public performances: Tahar through his physical energy, his joyful body language, courage in attempting physical trials and, linguistically, by picking up the vernacular jargon of the street he frequented; Yasmina, by daring to use public transport to regularly visit downtown, purchasing stuff which was highly appreciated in her provincial entourage, by changing her appearance as a fashionable teenager, with a certain *métissée* aura, by talking and translating all the languages she needed to sustain in her layered identities and ethnical locations. She also exhibited pride and courage through fighting provocations or racists acts aimed at her siblings and herself. Yet another strategy was in doing very well in class, where she was one of the rare 'non-nationals'. Lastly, she became an expert in mobile phones, which she fixed,

recycled, exchanged and sometimes even sold or sent to Algeria as second hand items to offer to her friends and relatives.

In the sequence outlined below, Yasmina articulates a different perspective in comparison to Tahar concerning her future in Ireland, where she is able to express her need to reconcile places and ages, milieus and education more clearly. She cannot see how the change had brought her more opportunities for her empowerment, at the same time she states that she has enriched herself with new languages, with an ideal notion of becoming cosmopolitan, of having more freedom in her education, and more choices in her future life as a grown up woman and eventually mother or/and wife.

DVD 2 ch. 4.3 clip 14 (Dv 11_11). Becoming a woman: chatting in the yard with mother and grandmother. 5'59''.

In similar conversations around the kitchen table, images of the present life of the siblings are told and retold, and the recollections take place without a real plan, as they unfold. In the below sequence, Tahar and Yasmina told their mother and myself about their meeting with youngsters who behaved in a racist manner. Like me, Karima seemed to hear these facts for the first time. These racist incidents had repeatedly taken place during regular visits to a commercial centre situated two kilometres east of Swords. Yasmina and Tahar first came to an agreement about how they felt about this and then devised strategies to try to deal and respond to such encounters. They finally had to appeal to their father's authority, Yasmina showed a certain pride and courage already by herself, by responding to the youngsters who were throwing pebbles at her and her siblings. Karima, is perhaps

surprised, but not shocked. She shows that she is able to forgive the aggressors of her own children by stating: 'They are only children...'

DVD 2 ch. 4.3 clip 15 (Dv 9_2). Yasmina and Tahar talk about racism. 4'01'.

Following this account, she goes on to point out that they also received friendly signs from many Irish persons and therefore she refuses to generalise. And even more so, namely because they are children, she does not think there is something in this behaviour that cannot be somehow transformed. She believes that parents and teachers must help children to maintain a non-racist attitude; when kids hear their parents' or teachers' discriminating they then mime the adults.

The Intergenerational at Work

La fille: 'Le colonialiste est raciste!'

Le père: 'Il est raciste et dominateur. Quand on est dominé par un autre pays, on n'est pas libre, on perd son indépendance. Ainsi l'Algérie, jusqu'en 1962, était considérée comme une partie de la France. Ses richesses ont été exploitées et ses habitants privés de liberté. Les Français ont débarqué en Algérie en 1830 et se sont emparés de tout le pays. Ceux qui ne voulaient pas de cette domination étaient pourchassés, arrêtés et même tués. Le colonialisme est un racisme à l'échelle d'État' (Ben Jalloun 1996: 96).

During one of my very first visits to Parnell Square, an unexpected exchange took place between grandmother and grandchild, Yasmina. Noulá recalled her youth as a *moujadine* during the Algerian independence war between 1954 and 1962. These years were crucially formative for her as a revolutionary female hero of the Civil War. She was an early member of the FLN, which took power as a parallel State institution during the civil war, whereas after the independence it became the hegemonic and dominant party in power for decades under a socialist coalition. Nualá recounts that her father was violently murdered in front of his family by French soldiers, possibly explaining why she began to act as combatant from an early age. She was put in prison and condemned to a life sentence, was then

unexpectedly freed and given a pardon (as noted above) as she describes the reprieve awarded to the most courageous women within her prison. She then, after the war, married another nationally decorated hero of the FLN, Mourad's father and Tahar's grandfather. She tells this story with pain and difficulty because of her medical conditions. Yet she is rejuvenated by Yasmina in a moving dialogue, where I become the third pole of the construction of a public storytelling.



Figure 9.4 Tahar's Grandmother Nualá.

If I am the person who is receiving and making sense and thus learning and responding emotionally, Yasmina is the one who fills in the information she knew beforehand. She is able to do this since she has been educated in an Algerian national school, where these historical facts are told and re-told in order to celebrate a sense of nationalism and socialism, and because her family was a laboratory of sorts for such a sense of national belonging, given that her grandparents are both decorated national heroes. Yasmina has a firm footing in the family's past and has been hearing about this history since she was born. This pride of belonging and

affiliation with the creation of a modern nation state, at least from the heroes and protagonists standpoint, creates a scenario where the family can downplay the fact that they are also Berbers. Yasmina becomes the mediator by adding details that Nualá cannot articulate anymore and sometimes translates (since her grandmother's French has started to weaken). She reinforces her learning within the family about facts which in Ireland nobody will ever tell at school. In Ireland facts about the Irish civil war will most likely be told, but Yasmina will never have the possibility to demonstrate that she belongs to any actively involved family or clan, unless a comparative, intercultural curriculum is introduced. Only in this manner will 'non-national' children have the possibility to compare segments of history from countries such as Korea, former Yugoslavia, Algeria, Angola and Cuba, among others.

In Motion, at Home

To migrate means always to dismantle the centre of the world and to settle it again into a confusing, disorganized and fragmented world. (Berger 1985: 1)¹⁷

The rebuilding of the domestic *foyer* (hearth) became for me the core thematic through which to understand the challenges confronting Tahar. '*Petit à petit*', as Mr Mourad stated once in French, he found new friends in the quarter, was able to continue speaking Algerian Arabic and Tamazight at home with his mother and grandmother, yet was equally able to try out his new English language with his peers in the street, in the school, with teachers and trainers, with me, and even with his father and older sister. The new house in Swords became the locus for an imagined restoration of a middle class, peaceful life, which the father had sought for many years. It gave his children the possibility to invest in a social network where they could achieve and build a sense of belonging rather than simply 'pass through'.

The latter feeling of simply being transient was a very real fear since Ireland was not their chosen country of destination. Hence, the house in the suburb offered a sense of permanency, something solid, definitive, which precluded the idea of going back to Algeria in the near future. I realised how affected Tahar was about this positive sense of a 'rooting' in place when, in my follow up of the family's move to the larger accommodation in county Dublin, I was told by the boy and his sister that he had fallen one night from his new bed.

DVD 2 ch. 4.3 clip 16 (Dv 11_7). Bus trip to the new home, Swords. 3'45'.

In this amusing account, again elicited in a collective choral atmosphere where I myself contribute through my own biographical account, the paradoxical situation being told was that when he finally got a room for himself, with a single bed, and because he was used to sleeping in a big bed with his sister and grandmother, he did not feel safe in the new narrow space of a single size mattress and had fallen out during the night. Yasmina then comments that although the initial one-room accommodation they had at the beginning of their stay in Ireland was very small, she had felt better there than in the current big house. Here it seems as if the first days of family reunification had already started to appear under the limelight of an imagined family history, an idealised memory of happiness and novelty, but also, emotionally connected with a sense of solidarity, of communal sharing. This very narrow space allowed the family members to feel safe once again after years of separation, fear, life-threatening situation and despair. A concrete example of this is when the whole family discovers they can genuinely laugh again together, by watching *Mr Bean* on tape (as shown in DVD 8_3 at the beginning of this chapter), all sitting tightly in the living-bedroom; this was already the 'past' and an upbeat

memory of happiness because of the very physical proximity and indeed intimate claustrophobia.

By returning to the Parnell Square underground flat nine months later, both Yasmina and Tahar stated that they only had good memories of that place and that living downtown was still fascinating because of the quantity of cheap big stores, oriental stores for Arabian food, commercial movie theatres and social occasions more generally, so easier to reach than in the residential, middle class outskirts of the big city, where they had moved. Good memories were visibly connected with that 'sentimentalised' space, which, otherwise, would have appeared gloomy and unhealthy. For the sense of the 'foyer' to be rebuilt could not be split from the emotions shared, the sociality of the quarter, the proximity of networks, where the values of the youngsters could be carried out and where they found themselves part of a bigger world.

DVD 2 ch. 4.3 clip 17 (Dv 7_7). Yasmina and Tahar visit their former accommodation in Parnell Square. 6'57''.

In this sequence Tahar also re-visits his old school, proudly revealing new items (mobile phone, branded clothes, cup, shoes and indeed an attitude of a middle class Irish youth) in the hope of being respected (not bullied at least) and also with the aim of marking his belonging to a different urban area and destiny. He is nevertheless the same cute boy as before, but he needs to show up his abilities to overcome his fear of going back to a place where he had felt diminished at the beginning of his stay in Ireland. His abilities in football (visible in the sequence) and in mathematics, make him respected at once, and even envied (positively) by Jordan, Atillio and James.

In the same period as Tahar was settling down in the outskirts of the city, we had a conversation in which he reflected on one of his free drawings, representing a van in full speed and loaded with goods and suitcases, full of colours and space around.

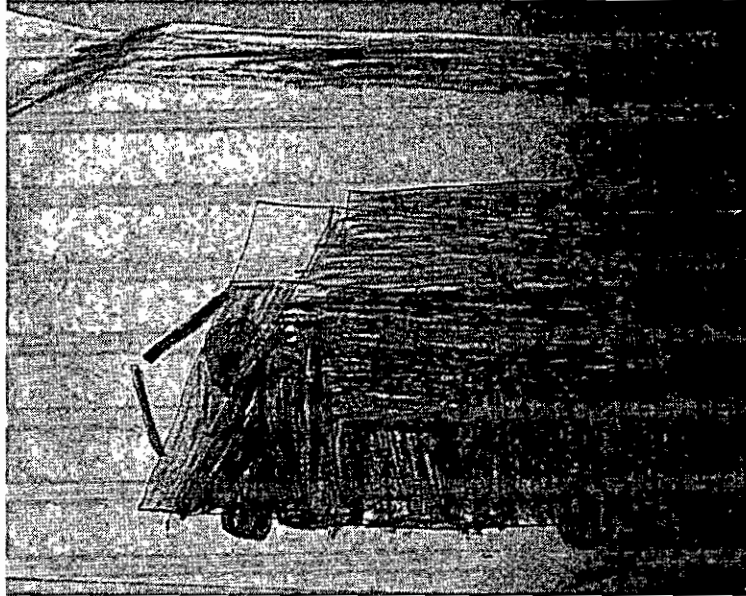


Figure 10.4 The van in which to travel with his extended family, imagined by Tahar .

Tahar is in the kitchen. Standing in front of the camera with some drawings he would like to show, which are on the ironing table near the window:

Tahar: '...And that is a ... car.'

Rossella: 'This is a garbage car?'

T: 'What?'

R: 'No? What is this car?'

T: 'It's a car.'

R: 'It's a car? Yes.'

T: 'Yeah. That's like a taxi-made.'

R: 'It's like a taxi?'

T: 'Yeah.'

R: 'And where is it going, this car?'

T: 'It's going shop.'

R: 'Shopping...'

T: 'To bring something...'

R: 'But who is inside?'

T: 'A family.'

R: 'A family?'

T: 'Yeah.'

R: 'And who is the family? Is it your own family?'

T: 'Oh... like family.'

R: 'Any family? How many people are in the family?'

T: 'Six!'

R: 'Who is in the family? The father?'

T: 'Father and mom and a grandma, and like...a girl and a girl, and girl and a grandfather I know.'

R: 'A grandfather as well, is there?'

T: 'Yeah.'

R: 'And there is also a son, a boy?'

T: 'Yeah, and the boy.'

R: 'But where is it going the car?'

T: 'It going eh...'

(Tahar shifts to Arabic with Yasmina)

Y: 'It's like a caravan...'

R: 'It's a caravan?'

Y: 'You know a house and a...'

R: 'Yeah it's a house that (is on wheels)... ok. Can you tell me where the car is going? You told me it was going to shop?'

T: 'Yeah.'

R: 'And after the shopping?'

T: 'It's going home.'

R: 'Yes, and where is the home?'

T: 'Like Swords.'

R: 'It's Swords... so, you would like to have a car...?'

T: 'What?'

R: 'You would like to have a car yourself?'

T: 'Yeah, I'd like.'

R: 'To have a car to go shopping?'

T: 'Yeah!'

R: 'So this was the car that you would like to have?'

T: 'Yeah'

R: 'And when you could draw this car, it was a free drawing or it was your teacher who has asked you?'

T: 'No. free.'

R: 'It was free, it was you who is deciding?'

T: 'Yeah. All the class said 'I'm draw', and I said 'I draw'...'

R: 'Yeah, you are drawing the car.'

T: 'Yeah.'

R: 'It was a beautiful car.'

T: 'Ok, thank you.'

R: 'Tell me what is inside. You have some suitcases in the car? There are some suitcases?'

T: 'There's a person driving.'

R: 'Who is driving?'

T: 'The father...'

R: 'The father?'

T: 'Yeah. And then they have like to go...eh...'

(He asks in Arabic to Yasmina)

Y: 'The door of the car...'

T: 'Yeah, the door of the car.'

R: 'They have to open the door?'

T: 'Yeah, and that is like were is...'

R: 'The roof of the car?'

T: 'Yeah!'

R: '...and what they have on the roof? They have some boxes with things inside?'

T: 'Yeah.'

R: 'They have their own things...?'

T: 'Yes.'

R: 'They are moving?'

T: 'No.'

R: 'They are buying things...'

T: 'Yeah.' *(with a big smile)*

R: 'Yeah in the shops. What are they buying?'

T: 'Like... a cheese.'

R: 'Cheese?'

T: (*laughs*) 'Yeah.'

R: (*laughs*) 'Do you like cheese?'

T: 'Yes.'

R: 'They buy food...?'

T: 'Yes, they buy food. And like, chocolate and... those things...'

R: 'And what else?'

T: 'What?'

R: 'What else? Whatever you want, you can wish.'

T: 'They...eh... like... eh...'

(*He can't find the right words. Yasmina speaks to him in Arabic, off frame always*)

R: 'You can tell it in Arabic if you want!'

T: 'No, no, no!'

R: 'No? Why?'

T: 'Like chicken, like sandwich...'

(*Yasmina speaks to him, he answers "Yeah" in return*)

Y: 'I don't think so.'

T: '... like sandwich.'

R: 'Yes, a lot of food.'

T: 'Yeah.'

R: 'And something to drink.'

T: 'And potatoes...'

R: 'Potatoes?'

T: 'Yeah.'

R: 'Something to drink?'

T: 'No.'

(*Yasmina speaks Arabic*)

T: 'Water...'

R: 'Water? If the car is not coming back home, where are they going? With a car you can go far away if they have a lot of food.'

T: 'They are going to Cloathl... one hotel in Sword.'

(*They speak in Arabic*)

Y: 'In the jungle.'

T: 'In the jungle.'

R: 'They're going into jungle?'

T: 'Yeah. He is going into jungle.'

R: (*laughs*) 'For a holidays?'

T: 'Yeah.'

R: 'But, well, where is the jungle? There is no jungle in Ireland. So it's in another country.'

T: 'Like France.'

R: 'Like France. In the jungle in France. Yeah ok, so this is your car to go to the jungle in France with a lot of food, with your grandfather, your grandmother, your father, mother your sister? Sisters...?'

T: 'Yeah!'

R: '...and yourself.'

T: 'Yeah!'

R: '...and a lot of food?'

T: 'Yeah, and drink.'

R: '...and drink. So you are at ease. Then you have everything you need.'

T: 'Yeah.'

R: 'This is wonderful.'

T: 'I draw and I 'wosh' you.'

Y: 'I show you!'

T: 'I show you.'

Y: 'He is going to draw now and he's going to show you.'

R: 'Ok, you are going to draw something else that you're going to show me, ok.'

(*Tahar goes to his drawer and sort out samples of flags he drew out of school: the Amazight (Berber) flag and the Irish one.*)

The dialogue was visibly driven by me and with a level of intensity I usually do not show with children. But this time I wanted Tahar's imagination to come to the edge of storytelling, because otherwise conversations among us were often languishing and remained somewhat fragmented. Conversations with Tahar did not seem to

work as much as observing him. I realised that this forcing of his speech revealed important aspects of his way of coping with languages, imagination and also humour, but they did not fit with his more spontaneous temperament. He prefers to express himself through body language (football or running, fishing or making a kite fly) rather than by having a steady conversation in English, which is possibly understandable, given his age and energy. I never forced that conversational mode too often, unlike for example, with his mother, sister and grandmother around the kitchen table. Six months after his move to Swords, he developed a positive attitude in his socialisation which helped him find new comrades in the classroom who were all in a similar situation. He quickly integrated into the football club in his new school and became a 'seed-player' in the hurling team, the national Irish Football. From here he was selected to play for the Swords Manor junior football team.

Most of the social actors I worked with, in Ireland and in France, both children and adults, utilised communication systems which were similar to those I used, if not better. They had updated information about technologies, equipment, a wider knowledge and practice of some tools, interests and easier ready-made templates of technology exchanged with peers and colleagues. Some of the children and parents disliked getting the 'traditional' VHS onto which I had copied video rushes with sequences where they appeared. They were in fact requesting DVDs only, given their reliability and lightweight qualities, allowing them to be stored and transported more easily. Parents and siblings would write SMS texts and emails in response to some key questions I had regarding data collection, following my period of stay with them. They also communicated with me on a wide variety of topics, from politics to leisure activities, sending me poems, and pictures. I never knew if they were writing from their work places, schools, homes, internet or call shops, or even

from outside the capital town or from abroad, during cheap trips across Europe, or sometimes even from their homelands, where some could return for holidays every second year. With Tahar, in particular, I had a prolific exchange on SMS. He was too young and had too little literacy in our common languages to sit writing emails, unless his father or sister helped him. He mostly preferred the mobile phone, because he did not really want to write letters, but send short and useful messages. That was a style he could manage and was in line with his fashion. For him it was the beauty of the mobile phone, the latest model with all its gadgets that was important and that he learnt that from his sister, his teacher. He did not use it too often but carried it everywhere.

I remember the first of his SMS text, since it made me realise how much more aware he was of my fieldwork contingencies than I ever thought possible. This incident confirmed my hypothesis that he was an active agent in his own life. I had tried to reach the outskirts of Dublin early one Sunday morning and had missed the few buses available from downtown. I was delayed by two hours, knowing that the family was together and waiting for me to go out with me for a walk in their best clothes after brunch. I was concerned at being late and busily informing Tahar's father about my tribulations with the bus, when suddenly an SMS came through from Tahar's personal mobile, which I did not even know he had. The text read: 'Don't rush. Take it easy! You are always welcome. Tahar'. I was speechless since he was shaping the very tone of our exchanges, reassuring me that we did not need to be too formal with one another. I was deeply appreciative. I realised that he was growing up, able to perform politeness in a sincere manner, and significantly, in a

new cultural context. He was so at ease within himself that he was able to say: 'Take it easy'.



Figure 11.4 Tahar seems more at ease than in his first months in Ireland

Conclusion

I had carefully investigated the kind of 'migration chain' (Bolaffi 2004; Reyneri 1979) utilised by the Algerian family in order to emigrate and then facilitate a family reunion. I began to learn more about relatives and friends who had remained in their country of origin and who represented an anchor of sorts for other relatives and subjects from the extended family and community who had also migrated. In this respect I began to form part of the migration chain of this particular extended family with its intricate transnational networks. I realised it more and more when I was travelling for instance to France, where I could buy some of the items so lacking in their everyday life in Ireland, such as Kabyl clothes, scarves, CDs of Berber singers, and favourite spices difficult to find in Dublin. The transformation of my role had carefully considered in that I wished to progress the research, but

didn't want my subject position to become too entangled in the fabric of the family. Yet, without such a bond with the family the fieldwork would remain somewhat strained and distant. I realise most social scientists struggle with this awkward feeling all their lives and the option to include such analysis in the final text is not always considered useful or acceptable; however, it represents one of the foundational questions in the experience of fieldwork with the family. I consider now that my bond was made even more visible by the fact that a whole family assessed me. This was a family where morality and pride were highly treasured, where many generations actively share and distribute values to their new acquaintances. The Kabyl societies seem to handle values as visible, material objects. Different generations, gender perspectives and social roles were intermingling and made my presence always needed for this or that; this always renewed my engagement because I never knew beforehand with whom I would be with and work alongside, each time I visited the family. Since I felt a guest for many months, it took a certain time to register that my status had changed. Gradually I increasingly participated in family activities, discussions, privileged moments: a status that the expatriated can accommodate given that their exiled condition is far removed from the gaze of their original community. So that consequent judgements, gossip, worries, which a foreign person (perhaps a French subject?) could provoke in their home, in contemporary Algeria, was no longer a threat, and that condition set us free from constantly exploring and negotiating the boundaries of our relationship. Moreover, I was not a co-national and this was also in some ways a guarantee for their safety abroad.¹⁸ Little by little the bird Tahar made his nest in the school; his family made it in Swords, and I myself, made it in their household.

DVD 2 ch. 4.3 clip 18 (Dv 10_1). Walk in the park with the whole family.

15'05''.

Notes

¹ I agree with MacDougall when he states: 'Non-fiction films are 'cast' no less carefully than fiction films, but the casting takes a more evolutionary and subterranean course'. (2006: 123). In my previous film for instance, I had to cast for five among the 14 children met during the year in a special class. In Tahar's portrait, I found at once an entire family where all its members were equally interesting, potentially good and photogenic, and different in age, sex, roles, leadership, knowledge, body expressions and language. None of them seemed to care about being filmed, and I had unfettered access to all their activities in the house.

² It is defined as the First Algerian War (1954-62), in relation to (an informal) Second Algerian War, the civil one of 1992-2002.

³ Here the true event/metaphor of the earthquake stands as an emblem of another inexpressible reality: the political and tragic civil war during the past twelve years, resulting in more than 150,000 murdered civilians and 7200 unaccounted for.

⁴ This particular family detaches itself from current trends in transnational migration. They do not send remittances back home and do not sustain a form of parallel, exported economy (like a dual household) in their countries of origin. Some additional material artefacts as sent from Algeria, in the form of local items.

⁵ Sibony's original text reads:

L'origine parlable est l'origine 'multiple', celle qui peut se prêter au morcellement par la parole et la pensée; celle dont on peut recevoir un message sans qu'il soit le premier mot, imparlable, ou le dernier mot, fatal (1996: 38).

⁶ *Mâ*, originally Chinese, was imported into Japan and appropriated as a Zen concept (Francois Jullien, personal communication), it means also 'the gaps left in between logs, in a Japanese wooden Temple', in order to make the architecture be more stable because slightly flexible in its entailed parts, which move along time, because made of wood - a sort of structural void shaping the building allowing the fabric of the structure to grow.

⁷ Witness the case of Chinese and Asian well-educated students in Western countries, who change their names from 'Chen Ching', for instance, to 'Peter' or 'Robert' Ching.

⁸ Algeria underwent a deep economic crisis at the beginning of the 1980s, with a parallel rise of pressure for a change in the rule of the FLN, the governmental party in power since Independence from French Colonial Rule. The president Colonel Boumedienne's era (1965-1992) resulted in a coup d'État against President Boudiaf, murdered in 1992. Some political parties were then institutionalized. Rising Islamist Movements were acting and growing in the political scene. In 1988 elections were organized, with a clear increase of the FIS (Front

Islamique du Salut). In 1991 FIS reached almost 50% of the votes and the government, afraid, stopped the democratic process by refusing FIS to take over a majority in the 2d round. Islamist movements, parties, fundamentalists armed parties, extra institutional groups grew and violence started. Purges, murders, paramilitary practices, bypassing Justice and institutional as well as ordinary safety, started to emerge. GIA (Groupe Islamique Armé) was rising and in response FIS created its own militia, the AIS, Armée Islamique du Salut. The first set began assaulting civilians, creating an atmosphere of terror and the second set pushed the government to re-establish political rights and democracy. For a distant observer Algeria became a theatre for the worst stereotypes of Islamic Fundamentalism. In 1997 a general amnesty was given, in order to restart its political and civil profile. Kabyl (Berber-Algerian) movements revitalized their struggles for recognition as an ethnic and linguistic minority. Algeria became a very violent arena of conflicts and GIA in recent times has increased its assaults through Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat, after its disqualification in recent elections (2002). (Sources from Middle East Institute 2003, AlgeriaWatch 2004, Human Development Report, United Nations 2004).

⁹ Several Kabyl intellectuals were murdered in the last decade. In 1993 these included: Djilali Liabes, 16 March, Tahar Djaout, 26 May, Mahfoud Boucebci 15 June, M'Hamed Boukhobza, 21 June, Youcef Sebti, 28 December; in addition to the theatre author Abdelkader Alloula, 3 August 1994 and the cult Kabyl singer Matoub Lounes, the 25 June 1998.

¹⁰ Although between the decision and the application of the decree there is no immediate result; people hope that this will come soon and will be permanent. Nevertheless, the decree had opened again the ancient controversy concerning the Tamazight's alphabetic script, which some would like to be the 'original' Tifinagh, others the Arabised one, and for most scholars the one similar to Latin. In this way it would be easy to step into modernity, gaining access to Internet and the like. The Tifinagh alphabet, originally the notation of the Berber languages, is alphabetically speaking belonging to the Proto-Sinaitic family, developed in Northern Africa from 6th century BC to the present, derived from the Punic script. The language: Tamazight (what we know as 'Berber', the appellation of the Romans for 'barbarus'), was used by Arabians who had conquered the areas and remained till the French and Italian Colonial rule in North Africa and in everyday use till today).

The cultural geography of Berber languages was widely studied first by French or Francophones linguistics in the past, for example, Cohen 1968, Galand 1979 and Basset 1952. they were also studied by Italian and Spanish linguists, because spoken Tamazight was widespread in ex-Italian colonies (like Libya), and widely spoken in Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria up to the Gibraltar area, Tenerife, and the Spanish Canary Islands. Today the

various Berber variations are studied mainly by North African linguists in a socio-linguistic perspective. In West Africa, the most known ethnic group using currently this language in their own vernacular forms are the Touareg.

¹¹ For example, 'CAF' in a French context (Caisse d'Allocation Familiale), institutional welfare source for many migrant families, or DCU (Dublin College University) among students in Dublin, or FLN (Front de Libération Nationale) in Algeria and France, or IRA (Irish Republican Army) in Ireland and the UK.

¹² This way of filming is a construction similar to jazz improvisation (from be-bop to free jazz), something particular to documentary, evident in the work of Richard Leacock, Jean Rouch, Raymond Depardon, and Johan Van den Keuken.

¹³ In contemporary Algeria, even though elections confirmed the previous President Bouteflika for a new term, human rights are still abused everyday. Secret service agents working with paramilitary and the military corps have considerable power. Economically speaking, the country is now turning to the USA for financial assistance and after many decades of socialism, the economic gap between classes is increasing.

¹⁴ One such example was the use of 'monkey' by certain customers in a pub.

¹⁵ My position was thus very delicate, since the more I got acquainted with the family, the more I built up expectations for a friendship beyond the professional purpose of the research. In this case I also fell into an ambiguous position in that the father could potentially think about me as an informant of the Ministry, or the Refugee Council, operating under the cover of social scientific inquiry. All these positions came into play, and remained open-ended in the present, since I could not conclusively prove to be an outsider (for after all I have a national research scholarship and produce new knowledge within this apparatus), nor could I downplay my awareness of what his country of origin and the ethnic group of the family had to endure in the past. This put me in a uncertain position in which film images could not be just another optional device for investigation or representation, removing the 'anonymity' with which social scientific investigations operate in order to protect social actors and indeed the researchers themselves. (Bourdieu et al 1999).

¹⁶ The children speak Arabic and Tamazight at home and they are developing fluency in English spoken with a Dublin accent. Yasmina and Tahar, at different degrees, seem aware of the fact that their lives might be inevitably shaped by both belongings, not in between Algeria and Ireland, but 'with' Algeria in Ireland, so to speak. Thus, the return to their country of origin will no longer be an easy task. At the same time, the risk of remaining for ever a migrant in Ireland, is also a scary 'bugbear' (Derrida 1996). These are conflicting

thoughts which sometimes translate competitive dilemmas and slowly shape the degree of investment in education, which for youngsters of this family's social class is a necessity.

¹⁷ Berger's original text reads:

Émigrer signifie toujours démanteler le centre du monde, et
l'aménager dans un monde confus, désorganisé et fragmentaire.

¹⁸ The Algerian political situation is so tense that any connection with co-nationals could potentially compromise the status this family and its direct entourage back in Algeria. Sometimes the father and mother thought about moving to France, where a larger Algerian Kabyl community had lived for many generations. Mr Mourad believed that they could soon move within European countries because of Shengen Agreement, allowing for fluid internal borders within the EU, but this ended up not being possible for non-European citizens, even if they had a permit to stay in one of the member States. Their life remains confined to Ireland with a general feeling of captivity, compounded perhaps by the fact that Ireland is an island. At the same time the collective hope for change, for the acquisition of rights, for an improved social standing, for obtaining healthcare insurance, for the wellbeing of the sick grandmother and for the provision of a good education for the three children, keep the family united for now.

Chapter Five

The Agency of Migrant Children: Five Narratives

Colonial and post-colonial histories will play a crucial role in rewriting the history and non-history of childhood, for in the dominant histories in the West, whether we are talking of psychoanalytic theory of the Freudians, the cognitive development theories of Piaget, the psycho-biographies of Erickson, or the social histories of Ariès, the one figure that is consistently missing (with the exception of the works of Fanon and Dubois) is the child of colour and colonialism. (Feldman 2002: 294).

The way I worked with Tahar's family in Ireland originated partly in the methodology I had applied in France some years earlier. At that time, I had purposely excluded all members of the family from the actual film; I had thought that when focusing on images of family life, the central position occupied by the classroom would inevitably be reduced and made secondary to the role of the family, as in Tahar's case. The second school Tahar enrolled in had not authorised me to film and this possibly helped me overcome my hesitations and pulled me into the family and the home. According to the behaviour and perspectives of the children I work with, family and school are often seen as two diametric opposed poles. This is a conclusion I drew from the fieldwork I conducted in Paris. In most cases, the migrant child has a difficulty relating and integrating the two locations where she is obliged to function and is required to be sensible in sometimes very opposite ways, demonstrating contrasting competencies (Faulstich et al 2001). The five case studies of the protagonists of the Parisian study are presented here in the hope of further articulating this contrast. By exploring the different layers of their agency and understanding, I chose to film mainly in the school and did fieldwork in the homes without filming. By letting them describe their domestic life inside the walls of the school and by hearing

their narratives in a location where they are not generally requested, explored or valorised, constructions of home and the domestic were effectively evoked through the accounts of the children themselves.

Mang Mang: The Eloquence of Silence

For any individual, memories of childhood years, overlain by other memories, fragments of memories, and interpretations of later years, constitute an infinite resource for constructing 'a childhood'. Whether or not we accept the Freudian thesis that memory is total, that all experiences are somehow stored and variably accessible, it can be still argued that memory is infinite. For any scene, image, individual feeling, or group sentiment that one recalls, it can be recollected from an infinite number of perspectives in an infinitely divisible number of ways. (Koester 1996: 142)

In *On Telling One's Own Story; or Memory and Narrative in Early Life-Writing* (1996: 53), James Olney quoted from the autobiography of Maxine Hong Kingston titled *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts* (1976). Remembering her schooldays, Kingston described the learning process of a Chinese girl who had recently arrived in the U.S. She had problems in reading 'I', the word that represents the Self, and was panic-stricken every time she was confronted with a text that contained that 'word'. This exposed her to all kinds of pressure, since 'I' is one of the most frequently recurring words in English. In the Chinese language, as Olney points out, the ideogram composed of one simple stroke (like the English 'I', a 'naked' line standing alone) means 'slave', while 'I' meaning 'myself', the first person subject, is represented by an ideogram composed of seven strokes



Figure 1.5 The Chinese ideogram meaning the Self.

The symbolic fragility of the English 'I' was literally embodied by Kingston. This was not merely a metaphorical location for subliminal panic, but a process whereby the Chinese pupil was expressing, by means of resistance, the complicated relation she had with the construction of her new identity. Asian migrants laugh and joke about their inability to spell, but learning to spell 'I' is no mere phonetic or technical exercise; it is often, as in this case, the expression through 'stubbornness' of a problem that is hard to decipher without a degree of intercultural understanding. This delicate balance between resisting change and the desire to overcome resistance created a new dynamic for the Chinese girl described by Olney however; one which needed to be 'heard' by her teacher and subsequently be narrated as a distinctly intercultural phenomenon in her biography.

When I met Mang Mang, newly arrived from the Shanghai region of China, in the Cl.in class (in her rapid 'total immersion' in the French-language classroom described in chapter two) I was struck by her similarity to Kingston as described by Olney. Sometimes anthropological descriptions of intercultural trials are as vivid as good

literature. Observing the Chinese girl as she was urged to speak, I couldn't but feel a sense of empathy. Seen through the eyes of her teacher, Pascale, who veered between anger and hopelessness, her paradoxical attitude seemed extreme, but there was an underlying logic, which Mang Mang tried to express. Although she had arrived from China many months earlier, Mang Mang could not spell a single French word correctly. Sometimes she took five minutes to read a sentence. She trembled in panic and amazement when faced with exercises in orthography. Reading the word 'helicopter' caused huge difficulties, but at last the pedagogical relentlessness of her teacher triumphed and she finally said it – 'helicopter'. But Mang Mang did not know the meaning of the word that had caused so much trouble and when a Chinese friend translated it for her a disillusioned expression crossed her face seemingly saying: so much effort, only for that!

DVD 2 ch. 5 clip 1 (Dv 8_1). Helicopter sequence in Paris classroom. 5'22''.

The following day, during her first boxing session, a similar situation occurred. She was not at all interested in boxing gloves, hits, knocks, and the provocation implicit in this sport, but although reluctant to take the initiative, Mang Mang was both determined and impassive, exhibiting stereotypical 'Chinese endurance'. She seemed reluctant to aim a punch at her friend Nawel, who threw herself joyfully into the sport, putting on the gloves (so much bigger than her face), jumping into the ring like Charlie Chaplin in *City Lights* (1931), adopting a burlesque attitude and playfully provoking her adversary (Mang Mang) who eventually started to respond. Little by little, the whole session turned into elation, dance and relief. For according to a pedagogical hypothesis, participation in sport has an effect on other skills, such as communication, social relationships, literacy and verbal fluency. As Mang Mang

began to like boxing, she simultaneously began to spell and talk more easily. She felt the impact of her body on other bodies, she acquired the resolution necessary to aim and hit, and she (metonymically) protected her mouth (hand) with a big glove. Perhaps these parallel activities influenced each other; her spelling abilities certainly improved.

Spelling was not the only form of utterance that caused problems; there was also storytelling. Each time Mang Mang was invited by the teacher to 'tell' something (to explain the plot of a book by interpreting the illustrations, or to narrate a short story based on a sequence of cards), she resisted fiercely, like a torture victim whose words are extracted from her against her will.



Figure 2.5 Mang Mang conveys perplexity prior to her utterance.

The following dialogue between Mang Mang and her teacher Pascale illustrates some of these points and makes her logic understandable in the light of her lived experience. It occurred in a session in which the pupils were asked to describe their activities during the All Saints Day holiday in November:

Pascale: 'Mang Mang, it is your turn now!' (*She smiles because she knows that the Chinese girl hates to talk in front of the class*) 'How did you spend your holidays?'

Mang Mang: 'Holidays?'

P: 'Yes. What did you do?'

M: ...

P: 'Did you often go out for a walk?'

M: (*shakes her head*)

P: 'You never went out with your mummy for a walk?'

M: 'No.'

P: 'Did you stay at home all the time?'

M: 'Yes.'

P: 'And what did you do at home alone? What do you usually do when you are at home?'

M: ...

P: 'Did you watch TV?'

M: (*after a pause*) 'Yes.'

P: 'What do you watch on TV?'

M: ...

Hedda: 'Pascale, I believe she watches cartoons!'

P: 'I would like her to try to make one sentence. Up until now she has only answered "yes" or "no"! I would appreciate it if Mang Mang made the effort to say at least one short sentence in French!'

M: ...

P: 'What do you watch? First channel, second, third or Satellite TV? Chinese programmes perhaps?'

M: (*becomes worried and scratches her cheek to show her perplexity. The whole class laughs.*)

P: 'What did you watch, what channels did you look at?'

M: ...

P: 'Do you like to watch cartoons, musicals, movies, do you look at Chinese shows...?'

M: ...

P: 'Do you know what you watch on TV, Mang Mang?'

M: *(shakes her head)*

P: 'Well, let's try it another way. If you watch TV, can you, at least, tell me please if they speak French or Chinese?'

M: . . .

P: *(more and more upset)* 'Do they speak Chinese or French, Mang Mang?'

M: 'They speak French.'

P: 'At last! So, then, what channel do you usually watch? The first? The second? The third?'

M: *(after reflection)* 'First channel.'

(There is a pause while the children whisper about some programmes and then Pascale begins again to press Mang Mang, who had thought the interrogation was over).

P: 'So, you did not go out at all during the holidays? Even in the evening, for a walk with your parents. Not even to the park, to the playground near your home? Not even to the Sacré Coeur park?'

M: 'No.'

P: 'Do you have any sisters or brothers?'

M: 'No, I don't have any sisters or brothers.'

P: *(perplexed and a little uneasy)* 'Any friend, a girlfriend perhaps?'

M: 'No.'

P: 'Do you ever get a visit from a friend? A friend who comes home to play with you?'

M: 'No.'

P: *(whispering to Kadiatou)* 'Kadiatou, can't you do something with her?'

Hedda: 'Pascale, it is not true! I saw Mang Mang with someone a few days ago. A Chinese boy. At Sacré Coeur park.'

P: 'Is it true, Mang Mang? Who was he?'

M: 'Well, he was something . . . only boy!'

Hedda: 'Yes, Pascale, she was playing with him.'

P: 'So you are not always home. Sometimes you do go out!'

M: 'Yes.'

P: 'So, you can make a sentence out of it? Come on, let's make a sentence!'

M: 'Sometimes I'm going to leave [for the] garden . . .'

P: (*correcting her*) Repeat: sometimes I go to the Sacré Coeur garden!

This dialogue was similar to other conversations which had taken place in front of the class, when Pascale scolded Mang Mang for being so reluctant to find friends with whom she could speak French out of school. Pascale even dared to ask her to speak French with her parents! Mang Mang was accused of speaking only Chinese when she left the class, and this was held to account for her slowness in learning the new language. Although she had been in the Cl.in class longer than most of the other pupils (though not yet for a complete school year), she spoke less French than most of the newcomers, and when she tried to say something her sentences were never 'correct' or immediately comprehensible.

If one visited her at home, as I did, it became clear that her choices were limited, and this perhaps strengthened her resistance to the pressure put on her. Her parents, like many immigrants from the People's Republic of China, worked in a small firm engaged in garment production, managed by their co-nationals. The hours of work were long, ten to twelve hours a day, including Saturday. Mang Mang's parents spoke hardly any French, which they did not need in their daily life, surrounded as they were by other Chinese and doing their shopping in the local Chinese supermarkets. As in other diasporic Chinese communities, the social, cultural and economic practices effectively preserved the ethno-linguistic boundaries between the community's members and those outside it.

For Mang Mang it would have been humiliating to attempt to comply with Pascale's request that she should speak French at home. It should be remembered that she had

for many years been separated from her father, who had migrated to France to 'open' the way for the rest of the family. She had also spent a year and a half without her mother, who had come to France to be with her father. Mang Mang, their only child, as a result of Chinese birth control policy, had remained in China. She took care of her grandparents, hoping for her parents' return, but when her grandfather died, her father, who had come to China for the funeral, decided to take his daughter back to France. (He also took back a videotape of the burial ceremony). Mang Mang, removed from one country to another, needed to re-establish an emotional connection with her parents, while at the same time contending with a school very different from the one she had attended in China, where she had been doing very well, especially in mathematics. When she arrived in Paris, she often watched the videotape of her grandfather's burial, the last images of a world that was disappearing. In Paris her family lived in a flat under the roof on the seventh floor, comprising two tiny rooms and a kitchen with a shower. There was no lift and the toilet was outside on the landing. In lacking private space, Paris was not really so unlike Chinkuan in China, but the interface between outdoor and indoor, the relationship with the neighbourhood and the life of the street, was of course very different.

Mang Mang's first preoccupation was probably to re-establish her position as a child, with less responsibility than she had had while living with two elderly relatives in China, but also with more difficulty in relating the home place to the surrounding society. Besides learning, like other migrant children, to accept that she had left the security of her original home, she had to acknowledge her new home as the foundation for a safe life in the new country to which migration had brought her. It was necessary to reintegrate the concept of home. School in China had been a space

where Mang Mang was acknowledged to be clever, where she was well thought of; she had hoped to find herself in a similar position in France, but instead, because of her difficulties with French, her teachers considered her to be a loser. The school had presented the French language to her as a test; the need to structure her identity in the public sphere had to pass through that narrow door. The child was perhaps caught in what Bateson (1972) calls a 'double bind' between her desire to reconnect with her family on the one hand and the demands of the school on the other. For her, the process of integration was shadowed by confusion and a sense of loneliness, or even alienation.

The teacher's suggestion that she should speak French at home and watch French-language television made Mang Mang feel guilty and confused about revealing her family life. Her response could be interpreted as conveying two competing perspectives, one related to her female gender, the other more 'ethnically' influenced because it refers to her relationship with her co-national peers. When asked by the teacher whether she had any friends, she denied it not because she was deliberately lying, but because she thought that her teacher was only interested in French-speaking friends. When Hedda revealed that she had seen Mang Mang playing with a friend, Mang Mang replied that he was 'only a Chinese boy'. If I understood her correctly, both these categories – 'Chinese' and 'boy' – fell outside the definition of 'friend'. Like her female classmates at the same stage of pre-puberty, she did not seek boys as friends, or at least was not meant to acknowledge them as such, even if she 'felt' a sense of friendship toward them. Then there was the language question: when she and the boy played together, they spoke their mother tongue, whereas the teacher had told her to find French-speaking playmates. The same was true for television: she denied

watching programmes because they were Chinese-language programmes and as such not likely to be approved by her teacher. Hence her silence and her grimaces which so upset Pascale and convinced her that Mang Mang had a basic handicap in verbal expression, were strategies dictated by her need to acknowledge two worlds with different rules, tastes and taboos. In terms of language acquisition, she manifested a resistance which included aphasia, but showed nevertheless a strong awareness that she lived by bridging some 'paradoxical' gaps and that time was needed to integrate into a new life, to learn a new language. Moreover, because of her sense of moral devotion to the family in the larger sense, including her grandparents, she did not want to achieve integration at the expense of 'giving up' her parents' heritage, particularly the language. The request made at school that she should speak French at home appeared as a threat to her integrity *vis-à-vis* her parents, her past, her sense of belonging and moral views; it also involved repressing the only affective links she had so far in France. These are some of the aspects of the 'double bind' which migrant families face and which institutions in the hosting countries create, affecting particularly sensitive and loyal migrant children who find themselves in a situation calling for change and adaptation. Mang Mang, it seems, was at this time of her life such a person.

Although, through her experiences in the Cl.in class, Mang Mang realized that she was not the only one facing difficulties in bridging the gap between life within the family and life outside; she also saw that her classmates had more opportunities to speak French. In most cases they had siblings, they went out alone in the quarter, they strolled in the parks, and in some cases their parents already spoke the language well enough to be of help, at the oral level at least. This situation was reversed when some new Chinese children came to the Cl.in class in the second term. On this

occasion, Mang Mang was asked by the School Principal to help in translating the school rules for the Chinese parents enrolling their sons. But Mang Mang, as it is possible to see in a sequence from *La Mémoire Dure* (2000), refused to speak Chinese, pretending she had forgotten. The following dialogue with Pascale, which took place after this event, shows how she tried to please both these antithetical worlds of hers by devising a new strategy.

DVD 2 ch. 5 clip n.2 (Dv 8_2). Can you say 'I am happy? 3'20''.

Significantly, as discussed in chapter two, Pascale was a complex agent in the chemistry of the school's life and in the facilitation of the learning process. Pupils compulsorily learning French in a Cl.in class are constantly urged to utter, to spell, to 'say it'. The teacher evaluates the pupil's speech and the pupils cannot remain silent. S/he cannot use non-verbal expressions. The educational system, which keeps a close eye on its members, required Pascale to transmit knowledge according to a method which she had studied for many years, becoming a talented and highly visible teacher. Most of her colleagues admired her, especially the principal. In the years during which I observed and talked regularly to her she was authorized, even encouraged, to adopt a somewhat abrasive manner in handling children. Because of her genuine love for them, her behaviour did not attract blame, but on the contrary made her a more successful teacher. Most of her pupils reached an acceptable level and were prepared to face, more or less staunchly, their 'fate' in the French educational system.



Figure 3.5 Pascale, the teacher of Cl. in class.

If Mang Mang's 'silent mode' led me to explore the particular form of resistance that characterized her personality and her relational response at a given time and in a particular social context, I also came to qualify my interpretation by tracing back some of the forms of behaviour she brought to France from her upbringing in the Shanghai region. I also observed how her agency was expressed in the social context of her day-to-day education through reducing my interaction with her as much as possible, letting her relational modes emerge with others at school and home. In this way I could film without 'isolating' her as the main character, for school was a public arena in which she was not the sole subject in focus. By visiting her at home, I developed a conversational, quiet way of being both together and apart. Often I did not film, for various reasons, but chiefly because we were usually alone in her home and I did not want to create an intrusive, unbalanced relationship based on the introduction of the camera into her intimate surroundings. I also wanted us both to relate to a physical proximity less intense than the one generated by filming. Mang Mang had never told me whether or not she liked to be filmed; she seemed almost

indifferent to the gaze of the camera, acting in the same way whether I was filming her or not. She rarely talked, and I came to realize that her company was the most restful that I had ever experienced with a child. Nothing was rushed and few demands were made; anything that could generate tension was avoided by her. It was perhaps the behaviour of a very polite child who had grown up in the company of older people, within a cultural frame in which, if physical proximity leads to intimacy, this is not perceived as an abusive intrusion because each person adopts an introverted attitude and moves through the domestic space with a measured tempo and concentration. The counterpoint of school and home rendered visible the locus of Mang Mang's struggle in the French public sphere in which she was now located. The time I spent at her home fed my understanding of her past and spare-time activities in solitude, out of school, in her and our present.

Kadiatou

To think of spoken narrative as cognitively inferior to written statement, because less independent of context, is to rely unreflectingly on a stereotype. ... One may find abstract, analytic forms that are bound to their immediate context, unable to transcend it, and one may find concrete narrative uses of language that leap toward alternative futures. In sum, our cultural stereotypes predispose us to dichotomise forms and functions of language use. ... In particular, narrative may be a complementary or alternative mode of thinking. (Hymes 1996: 113-15)

Kadiatou is twelve years old. In the next academic year she would have been forced to attend middle school, since French law does not allow children older than twelve to remain in primary education. She arrived in France when she was eleven years old, having never attended school in Guinea - and the Cl.in was her very first experience of formal education. She is the elder daughter of a married couple who migrated to France, leaving the small girl in charge with her paternal grandmother in Guinea, who was the widow of a *Tirailleur Sénégalais*.¹

In Guinea Kadiatou's father was a schoolteacher² and her mother a hairdresser, a maker of designer '*coiffes*' ('hairstyle'). As a migrant in Paris, the father made ends meet with small jobs, working as a loader at night and a salesman of plastic souvenirs for tourists during the day. Immediately after their arrival in France, his wife had given birth to a boy and therefore continued hairdressing at home, on a black market basis, with female friends of friends as spare customers. When they decided to 'repatriate' Kadiatou from Guinea to France, using welfare policy to organise a visa for '*rapprochement familial*',³ their daughter entered a family she knew very little about. She found a younger brother born in Paris who spoke good French, never chatting in Bambara and Soninké, perhaps for fear of public shame, perhaps because he wanted to identify with his peers more than his parents. The boy was following the material in his primary classes with ease. Kadiatou's mother was pregnant again and visibly tired, possibly in a latent depression. Kadiatou was forced to roll up her sleeves.

They live in a *mansard*,⁴ comprised of two small rooms with a total surface of approximately eighteen square meters. One room, as big as a double bed, is that of the parents, while in the other, there is a kitchen-bar, the sofa still covered with plastic, a small table and the TV, two armchair/beds for the children and a sliding door opening directly onto a small shower. Toilets are on the landing, as it is usual in such old buildings. It is a characteristic *immeuble parisien* on the Boulevard Pigalle, on the 6th floor with no lift - a very similar flat resembling Mang Mang's home. Most of the immigrants who manage to maintain a flat located inside the walls of Paris are in similar accommodation, which in the 1960s and 1970s were mainly for students, and before that for maids and stewards. The difference is that families, especially those

with many children, have very different needs to those of single students and these flats hardly provide basic commodities. Internal courtyards are areas of no entry (to salesmen, dogs and children, as signs on the inner door often read), which previously were available for kids to play in. Windows are dangerous, often boarded up by understandably anxious parents, and the descent from the 6th floor makes every exit a trial, especially when loaded with two or three small children, bags, garbage to throw away, clothes to bring to the laundrette, pushchairs and sometimes umbrellas. Returning home is also very difficult, with loads of food bought in the closest 'ED', a cheap chain supermarket. Many mothers, and sometimes fathers, have to endure such tours de force several times a day.

Other typical accommodation for immigrants or sub-proletarian families is in the cellar, as in Ibrahim's case. These have high, narrow, condemned windows. If the mansards are cold in the winter and extremely stifling in the summer, the flats underground are cold and wet in the winter and hot and wet in the summer, and in addition, have no view, or sunlight. However, these two types of accommodation are still preferred in comparison with the *Habitations Loyer Modéré* ('Council Houses') in the suburbs, for obvious reasons of social opportunity. In the HLM most of the youngsters find very few jobs, no professional challenges, and are faced instead with unemployment, sometimes petty criminality and life in a gang. These high buildings stand isolated along huge estates, with motorways nearby and few collective transport options after standard working hours. They are built far from the city centre of Paris, and very few people commute downtown, due to the expense.



Figure 4.5 Kadiatou learns French kinship terminology.

Kadiatou presents herself as a lively, intelligent and reasonable girl approaching puberty. In the six months she attended Cl.in Kadiatou progressed enormously. She has a good command of French at the oral level; she even reached CE1 (third class of grammar school) in the nine months she spent in the school and was about to leave Cl.in probably after Easter. Then, because of her problems in writing and mathematics, she was held back, so that Pascale could teach her on an individual basis. The delay will not, however, save her from a future enrolment into a SES⁵ division in middle school: they are establishments for technical education, for children with scholastic difficulties, social handicaps, and also behavioural problems. The pupils from ordinary classes refer to SES as: '*Section Enfants Sauvages*' ('Unit for Savage Children').

In an ideal situation, Kadiatou could have attained the required level if she had the opportunity to spend one more year in grammar school, since she is very intelligent and works hard. Unfortunately, the school calendar and the obligations relating to her

age will make her curriculum weaker. Pascale struggled to have her stay with her as long as possible, but she also knew that this privileged moment would end one day and Kadiatou would be lost. One felt strongly the tension and the concentrated efforts of her behalf during her last few weeks in Cl.in; in fact this anxiety created a sort of paroxysm, embedded in a formal dialogue with her teacher, just before she left. During that dialogue, Kadiatou understood that since childhood, her destiny had been marked, sculpted and informed by her parents' migration. The repercussions have been constantly around in her life. If her father could have brought her to France earlier, her educational achievements and quality of life might have been very different. She tries to talk timidly to the mistress about her worries and even dares to state that this 'fate' is not obligatory. Kadiatou, who thought she had the possibility to recover what in the school's eyes is 'lost' time, for example time spent in her country of origin, discovers instead at the end of the year that in order to be able to attend higher education, she is to be entered into a technical school, ending up hopefully with a job. In French, especially in African French, the concept of a 'job', intended as *métier*, has a clear connotation. It is something one learns from relatives, parents, or mentors; it is a craft learned outside of school, passed on via an apprenticeship but never through study and a succession of courses taken – consequently, no need to sit years at a desk and work hard. In this scenario Kadiatou would get the opportunity to have a *métier* in two or three years following her struggles in the French scholastic system. Pascale, during the final dialogue they had, was very embarrassed in her attempt to communicate future images and possibilities for Kadiatou. In outlining these, she was simultaneously asking herself: 'How do I explain it?' 'How do I convey this to you?'

One can read a glance of deep disillusionment in the eyes of the African child in *Mémoire Dure*, the face seen close up emphasising even further the resonance of disillusionment. Nuances of perplexity and bitterness had soon appeared on Kadiatou's face alongside wonder: why then all these years at school? Why this stressful effort to reclaimed lost time? Didn't her parents know that it was useless? Her father, an ex-schoolteacher, also had hopes for his daughter. One must imagine the status of a schoolteacher in West Africa, the respect and charisma which can be associated with this profession. On the other hand he went to France with the expectation to enter some local export/import co-national business, but instead ended up in a state of constant precariousness, experiencing racism despite having a job selling plastic souvenirs in Pigalle, a sales clerk on a commission basis when he was lucky. I often visited the family: he spoke about his pride and frustration, and his will to understand what was not working for Kadiatou. He had thought, he admitted, that *Section Education Spécialisée* was another C.I.in, a platform to consolidate his daughter's abilities, but when he realised that it was an educational path with little incentive to continue after middle school, he became very angry. And his daughter had somehow felt the deception even more, since her father was the one who had, in the first instance, motivated her to succeed.

DVD 2 ch.5 n.3 (11_5). Kadiatou learns French terms related to kinship. 2'29''.

Kadiatou was in any case integrated into an ordinary class at the end of the school term. She spent some more months in the same school but in a different class, preparing for the coming life in a school where little attention would be given to each pupil, because of high average groups. She continued to work hard. Pascale had hoped that she would not be a victim of the SES middle-school system, and indicated she

would be available for tutorial help at any time. When she started middle school, Kadiatou often visited Pascale's home. She kept contact with Pascale and the new Cl.in for one year. In her village in Guinea, Kadiatou was able to take care of her grandmother, carry out the various everyday tasks of the household, sell the surplus of the harvest and the milk to the local market and, not least, speak two or three Guinean languages. Had she stayed with her grandmother, she would already be engaged by now and ready for marriage. Kadiatou herself spoke about the topic of engagement during a chat around Pascale's desk, as analysed in chapter one (DVD 1 chapter 1, clip n.2). That day she seemed really at ease, perhaps because it was an informal chat, and the teacher was not evaluating her speech. It was a story about her life, colourful and funny, far removed from the dry contents of the textbooks.

I had, at the beginning, started by questioning her, mainly through the camera. In this 'storytelling around the hearth' mode, one can learn about Kadiatou's cultural practices, translated for the French context but still revitalised by the relational opportunity that our chat as female subjects, in a circular and relaxed posture, with good humour and curiosity, provided. Kadiatou then showed a side of herself that had never been revealed before. She articulates some descriptions of her domestic role, the difficult co-habitation with a fierce and sometimes arrogant younger brother. For Kadiatou seems to point out her discovery that her brother dares to tease her from the safe position of a well integrated male subject, holding a very different power to his newly arrived sister. He can joke, but can also dare to speak the truth: for him, developments such as an arranged marriage will not happen. Furthermore, Kadiatou describes the withdrawal of her mother, minimising Kadiatou's anxiety and not attentive to her concerns. Finally, the most upsetting answer to her expressions of

sorrow derived from the words of her father who said: 'If we are not there⁶, I don't care a shit about it!' Again Kadiatou is confronted with the migration option, when she states: 'If they want to marry me to that monster, better I do if I come back to my grandmother (in West Africa)'. In Guinea Kadiatou would have to struggle and demonstrate why she did not want 'that ugly man', but her father would have felt obliged toward his associate. In France she has the option, since different laws exist to allow her to oppose the situation, but she also realises that her father does not seem to care anymore, because they have lost their previous cultural and economic context, where alliances count in a different way. It could be said that, somehow, she is left alone in her family network, for better or for worse.

In this way, by recounting the events with a popular comedy style, using dialogue as a script, Kadiatou has provided the very substance of the family communication, not merely her personal paraphrasing or psychological interpretation of it. Listeners could 'visualise' with her some family conversations or jokes, which have probably occurred in various languages and dialects and are, in her conversation with Pascale, translated ad hoc by the girl. Her relatives' temperaments, slips of the tongue, the day-to-day atmosphere of her house, have been shared with her mates, Pascale, myself and the audience of the film more extensively. Nevertheless, Kadiatou experienced so many contradictions in these first months in France; the potential of a 'job' versus further education, an arranged engagement versus sentimental freedom, marriage versus professional viability, just to name a few issues. The learning process provided her with new options during the age of puberty, with Pascale as her teacher, with the responsibility of giving back to Kadiatou's father the dream of his own status; the harshness of the educational trials, the impediments precluding the acquisition of

language and mathematics, can collectively be said to have provided her with as many obstacles as those to be faced in the years leading up to her adulthood, yet occurring within a condensed time. In certain respects the adult age which she would have reached in Guinea would be characterised by a different set of choices, acts of solidarity, trust and most important, reciprocity. (See, for example, her account about Ramadan described in chapter two, where she spoke about her desire to be ‘with’ her grandmother, to be socialised through the rite of fasting).

Now Kadiatou experiences a position of ‘*déchirement*’⁷ partly through her treatment by adults, where she is facing dilemmas and cannot always show her wisdom, knowledge or vitality. If she continues with her studies, her father will support her with pride because he was a schoolteacher. Alas, this option is not left to Kadiatou and her father; instead it remains primarily in the hands of vigilant teachers and principals, whom they will meet or not meet after the CI.in. No rights to further schooling are guaranteed when one has such a ‘delay’ in the French educational system, which only provides a way forward for those pupils who can start at the required age and perform well from beginning to end.

Alfa

Le chien est celui qui manifeste une ‘transcendance’ dans le règne animal (Lévinas 1981: 71).⁸

Alfa, the Fulani child who escaped from Liberia through Guinea with his family, commented on one occasion: ‘It was always there, the war in Liberia. Always, it’ll never stop, it’ll never end...’

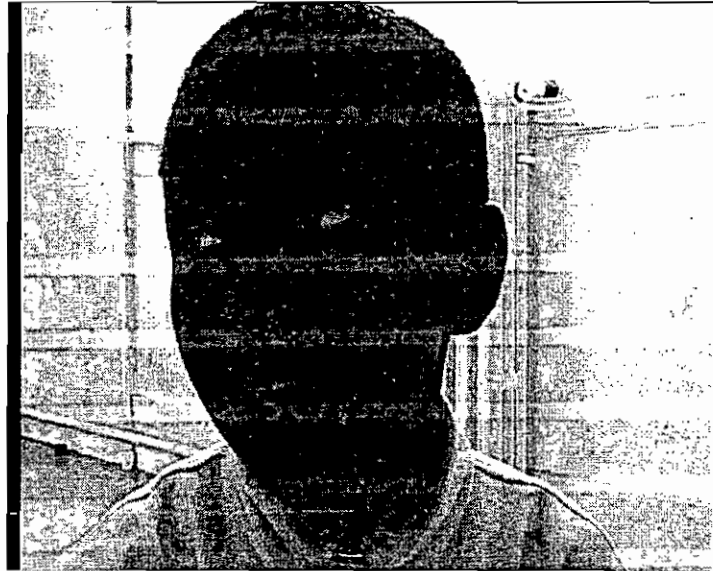


Figure 5.5 Alfa recalling the civil war in his country.

We were speaking in 1998. Two years earlier, the war had lured thousands of refugees away, and Alfa was one of them. For some years after that interview with Alfa I heard little, if anything, about the conflict in Liberia. It looked as if the situation was calming down, so that the words of the boy sounded overly apocalyptic to me. But writing now in the middle of 2003, as I revisit these accounts from 1998, the war in Liberia has begun again, even more violently than before. Alfa's words were therefore accurate. His statement anticipated a trajectory of history as we can only acknowledge it today, in our historical present. I cannot but retain my emotions, my rage and sorrow, in stating that in this simple example, Alfa's personal history as well as human history have been extended, prolonged and intersect with each other at the start of that short story he once told to the camera. When he was stimulated by my attention to perform storytelling, in that tacit invitation to speak (and remain uncorrected according to the high French standard), Alfa allowed recollections to emerge which in school he had never dared to release.

With Alfa I noticed that a fragment of experience sometimes demanded to be told again and again thus becoming a story to be retold, to be expanded upon like a *reverie*; a need to develop his communication abilities, given his shyness and physical presence, led to the potential for exemplary narratives. Since he had problems in spelling and reading he was sent to a speech therapist, and was therefore considered a child without imagination. However, he expressed the opposite attitude working with me, seeing me as filmmaker, as listener: he became a producer of narratives, revitalising the Sahelian African tradition of storytelling which he had learnt before fleeing his homeland. Sometimes he referred to imaginary creatures, totemic animals and features of traditional Fulbe tales. As the Fulbe philosopher and writer Hampaté Bâ writes:

There are several series of tales. Some are to amuse and some are didactic, tales in which elders have put secrets about their science and which younger men take often years to learn. For, one has not only to memorise the tale, but also to become able of transmitting it without un-rendering its expression. (...) There's a period to learn, a period to get the explanation, a period to teach. (...) For us there's not an inferior, lower or primary teaching and a secondary, higher, superior teaching: there is indeed a primary understanding and a higher understanding. The same lesson, which is taught to a seven-years-old child, can be taught to a wise man: it is just a matter about knowing how to present it and what one has to put in the envelope. The envelope is the same one. In Africa, where there are not books, teaching is embedded in tales, proverbs, legends. (...) It is beside such things that many anthropologists have been passing by. For us everything is school. Nothing is merely an amusement. (1994b: 333-35; my translation)

We can imagine Alfa immersed in a society with similar cultural practices in the first seven years of his life; which, as is understood in pedagogy, are the most important years in a child's structuring of sociality and self-awareness. We can thus become aware of the dramatic way Alfa has left his society through his own accounts, and engage once again with the new Cl.in pupil.

In the following sequence for example, Alfa tries to narrate important aspects of his experience, oscillating between imagination, fantasy, factual accounts and chronicles in which many boundaries between imagination and reality must remain porous (Frank 1985; 1996), for these crucial memories are for Alfa a very important locus for empowerment and identity accumulated over time during his present life in France.

DVD 2 chapt. 5 n. 4 (DV 15_1) Alfa's recollection. 4'40''

Alfa ends his account 'dramatically' by reaching into the present, saying: 'now it is over'.⁹ Relatedly, on another occasion, Ibrahim, a classmate of Alfa remarks: 'we came here (France) and we lasted here' (see chapter two and below). In Alfa's recollection this radical transformation is powerfully expressed as a climax, but also a sort of resolution of the suspense. After having revealed his early childhood, his powers as a *medium*, he stops brutally with a short statement, definitive, without hope: 'It is over'. What indeed was over for Alfa?

Expressions of *Poullakou*

But learning, they will also forget. Would what they would learn be worth as much as what they would forget? (Cheik Kane 1961: 34)

In a larger sense the echoes heard in Alfa's accounts can be perceived as preconditions, or historical reverberations of a trajectory of transgenerational identity-making in progress. There are traces of dialectical patterns of power that are institutionalised, located in the current European educational framework, which provides, but also imposes, unique models to adhere to (and hence possibly to resist); in the case of Alfa, a child whose life history and ethnic origins are, if not ignored, in some ways visibly bypassed. Additionally these traces could be aspects of postcolonial and dialectical relationships with the institutions of the host country, as Alfa is inevitably seen by his educators as a person to be 'fed' with knowledge.

However, these echoes are also connected to Alfa's own family. Prior to the exodus of his family from Liberia, Alfa was very much kept within the confines of his own ethnic group. Further, he was raised within various communities of necessity, encountered during the long journey to escape the war from Liberia via Guinea to France. With this particular child the main thematic became the 'gaze', a metonymical aspect intended here literally as 'sight'. Through the gesture of watching, the action of 'looking at' those authoritative structures facing the self, including communication through eye contact and avoidance of the authoritative gaze, the rupture of a taboo across para-linguistic negotiation can be seen. In Alfa's gaze one can grasp a sense of current south west African history intermingled with his own history and personal stories, inseparable echoes merging in his account.

When I arrived in the classroom at the start, Alfa appeared to be a timid and puny child, welcoming but distant, who entered the field of vision of the camera only after many months of hesitation. He was certainly intrigued but always shy. I need to digress here in order to show how my meeting with Alfa was informed by my acculturated gaze.¹⁰ In the studies cited below, Fulbe identity aspirations seem to give less weight to aspects of kin and consanguinity than physical features, habits and morality, expressed in the general term of *poullakou*. Urban-rural displacements and migrations, Islamisation, economic transformations, drought and loss of herds render the meaning of *poullakou* in constant flux in the social actors' perspective, when assessing the cultural context of reception and when they try to articulate what *poullakou* is or how it is perceived by outsiders.¹¹ I have learned much about these aspects during a longstanding relationship with Fulbe students and colleagues, whom I had the chance to work with and travel to West Africa with, enabling us to discuss

our perspectives. Some Fulbe students and scholars watched the rushes and the final cut of the film which featured Alfa and commented frequently that I had to include the study of the meanings of *poullakou* to support my interpretation. One Fulbe viewer added after the screening: 'A message through the eyes is more important than the words', a saying of the Garouà area in Adamawa (Hamadou 2002, personal communication).

A child raised in this way is encouraged toward acts that pay respect to communication through sight, in a complex pattern incorporating gender, body posture, hygiene and age (Holtedahl 1997), described later in more detail. Alfa, educated in this way, had just arrived into a new sociocultural context when I first met him in France. Fulbe subjects call themselves *Pouullo* whereas the non-Pouullo are described as *Haabe*. In terms of behaviour the Fulbe ideal education envisions shy, reserved subjects who tend to respect the status quo with other non-Fulbe. These ideal subjects are eventually dominated or even assimilated, as happened from the expansionist history of the seventh century of these ethnic clans up until the pre-colonial era (Djingui 2000). When it comes to the construction of identity, to be *Pouullo* is overtly considered to be superior to being *Haabe*. Thus, those who were not born Fulbe but who have acquired Pouullo through social betterment, migration and marriage, when trying to show their sense of belonging in an overly ostentatious way, can be accused of being arrogant, vulgar or socially clumsy. Exhibitionistic attitudes towards attributes central to one's identity, if they are acquired and not legitimised by one's own community, are penalised. These manifestations essentialize virtues (for one cannot acquire them if one is not truly humble and blessed) even more acutely since the Fulbe converted to Islam. According to the latter the exhibition of one's privilege is a moral fault.

To understand the way Fulbe attitudes are encouraged, it is important to note that one of the key concepts in the construction of *poullakou* is *semteende*. *Semteende*, comprising qualities which are comparable with Western concepts of shyness, humility, reserve and respect. Those who express *poullakou* through *semteende* are appreciated because they achieve an ideal form, which makes it possible to distinguish *Pouullo* from *Haabe* individuals. *Semteende* pertains to the psychological formations of a sense of belonging and of a moral understanding of well-being; it encourages action within social relations, whereas *poullakou* is primarily a given condition and cannot be acted upon, but instead must be constructed through social legitimisation and ways of being.

From the *Haabe* point of view the two concepts of *poullakou* and *semteende* are often mismatched, assimilated or used in an undifferentiated way (VerEecke 1988). This might demonstrate that, on the one hand, the latter is a fundamental component in the process of identity construction; yet on the other, it is difficult to see that *semteende* is acquirable in an educational sphere and that it belongs to the behavioural domain, while *poullakou* is the synthesis of many attitudes. It is not a way of behaving but a perspective about building a sense of identity, which requires more features and complex patterns to be identified. In other words, expressions of shame belong to cultural behaviours in all cultures. *Semteende*, albeit under different names, exists in every human society (referencing emotional restraint or reticence), while *poullakou* is the constructed peculiar quality of *Pouullo* people, where *semteende* is one of the core behavioural features (VerEecke 1988). *Semteende* characterises social interactions, from the way one introduces and presents oneself to the way one pays attention to

others, in accordance with hierarchies of age, gender, consanguinity and kin interaction (kinship intended obviously in its larger sense). An example of some of the interdictions children should observe is the stipulation that a child must not pronounce the first name of adults who inhabit roles of authority for her. The role-playing is contextual to the social activities through which the child evolves, but it is also based on a culturally defined frame and scale of interpersonal relationships of dependence locating a newborn from the start of her life. The child should never look elders in the eye and should bow in greeting when addressed to speak; furthermore, children should take off their shoes when entering an area where older people sit. Juniors do not declare to seniors their physiological needs or weaknesses (hunger, thirst, cold, the need to wash, defecate and urinate, or express fear of dangerous things). One of the aspects of *semteende* I was interested in exploring within my ethnographic interpretation of Alfa's relationships in the French school system is that of the inhibition of directly gazing at superiors whether they be parents, teachers, aunts, uncles or older siblings.

Semtugo is a verb suggesting a violation of *semteende*, albeit implying that *semteende* is not only a limitation and repression of the possibilities of *semtego*, but also a positive behavioural statement about one's will and strength of temperament. In this context, *semteende* shows attitudes of generosity, honesty, kindness and pride (VerEecke 1988). Such an idealised aspect of Fulbe children's education, when turned toward one's ethnic sense of belonging, moreover encourages subjects to sense beauty in the pride of developing *semteende*, not merely pointing out the repression and sanction of everything which is potentially or factually *semtego*. In my discussions with Fulbe parents and with university students raised under similar pedagogical

principles, now aware of their past as children, even when I was reading Fulbe writers the most vivid being Hampaté Bâ, who wrote several autobiographical novels (Bâ 1994a; 1996), it becomes clear that there is an interface between *poullakou* and *semteende*. Their approach suggests that each ethnic group has its own forms of *semteende*, while only Fulbe have *poullakou*, emphasising the contextualisation of these culturally specific patterns. Moreover, many of these sources point out that a sense of sacrifice is demanded from the child, who must show *semteende*, mainly through a form of deprivation involving food, water, body posture, patience, position of head and eyes. This behaviour is associated with the ability to contain provocations and humiliations, enduring in silence while retaining anger, showing courage instead of mere impulses of revenge, and not being too extroverted. In Alfa's behaviour with his teacher these aspects are visible when one has identified the context. Although not as visible to the acculturating and acculturated eyes of the teacher, the manifestation of these aspects nevertheless becomes visible through the process of filming.

However, before analysing the consequences and collisions in social behaviour that take place in Alfa's new life, it is necessary to look into the way the ruptures and modalities of keeping in balance a normative rigidity of ideal pedagogical instances are made possible. The values of this type of education were vividly revealed in the participant observation work that I did with the family. The roles played by family members, the elder and younger siblings, male and female parents and other relatives, each with their attendant gender connotations, are also fundamental. One characterisation which furthers understanding of Alfa's autobiographical storytelling, (I refer to our dialogue about his dog *Medor*), is the alliance of gender and generation in the social form of *walderuu*, youth associations. *Walderuu* are formed with peers of

the same age and gender, neighbours or peers belonging to the same clan or school and historically, in view of the rite of passage to adulthood. What was called *Soro* in nomadic Fulbe society has today almost disappeared in its ancient form (Bocken -Oumarou Ndoudi 1986), for many reasons that cannot be analysed here; yet it is distilled still through some behaviours and values expressed by Fulbe-imagined communities. In this rite one must learn to face physical pain, to show courage, to experience temporarily androgynous attitudes (makeup, long hair, mellifluousness, fights with weapons, freedom to break social order, and burlesque attitudes) so as to step into the virility or feminine qualities of the age of puberty. The experience of a type of pain called *ngorou* is administered through harassment by older peers of the same male sex. Alfa points out how some older boys were harassing him when his special ally Medor; his dog and 'twin', was killed. In the exodus to Guinea Alfa lost his cohorts (his *waldeeru*) and nobody but his pet could protect him from being bullied and from the trials of *ngorou* overseen by veterans (who were already circumcised). It seems that the existence in several refugee camps, together with the subsequent asylum in France, have interrupted the contextual transformations which Alfa was about to undergo, with their various manifestations of sociality and aspirations to integration which these socially gendered rites provided for.

To return to Alfa's expression of shyness and his avoidance of eye contact with his teacher, it is important to remember that *semteende* also implies the potential to escape interdictions in given relationships of intimacy and gender-age contextual safety. Female relatives of maternal kin (namely older aunts, sisters, female cousins, and mothers; familial titles which evoke common language terms of consanguinity and which help our Western understanding, but actually have other patterns in local

kinship) can show a certain indulgence in meeting the eyes of a younger boy or girl. In this case children can expect expressions of complicity or the temporary suspension of interdiction from a female teacher, a female healer or doctor, from a female *marabout* or generally from a female representative of educational authority.¹² This form of complicity and reciprocity is called *endam* in the Fulbe language of Adamawa; the root is *endi* which literally means both the maternal bosom and breastfeeding (VerEcke 1988). Maternal understanding and the intimacy of breastfeeding, the loving look into each other's eyes, are from the same etymological root. Having tried to reduce these multiple references to the components and meaning/construction of *poullakou*, I have concentrated mainly on those expressions which have emerged between Alfa and Pascale, as well as between Alfa and myself. It is therefore useful to emphasise that the main recognition of the state of 'junior' for Fulbe children, with their due gender differences, passes through the learning of *semteende*. It must be learnt with the aim to consolidate, to express and to improve one's *poullakou*. This attribute is virtually possessed, indicating the right of belonging to a given clan, whose members want to import social status into their community, and from there to a larger society of members who define themselves as *Poullou* and are recognisable as such through their expressed *poullakou*. The socialisation of the child takes place in this network of relationships, exchanges, interdictions and applications of rules of behaviour.

If as in Alfa's case, the family, now refugees in France, tries to conserve some of these expressions of *semteende* to strengthen the continuity of their shared identity for the child, who now lives between the socialisation of the school and that of the family, then these two can become poles of contradictory identity formation within which some forms of what Bateson (1972) calls the 'double bind' can be experienced and

resisted. This is witnessed in *Mémoire Dure*, which documented several of Alfa's learning blockages. With Alfa my observations *in situ* were culturally informed by my fieldwork in Adamawa, in areas which had a Fulbe majority. When his elderly parents, refugees of the Liberian civil war, arrived in France, with no French or English, nobody asked them to tell their story. However, I was kin to listen to their past. Hence, in meeting me, Alfa met for the first time curiosity and trust, which the school had never provided. At the beginning of my stay in his class I had greeted him in Fulani and then said some Fulani words to check if my poor command and his fluency had something in common. Many words were the same and he was amazed, initially with pride - since his language existed in the eyes of a foreigner, as I was for him, so this public recognition was somehow more valid - then with worry, for to him there was a risk of being pulled back in time and space, as well as speaking a language which the school disapproves of.

Alfa's recounting of several experiences in various refugees camps, where friends and colleagues of his father had taught him what they knew and of their acts of solidarity in a common situation of pain and waste, made me think that his education was mainly oral and similar to that described by Ampaté Bâ. Moreover, he had also received some months of education in a Koranic school before fleeing, like so many sedentary Fulbe children (Holtedahl and Djingui 1997). In contrast to Ibrahim's response of simply reversing the notebook, Alfa had shown aspects of his previous Islamic teaching by reading French exclusively through photographic patterns, word by word, without trying to learn the phonetic spelling or the etymological meaning or the explicit indexical logic in the chain of words. I hypothesised that Alfa read in this manner because learning in these schools meant copying entire pages of the Ku'ran in

Arabic and reading them aloud from memory, without knowing the translation in one's language. Thus these methods had already shaped a habitus (Bourdieu: 1977) of learning for him. Alfa was scolded by the teacher when writing in French for not paying due attention to the spelling and instead simply acting on his own desire to speak and write the correct words, as playful or magic acts, themselves disapproved of by the rationalising French education. She explained that his desire to do this wouldn't suffice and that it was wrong to rely on it, telling him the safest way to learn was rationally through proper pronunciation: first the phonemes, then the lemmas, then finally forming chains of these into words. She seemed to indicate that there was no risk of mistake in using the 'logical' way she was emphasizing. In using this method, she explained, each reading of the same sentence will provide the same result.

This method appeals to a rationality of an indexical type and collided yet again with the knowledge Alfa had acquired prior to his migration. The French educational reading methods are not in themselves wrong, but they are nevertheless historically posited, and in this case the establishment of compulsory learning, in an extremely short time, denies the logic and functionality of the child's previous habits, inducing a state of *tabula rasa* in his mind. According to the French educational system, Alfa has problems in orthography and hence in *orthophonie* (the art of spelling a word correctly) and also the other way around: grammatical correctness and beauty are in this case related and should consequently advance simultaneously. In the reverse scenario, in the reciting of Ku'ran, beauty seems to belong mainly to a mystical order and knowing the meaning of what is said is not automatically constitutive of its truth. What constitutes truth and beauty is rather the mystical inspiration, the Koranic

prayer. It is the praying subject who enables meanings to be received by God. The justice is not, so to speak, terrestrial, if not present in the oral performance and in its pre-inscribed form (in the Ku'ran by calligraphers and mystical poets). For the teacher, Alfa's writing limitation should be promptly overcome, without hesitation and without exploring the reasons underlying the behaviour, acquired as a conscious project of skill acquisition, simultaneously inscribed in the corporeal attitudes severely taught in the Koranic school and appropriate to that educational context. Alfa is ordered to undergo a huge transformation of his assumptions, habits and the inner logic of his very agency, yet the time and reasons given to him for this are subjectively perceived by Alfa as a rough justice.

Moreover, in the word 'Alfa', it is tempting to hear the same etymological root in the word '*Alfa-ahu*', a concept informing the counterpart of esoteric Fulbe knowledge. *Alfaalu* is defined as the ability to wish something into existence and to influence fate through the act of wishing, and more widely through propitiatory practices. As Baba explains:

According to *alfaalu* principles, keeping on thinking about the same idea may make it happen. It is then better to always think positively. Negative thoughts and sayings are invitations to misfortunes ... Consequently, children, in their games are very early exhorted not to fall in with any kind of games where it is about war, death, starvation, because it is alleged that it can bring these calamities on the community. Doing it is making bad *alfaalu*: ('*Hallugo alfaalu*'). They should instead have to regularly deal in their everyday games with good *alfaalu* ('*Voodugo alfaalu*' or '*Alfaalu mboon-ngu*'), which means they have to play, invoke and wish rains, cows, marriages, abundance, feasts, to make sure that they are appealing only for happiness. Fulbe children have then thousand and one opportunities to embody how to avoid bad *alfaalu*. They grow up with it and it guides all their behaviour and activities (2003: 58).

If the teacher had the unpleasant duty to correct the children, my role vice versa was to not penalise any of their expressions: the intercultural investigation was mainly

situated in the exploration of the inner logic of the children's behaviour, their emotional reactions and the emergence of some new relational patterns. In so doing through film, I could offer a space to amplify accounts not only relating to educational proficiency, but to performances of remembrance and storytelling.

In the deployment of his imaginative ability, I noticed that Alfa needed to tell the same story several times, with minimal variation, almost in the guise of a canon to be memorised and close to the Sahelian way of telling which, as noted above, is simultaneously performance, mysticism, cosmology, historically transmittable knowledge, initiation and science (Bâ 1994b). Alfa struggled to overcome the tendency to dyslexia and aphasia that meant he was filed into the school system as a child not fully able in the domain of literacy, with an allegedly 'scarce' imagination. Thus throughout the film I did not utilise an approach which over-stimulated the children's response, but used one of calling and evoking things transversally, so to speak, and this apparently allowed for the creation of a space of *parole libre* (free speech) - one of conversation, or indeed silence. In any case no penalty would follow their choice. They would instead be listened to. In the excerpt in which Alfa evokes his dog Medor, there is a complex use of references, deploying several levels of consciousness and abilities, further showing that he has nevertheless a vivid imagination and a skill for reminiscing, which the school seems not even to suspect.

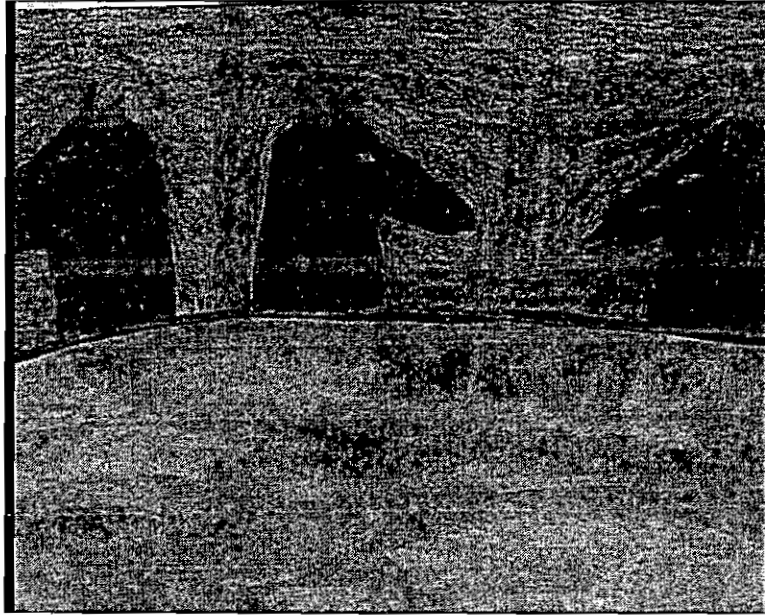


Figure 6.5 Alfa's drawing portraying his dog Medor.

In offering a reading of Alfa's relationship with his dog, I must pause at his portrait of Medor. The dog is represented as having a strong attitude, looking into the distance, in middle shot. Alfa has utilised okras, yellows and various brown shades evoking those of the Sahelian landscape. As his totem, mask and symbolic brother (Alfa is the only male child of his direct parents and has five sisters, much older than him), Medor could also be perceived as an ally and protector-spirit. After Medor's death, Alfa did not wish to have another dog. The way he talks about his pet opens up other interpretations; for me Alfa's descriptions of Medor also evoke a piece of his infancy from which he was dramatically torn. Nevertheless, although dead, Medor still seems to function in Alfa's life today as a mediator between worlds and epochs that beg to be reconciled. The dog is described in Alfa's words as having special powers, as a superior creature, a champion of the canine race, a fighter full of courage. Finally, Medor is a male dog, both protective and expressive of aspects of man's virility.

After Medor died, Alfa tells the stories of his power as medium. At the sentence 'but now all this has ended', Alfa again lowers his eyes toward the floor and remains silent, so as to re-absorb the tone of the confession toward an untold, un-tellable account of his arrival in France. He joins the present of his migration. By enrolling in the Parisian school his powers of 'seeing what nobody else can see' were somewhat inhibited. His status of medium, having the special ability to connect the invisible and the visible, ghostly and prophetic, which previously gave him courage, strength and recognition within his community, was, so to speak, put in the background, suspended and fixed into a private fairy tale. Now, in the society surrounding him and especially at school, Alfa does not reveal any supernatural powers, but he prefers to operate through mimesis and conformity, trying to be a good son, respectful of his parents and older sisters and an able and obedient pupil for the headmaster and teacher.

I have tried to film Alfa's posture, his face and gaze, without utilising naturalism or objectification, eventually seeking what Ricoeur (1986) describes as a 'iconic increase' in the posture of his face. In the sequence referenced above, Alfa finally dared to raise his eyes and look straight across through the lens of the camera. He reached the world behind the camera, so to speak. He also reached my gaze, that of the future audience and his own place in that audience in the future, as spectator of that scene. It can be speculated that in so doing Alfa had transformed some of the *semteende* interdictions, expressing his willingness to obey the rules of a new cultural context, a context in which he as host and a new citizen in the making, can be acculturated. However, until Alfa can choose to operate using his resources and his abilities in maintaining the complexity of thick identities, his agency in deciding when to break the rules and when and to whom he should be loyal, he remains awake to the

possibilities which his socialisation will provide, without having to deny or devalue his past and cultural origins.

Ibrahim

65. Streets of Kado. Ext. Day.

Davidson runs away, like a screaming beast, in the streets of the city. ...

With emptied eyes wanders in public, wasted gardens. Here is, the public lavatory, one, two, and three, of colonialists: one section for Whites, one for Arabs, one for Negroes. He, with an urge from his darkest soul, mechanically, humiliated, enters the section for Negroes, in shadowy buzzing of sun. Facing the disgusting wall of the lavatory, his eyes are terrorised. But what they stare at is not the wall, but unavoidable he sees the form of the forest, the sun. With a movement which is somewhat mechanical, like the one of a beast moving its palms or paws, he tries with his hands to tear off that vision. But can't, indeed.

The vision of the forest is so sweet, in front of him.

And suddenly, uttered by his inner voice, a word resounds (Pasolini 1970: 65).

One of the younger Cl.in children, Ibrahim, has pushed the front button of the camera himself enabling me to look closer at him. The result of this gesture was that he immediately entered my field of vision (I was observing through the camera without shooting, as I usually do). He also inscribed himself in the frame, in an extreme close up. Here is an example of a choice made without choosing: I could not adjust my frame because he was the one who started the filming process but neither could he change it, precisely because he was the object of the shot. Hence he became the subject in front of both the camera and the microphone. This shot (in French *prise de vue*) has been literally a stand (*prise de position*) toward me; moreover, it served as a hold on me (*emprise*).¹³ And through me and through the camera's gaze, this shot took hold of the potential audience as well, providing a window from where space-time is unforeseeable.

The first discussion, or monologue, with Ibrahim, happened just after a sports session in the courtyard, where he proudly learnt to skate with old roller skates and so enjoyed the feeling of flying on wheels that he came back to the classroom in a state of talkative excitement as described in chapter two. Following a question about his illness,¹⁴ he gave accounts of his life in the bush in Mali, where he was a herder, living with his uncle and cousins. From a young age Ibrahim was left in the country with his mother's relatives. In the Sahelian bush he had learnt how to look after the cattle and spent several weeks in a Koranic school prior to leaving for France, where his mother and father had already another child; his youngest brother, who was born in Paris, as in the case of Kadiatou, spoke French fluently, did not want to talk Western African *patois* and had never visited Mali in his life.



Figure 7.5 Ibrahim learns how to buy in a supermarket through trial and error.

Ibrahim had just returned to his family a few weeks before the recollection below was elicited. I was sitting in front of him and had put down the camera after my long session running after the roller skaters. However, when he started talking, I took it up

immediately and without even taking time to check the exposure or the cleanliness of the lenses, I begun filming. I was suddenly aware that Ibrahim was finally speaking at length, and that jump of trust and command were exactly the objects I was after in my research. I instinctively knew that the forthcoming recollection was one of the accounts that can only be narrated when one is still inhabiting in two places simultaneously. The threshold of the migratory experience was to be crossed. A story could be thrown ahead, like an anchor.

After me I take a horse, after me I goes to the swimming pool, swimming pools here and in Africa not the same. Afterwards here you goes, after until midday, until, until already, you still go. As you like, money is not there, as you like. Me, I goes with horses, afterwards me I goes with some water, afterwards horse drinks. Afterwards me one goes with horse. After me one goes to take a cow, bring it and drink. Afterwards we go and go and go and after we tear the milk: shh... shhh... shhhiii... (*He demonstrated with his hands how he was milking the cow*)¹⁵.

It was only when I transcribed the text of Ibrahim's oral recollection, applying the method of Hymes (1996) and Bernstein (1990), which consists, among other criteria, of taking into account not only each verse, but organising them into stanzas so that the utterance becomes fully visible as a form of chanted retelling, with rules, meter, intervals and a coherent tempo. In relation to the exercises undertaken in class, where the linguistic dominance of canonical forms and proficiency acquisition contrasted with possible elicitations of personal narratives, Ibrahim was autonomously chose a single form. Hymes and Bernstein had demonstrated similar phenomena in the case of educational frames imposed on Black students in New York in the 1960s. I understood, not only conceptually, but also empirically, what their studies had actually meant, albeit within a far hotter public debate about 'assimilationism' and inequality. Their alternative forms of textual analysis revealed hypothetically that Ibrahim was expressing a form of narrative influenced by rap and hip-hop, which in

fact was at the time his favourite locus, the formation of his identity influenced by urban subculture. Paradoxically, while filming, I had the intuition that he was rapping, but I had to witness a clear demonstration of it, via the empirical analysis, which revealed his style. I had, thanks to the filming process, the chance to listen to his rhythm many times. Consequently, the transcription takes into account the starts and pauses, the pace and breaths, the rhythm of the stanzas (a-n) and verses (1-6), appearing thus:

- 1a. After me I take a horse,
 - 2a. After me I goes to the swimming pool,
 - 3a. Swimming pools here and in Africa
 - 4a. Not the same.
 - 1b. Afterwards here you goes,
 - 2b. After until midday, until, until
 - 3b. Already, you still go.
 - 4b. As you like,
 - 5b. Money is not there,
 - 6b. As you like.
 - 1c. Me, I goes with horses,
 - 2c. Afterwards me
 - 3c. I goes with some water,
 - 4c. Afterwards horse drinks.
 - 1d. Afterwars me
 - 2d. one goes with horse.
 - 3d. After me one goes
 - 4d. take a cow,
 - 5d. bring it and drink.
 - 1e. Afterwards we go and go
 - 2e. and go and after
 - 3e. we tear the milk:
 - 4e. shh... shhh... shhhiii...
- (he shows with his hands the milking of the cow).*

- 1f. After you've drink,
 2f. cous-cous-cous,
 3f. after one goes eat,
 4f. after drink, to eat,
 5f. after one goes
 6f. to bring in the evening.
- 1g. we go,
 2g. and if you find something,
 3g. to beat, to beat, until the thing dies.
 1h. If one sees a dog we are going to...
 2h. A dog we are going to beat,
 3h. he comes after us, we run.
 4h. Fast, fast and fast.
 5h. Fast and fast.
- 1i. After dog says 'houf'
 2i. and me have a knife.
 3i. A huge knife
 4i. and afterwards me,
 5i. I does like this
(he shows himself stabbing the animal with his knife)
 6i. Pahhh!
- 1l. After we find something,
 2l. if you find something,
 3l. if you find something,
 4l. a snake,
 1m. after we find,
 2m. after to cut its head,
 3m. after to throw it in the sand,
 4m. after if you have done little...
 5m. shii shii shii,
 6m. after the father will beat you!
- 1n. Afterwards we ate.
 2n. We ate as much as we wanted.
 3n. We ate, and ate.

4n. And then we came here

5n. and lasted here.

In the core of this unforgettable account, Ibrahim evokes the drinking of the ‘white’ milk, which the calves sucked directly from the cows, by use of the onomatopoeic sound ‘shi shi’, re-enacting the sound of the milk sprinkling. He then contrasts, with a different tone, the ‘purple’ actions of hunting with a big knife, which follows in a sensuous description. Thus, the memory of the pleasure of being nursed is followed by the exploration of a taboo: the hunting of wild dogs and then of snakes, which the uncle would punish if discovered. Ibrahim’s rap account consisted of images of the bush, evoking desire (‘As you like’); rebellion (‘to beat, to beat, until the thing dies’); pleasure (‘After drink, to eat’) fulfilment (‘We ate as much as we wanted’); totemic creatures (‘If you find a dog, (...) a snake’); power (‘A huge knife’) and disillusionment (‘We came here and lasted here’). It also embodies the thematic of French contemporary rap and hip hop at that time.

Further, this telling is suspended in the French verbal tense *imparfait*: ‘*On mangeait le cous-cous*’, ‘*on était punis par son oncle*’, ‘*on chevauchait autant que l’on voulait*’ ... until a sudden stop over the absolute tense: ‘*On est venus là¹⁶ et on est restés là*’. Even though the grammatical forms of educational French are still marked by some mistakes in agreement between subject, adverbs and prepositions, nevertheless, the temporal forms of the verbs create a relation to the inner time of the narration which is well modulated, logical and contain a complex internal echo. The chronological impetus is powerful. Ibrahim seems to play with a moment that was suspended, so repetitive until a sudden disruption occurs.

My analysis of Ibrahim's accounts through the perspective of interpretation could stand alone here, had it not been for the momentary gaze of the lens. His gaze persisted as a form of shared communication, which opened up an enigma in the field of social research. It was an action creating at once a shared world where intentionality was not the only element. I found comfort in philosophy, namely phenomenology, to provide a possible analysis of this exchange. We could try to make a comparison in the action of filmmaking, with the fundamental shift from 'speech' to 'to speak', as action 'toward'.¹⁷ In fact, as the French philosopher Lévinas (1981) points out, both philosophy of language and linguistic science as *Art of Logos* (or rhetoric), have been since Aristotle and Plato mostly preoccupied with speech as an object of analysis of the forms of rhetoric.¹⁸ This has somehow induced the forgetfulness that language as movement, as a 'speaking toward', can be seen as a social tool enabling rapprochement with Others.¹⁹

In that first analysis of the form of speech which Ibrahim expressed and which was subsequently recorded on film, using the hip-hop form as seen above, I was still captured by my linguistically oriented attempt of defining the result of this speech and its form. These two ways of interpreting Ibrahim's speech and actions are both relevant. The first construction can be said to recognise the freedom for Ibrahim of speaking in his familiar language, through which he expressed eloquence, even involuntary poetry, as described. In this aporia I still debate my findings, but with the aim of foregrounding the ethical dimension noted by Lévinas '*l'acheminement vers l'Autre*' (1981: 192-193) as one of the principles, attempts and hopes informing my visual anthropological practice.

Nawel



Figure 8.5 Nawel tells an Algerian tale.

Il y a un moment où la lumière commence à s'en prendre aux choses, à leur faire balbutier leurs formes, et puis leur noms successifs, à partir de celui-ci même de "chose" qui est le commencement. Il y a d'abord quelque chose; puis, des choses. Et c'est exactement comme dans la Genèse. Tout se passe comme il est décrit dans le célèbre Chapitre I. Division de l' homogène, du rien ou du chaos ad libitum.

Il y a une petite enfance de la figure du monde d'un jour, pour un lieu donné. (Valéry 1943; *Sans Titre*).

When Nawel was re-integrated in the class of her age group, after six months in the Cl.in class, the new teacher asked her, this very first question: 'Where do you come from?' She answered 'From Cl.in'. The whole class laughed. She never understood why. At first glance Nawel seems to come from a 'Algeria' depicted on the news: a nation of hold-ups, massacres and a broad and obscure violence, which became visible after years of socialism. A certain coterie of established French politicians looked at the situation with complaisance, almost as proof that the Liberation, the FLN, the glorious past of its independence in the 1960s had failed in a constitutive way, and that the thousands and thousands dead on the Algerian side had not been

worth that rebellion. The years when Algeria had fought French Rule were now under the filter of revisionism, latent ever since and never really metabolised by the French side.

This Algerian girl is one of seven children of a family fallen into misery: her brother was wounded in a raid of fanatics, the father had disappeared for a long period and the mother had consequently tried to establish for each child some structures of safety. She had given Nawel to an aunt-in-law who adopted her and brought her to Paris to stay with a half-sister in her thirties living on her own and a half-brother of Nawel's own age, who was attached to another school. Nawel does not seem too happy, but she shows courage and copes extremely well with her new life in the Cl.in. She goes alone to school, which is quite a long distance away; she completes her assignments by herself, but she is often very tired because she stays awake until late at night. She suffers harassment from her half brother and her stepfather and bruises occasionally appear on her skin. Pascale does not tolerate the idea that a child can be abused by people she trusts. She is enormously invested in the integrity of the female pupils she teaches; especially the girls, as in the case of Kadiatou discussed above. Consequently, a strong bond is immediately established between Nawel and her teacher: Nawel needs tenderness, a firm way of managing her anxieties and to feel taken care of. She demonstrates this by her physical interaction with Pascale, touching her while she is being taught. Often she sits on her teacher's legs. She's both joyful and shy; suddenly, she performs for an audience of her peers by dancing to Algerian tunes, moving her belly like a professional; sometimes she makes fun of everybody and can show incredible elation when a Charlie Chaplin movie is screened. Nawel is like fresh air when she is up, pitiful when she is tired, distant when worried. She often

changes her mood from one minute to another. When she left the Cl.in the whole class grieved, most of all Pascale, who realised how strong their connection was. Nawel had also started a friendship with Radija, newly arrived in Cl.in as an exiled Algerian, whose father, a committed journalist under the threat of death, had to send his whole family to France suddenly and then disappeared for a while from public life. Nawel had asked Radija to transcribe a letter for her Algerian family into Arabic.

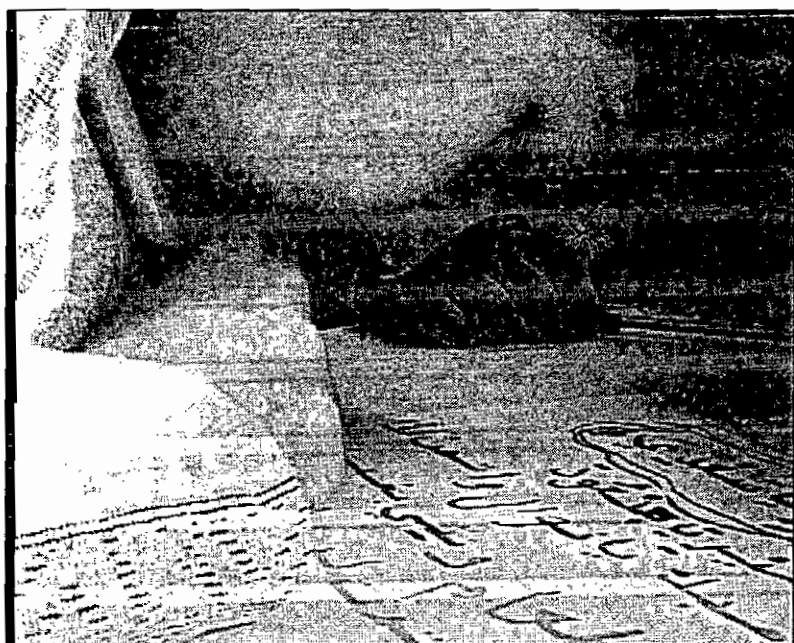


Figure 4.5 Nawel dictates a letter to Radija.

She could remember the language orally, but not how to write it. She therefore dictated the missive to Radija in the old style of 'scribes'. This was the first time she evoked her biological family, still in Algeria and potentially separated and spread in various regions, after the violent events of Sidi Moussa.

DVD 2 ch. 5, clip n. 5 (Dv 10_4). Nawel. 4'26''.

We had this short but intense dialogue just after she dictated the letter. A long moment of mutual staring, heavy and light at the same time, a moment of silent

recognition stretched out between us. If this was also an event-centred shot then I will call it an 'advent'. Nawel let me experience one of the meanings of storytelling through her talkative silence: perhaps a sense of filling or articulating the space between longing and belonging by means of unspoken words. This emerged as a silence full of tension, the communication of an unbearable questioning about what brought us here, the two of us bound by the camera filming. On the one hand, there is the paradoxical exhaustion of not having another choice than that of representing oneself all over again. On the other, this created an intimacy where the inner dialogue of Nawel went on for a lengthy time, which lasted, for me, much longer than the more bearable silence I am used to recording. If her question was: 'Can I ask you something?', I believe the fact that I agreed at once was enough for her.

This brings us to a crucial edge, where the possibilities of storytelling all become available but are rendered useless at the same time. We are in the realm of imagining a shared world already, where the possibility of questioning others, seeking to 'know' something, is here and now, in our inner dialogues. What was suspended, for me and for her, were two different conditions of communication; however, what was worthwhile was that she was allowing herself to remain in the untold. She was retaining her location, her sense of home and integrity, within my perception. Building on Hannah Arendt's (1958) seminal work on storytelling and the human condition, Jackson references Merleau Ponty: 'Thought cannot free itself from the practical, physical, and sensible immediacies of the world ... it is not a matter of rising above the mundane, but of lateral displacement' (2002: 265).

Nawel was embedding this 'lateral displacement' and somehow steering me in the right direction: demonstrating when to pause, where to adjust, how to begin again. In some sense the thematic of homelessness, of being unrelated, extraneous, versus the claim or the principle of hope of 'being at home' in the world is constitutive of storytelling. For in the words of Jackson, in this condition 'rather than a 'nowhere' outside of time and circumstance, one seeks a 'elsewhere' within the world' (ibid.). This seemed to reflect Nawel, through her silence replete of possibilities. These possibilities appeared as claims for suspending the formulation, the production and the multiple forms of (to her) 'untrue' loud speech, overwhelming her inner tale.

I often questioned the children about their dreams, since I consider the telling of one's dreams a very important source of meaning; it is one of the most intimate accounts, embodying a knowledge which can only be constructed by entering, day-by-day into one's dream-like fabric; not merely in a cultural or archetypal perspective, giving symbolic significance to dreams of different people in the same patterns of interpretation. Instead, I used to assemble the accounts of dreams to create patterns afterwards, not to apply specific meanings to the symbols or unearth conscious meanings drawn from specific schools of dream interpretation, not least because it is not my field of psychological expertise. Instead, accounts of dreams become forms of speech amongst other forms of storytelling, which I sampled during the research period. I try to analyse the wider story, produced mainly by linking each individual's dreams to the dreams of others in the same community, with reference to the community in focus. These dream-like productions of meanings, symbols and synopsis weave together the relational significance and influence that members of a communal society can give to each other, even without knowing it or without making

a conscious use of this practice. Perhaps this possibility to use dream plots as stories could give Nawel a sense of her present and provide a sense of connection to the film.

When the time to recount came for Nawel, I asked if she had dreamt. Yes, she had dreamt: there were 'stones in her shoes and the walk from home to the ferry had been very painful.' As she tried to 'take away the pebbles, they were becoming even more'. She was pointing her shoes to me, her legs under the desk, saying that she still had pain from the previous night. When I asked if she had tried, in her dream, to take away the shoes she answered: 'I could not walk without shoes, they were too precious to me'.

These short recollections are perhaps enigmatic but also very significant. The connection between telling stories and walking, journeying, the metonymical image of the leg, and the feet is present in a number of philosophies, legends, customs and sayings all over the world. One could say that they belong to the archetypal imaginary of human history and are among the metaphors we are made of. This is perhaps why her account was influencing the back of my mind in my response to this particular dream. I was filling in with my imagination the space of what she did not tell - the ferryboat, was it the one she had taken from Algeria when she left her family? The shoes, which she didn't want to take away, were they connected to her femininity, or her childhood, or maybe only her sisters? (She had left five sisters and two brothers) Were the shoes her most valuable symbolic wealth? Were the shoes part of her very body, a protective skin to her tender and vulnerable feet, so essential if one has to escape, run away? Or were the shoes her silence, her closure (hiding the feet which had to walk endlessly) and the pebbles perhaps the words? As I attempt to explain

above, I was not concentrating merely on interpreting symbols, but more on the story itself to assist in our communication in a public and shared space.

This dream occurred few days after our suspended conversation, in which we had talked about her two names (Kheira from her father, Nawel from her mother), her homeland and her father: did that dialogue provide the ground for the dream to emerge? Or was it her future, which the dream was foretelling? She had to 'walk' away from the Cl.in soon. She had all her broken language in her heart; would she manage to live in a space where her language was accepted? If not, how painful in her mouth her utterances would be? No, she could not take away her shoes. And the more she was emptying them of stones, the more stones appeared. When one starts recounting, it is hard to stop.

For Nawel, Cl.in was yet another home-place to be left, and then another journey toward the unknown would commence. When she finally did leave, she got a chocolate from Radija that she held so strongly in her palm that it actually melted while leaving the Cl.in classroom. When she arrived at her new class and met her new teacher and classmates-to-be, she shed silent tears, showing a mute despair but also a sort of tender relief for her success in leaving of her own free will. Pascale and myself were also crying, I could not shoot because the lens was damp with condensation; although I wanted to show her hands, I could not see through the viewfinder. It was too overwhelming to say goodbye. And the touch of her chocolate was our last contact before she left.

Conclusion

Alfa, the boy from Liberia fleeing towards Europe, confesses by way of a fable-like story, things he had hardly dared tell anyone, via the *totem* of his dog Medor. Ibrahim speaks at length to the camera for the first time after months of withdrawal or shy observation: suddenly a rap poem springs forth with syncopated language, recreating the atmosphere of his wild hunting near the lake where he was a shepherd in the Mali bush. Following a confidential conversation, Nawel, the Algerian girl adopted by relatives, remains suspended in the silence of a question she cannot find the words to spell. Kadiatou, from Guinea, with her introspective tendency, narrates by way of vaudeville and traditional African theatre, at times even invoking elements of soap opera, a family episode where everyone comments on her supposed engagement to a friend of her father's. For Mang Mang from China, talking about her place of origin comes about through the process of negation, wanting only to say what others wish to hear, keeping that confessional space absolutely to herself, a sort of zen concavity where there is no possible story to be heard.

We must remember that in their place of origin, most of the children who are the main social actors in this research were still learning to dwell in their new environment. They already knew how to care for animals, were able to cook, earn small amount money and generally look after themselves; they could all speak more than one language. During the phase that I observed, when they were each starting school in Europe, it can almost be said that they were asked to regress following the demand to conform, imposed by educational institutions only because they lacked the type of educational experience required in Europe. This means that their knowledge of a world, which can be called 'native' one that I would also describe as non-Western, rural, non-industrial or underclass according to various socioeconomic determinations, isn't taken into consideration at all in

their educational assessment. Rather, age is taken as *the* unconditional reference point for homogenisation without considering that in other societies, age is marked by rites of passage and the full incorporation of children in the process of sustaining their communities.

It might be necessary to extend the concept of the mother tongue to the language or languages that have accompanied conception, birth and movement in the world, affective and reference contacts, connection with the environment, relationship with objects handled and with familiar scenery (Cardona 1983); in other words language which develops through activities of contact, fear, curiosity, discovery and play, alongside the world and its inhabitants - language as one of the vehicles for the formation of sociality. In this sense, many children from Africa, America, Asia, Oceania and Europe already possess several languages from their early years. The unconditional component of a nationally imposed hegemonic language is not always in harmony with the multiplicity, co-existence, flexibility and deep embodiment of familial/familiar languages.

My intention in the final chapter has not been to effect a dichotomy between school and home in an attempt to schematise or polarise, or demonstrate conflict, alienation and loss. I wish instead to provide evidence of ways of learning that balance out by themselves in each child according to personal experience of the social, the ability to metabolise and to undermine borders, to develop a sense of agency; ways of learning which, although they can cause suffering, conflict, and at times neurosis, are mostly integrated: flowingly, playfully and in an utilitarian way, in the desire to be in tune with the surrounding world, to be familiar with it, to both face and represent it.

Notes

¹ The *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* were soldiers recruited in the French West African colonies by the French Army. They contributed enormously to the front line in the World War II and died in high numbers for the liberation of Europe. Most never returned back to their homelands.

² She said herself *maître de lécole*, in the known West African *francophone* way, by attaching *le* (the) and *école* (school) in one word, becoming *parole* (de Saussure), namely, a word where signifier and signified cannot be split, as in poetry.

³ Literally: 'Family reunion', allocated after some years to children whose parents have migrated.

⁴ Typically, these are rooms used in the past by servants and located under the roofs of ancient buildings of Paris.

⁵ Literally: *Section Education Spécialisée* - a special education unit, with a technical vocation. No further studies are usually possible after this cycle. It is meant to train youngsters for very humble jobs which French national subjects often avoid.

⁶ He means 'over there', referring to the home country, 'in Guinea'. In French *là-bas*. It is the neutral, distancing way of calling one's homeland when one is an immigrant, a common expression in France.

⁷ In French the word *déchirement* which means the nouns of the verb 'to tear apart', has an existential connotation which I would keep.

⁸ 'The dog is the zoological creature manifesting a kind of 'transcendence'.

⁹ The dialogue with Alfa is here reported:

Alfa: Oh, it was a beautiful dog! Everybody loved my Medor!

Now, he is dead. Somebody killed him because... because he was a good dog.

We also used to organise competitions, "courses", to run of the dogs. Medor always won.

Rossella: Did you escape in Guinea because of the war in Liberia?

A: Yes. The war was there, every day, every day, and it will never end.

R: But did you see the war? How it was?

A: They used to break heads, they took stones and broke heads with the stones.

It was a guy, he was strong. He was used to kill people and then to leave the dogs, so they bite people and ate them! He was really cruel. This one struggled with Medor, so Medor killed him, he bites him in the legs, and then it died.

R: What was Medor doing during the war?

A: He was... somebody wanted to kill me. He took the rifle and told me: say goodbye to yourself and your family. He started to hit me and suddenly screamed like: 'Ouhaah' and then my father knocked him down.

After that, every day, every day somebody hit me. They were hitting me every day...

R: Who?

A: Some older guys, 16 years old. I was 5... and they 10 and 8... they were use to hit me all the time.

I was use to see things in such a way than if something was happening, somebody told me, in my ears. If I tried to explain it to my mother, my mother said: No, cannot be true! But anyway, everyday, if something was happening, 'he' told me.

Another day I told my mother: a car will have some accident...

My mother answered: 'No, it cannot be true' and the accident came and she finally admitted: 'Yes it is true'.

R: But who was telling you the things you saw? Your dog?

A: No.

R: It was you, by yourself who saw?

A: I was seeing it into my eyes. Since I was a baby, I could see things, which nobody can see. It was me who was able to see by myself. If something also happened... I could hear... Somebody came and told me about things happening into my ears. Nobody can hear for it!

It is somebody who tells me. Everyday, everyday I did it, everyday.

But now it is over.

¹⁰ I attempt to describe some of the main modes with which I had observed expressions of identity formation in Fulbe communities in Adamawa, the region overlapping north Cameroon and South-East Nigeria. Thus, I want to emphasise that Alfa was belonged to Fulbe families, but from a distant location in Liberia. So these parallels are much more general than what a detailed and comparative research might have produced. But some main concepts, common to young identity formations, are here hypothesised, but needed empirical demonstration.

¹¹ I refer here to the work of: Holtedahl et al (1999) Holtedahl and Djingui (1997), Djingui (2000), Bouchené and Oumarou (1986), VerEecke (1988), and more recently, Baba (2003).

¹² As a female researcher I can have this option too, although my being White in a society of majority Whites, much like Pascale, could give our roles more freedom too, for reasons which are too complex to elaborate upon here.

¹³ I do not know if it is possible however to render this play with the word *prise*, *prise de vue* and *emprise*.

¹⁴ He had been absent for 45 days in quarantine due to a diagnosis of scabies.

¹⁵ The text follows: 'After you've drink, cous-cous-cous, after one goes eat, after drink, to eat, after one goes in the evening; we go, and if you find something, to beat, to beat, until the thing dies. If one sees a dog we are going to... A dog we are going to beat, he comes after us, we run. Fast, fast and fast. Fast and fast. After dog says 'houf' and me have a knife. A huge

knife and afterwards me, I does like this (*he shows himself hitting the animal with his knife*) Pahhh! After we find something, if you find something, if you find something, a snake, after we find, after to cut its head, after to throw it in the sand, after if you have done little... shii shii shii, after the father will beat you! Afterwards we ate. We ate as much as we wanted. We ate, and ate. And then we came here and lasted here'. (He then bends his eyes toward the floor).

¹⁶ With the word *là* (here) he underlying France, Paris, by marking the ground of the classroom with his foot.

¹⁷ In French *dit* and *dire*.

¹⁸ Lévinas foregrounds phenomenology and the ethical dimension of the act of speaking, drawing attention to anthropological and humanistic dimensions.

¹⁹ As Lévinas writes:

Le dire est une approche du prochain. Et tant que la proposition se propose à l' autre homme, tant que le dit n' a pas absorbé cette approche, nous sommes encore dans le "langage quotidien". Ou, plus exactement, dans le langage quotidien nous approchons le prochain au lieu de l' oublier dans l' 'enthousiasme' de l' éloquence. ... La proximité qui ainsi s' annonce n' est pas un simple échec de la coïncidence d' esprits que comporte la vérité. C'est tout le surplus de la socialité. ... Ce n' est pas par le degré d' élévation atteint par l' inévitable réthorique de tout parler que se définit l'essence du monde de la vie" et du langage de tous les jours"; ils se décrivent par la proximité du prochain, plus forte que cette réthorique et par rapport à laquelle se contrôlent et se mesurent ses effets (1976:192-193).

I could not find an authorised translation of this passage from one of the shorter texts of Lévinas, so I didn't dare to operate a translation myself, since the language of the phenomenologist is highly poetic and at the same time specific and epistemologically coherent.

Conclusion

I am seated in my usual café in Dublin, an Algerian-Kabyl patisserie called ironically 'La Baguette', considered a French bakery by most of its Irish clients. This café is a real oasis among the surrounding grey buildings – soft and fresh cakes, crunchy baguettes and persistent pop French and Italian music welcome its diverse clients. I am in the back yard, chatting to a young man about 21 years old, who like Tahar, is an Algerian-Kabyl. He has lived in France for most of his adolescence, after quitting Algeria in the 1990s with some members of his extended family; he then came to Ireland when he was 18. He did not have many stereotypes of Ireland and hoped that, in reverse, there would be even fewer stereotypes of Algeria and Algerians in the minds of Irish people.

He seems to be satisfied with his current life. He feels less 'Beur' (of Maghrebin origins in French jargon) and sounds genuinely optimistic. To come to Ireland was the 'real' migration from everything he had known between the Alger and Lille's suburbs, between the usual three languages (French, Algerian-Arabic and Tamazight) that he was using daily in his family. He says: 'In France our own stereotype of the *Beurs* pursues us; it is printed on our faces. When I was in those suburbs I was ready to do whatever they could offer me. To move furniture, to deliver pizzas, to arrange petty hold ups, to work in a dog pound... We only had music as reality, namely hip-hop, which rescued us. We were composing with a laptop, in parking lots, on the sidewalk, inside old cars...'

He is now quite fluent in English, but we shift to French because we wish to talk about the current events in Paris and the riots taking place in the Parisian suburbs. We

talk about the state curfew giving special powers to the various prefectures, deployed in the past, during the Algerian Independent War against French rule and imposed by the right wing French Government as part of special measure to retain 'normality'. The young man seems to know about the Algerian War and talks proudly about the fact that Algerians will always be feared by the French who in turn, have an uneasy relation with Algerians. For as he puts it: 'they were too violent and greedy' when ruling Algeria.

I have an unsettling feeling while chatting to this man that perhaps among the young French youth burning the cars (ironically labelled 'third generation' immigrants because most are Black or North African, from the Maghreb, especially Algerians, the majority Muslim but not strictly observant) those are some of the children (now adolescents) from the Cl.in school. For a number of years ago Alfa, Ibrahim and Nawel's families were pushed away from the Parisian inner city toward the *banlieues*, the suburbs. These children have obviously grown up and Alfa must now be 17 years old? While the Cl.in students are in fact first generation immigrants they are most likely categorised as 'other' and therefore generically marked by the French state and the police, who frequently patrol these *banlieue* ghettos. There would be little perceived difference between, for example Alfa and Ibrahim and the two teenagers, Zied Benna and Bouna Traoré, who were electrocuted in the French National Electricity Company substation in Aulnay-sous-Bois, while evading one of the many police check points in that area. Just 15 and 17 years old, they immediately became the two young 'martyrs' who propelled the riots by virtue of their bizarre and unjust death.

As these thoughts run through my head, I picture Tahar in a few years time. The young man in the café is hopeful about the future, as is the young Tahar, and the riots in France seem so far away from the reality of an increasingly multicultural Ireland. Yet there are signs of similar unrest in the United Kingdom (though on a much minor scale) and across Europe, in Belgium for example. Hopefully the Republic of Ireland will not merely copy former immigration models from the U.K., France or the U.S. in hosting its new citizens. There is a particular distinctiveness to patterns of migration into Ireland that needs to be explored through careful ethnographic and evidence-based research and it is painfully clear that integration policies cannot be imposed through a pan-European 'harmonisation' model. For in France the right wing politicians address the young rebels with all the worst possible appellations, labelling them as *racaille* loosely translated as 'scum' and 'garbage'. For the sons and daughters of the 'imported' labourers, the ex-colonial subjects assimilated into France to provide the under-paid *main d'oeuvre* and now kept in conditions of social deprivation characterised mainly by lack of employment and a reduction of hope, there is no possibility of equal access to higher education, to full employment and a sense of shared citizenship. The 'immolation' of the fetish of the car, itself symbolic of immigrant labour in the fifties in the industrial plants of Renault, Citroen and Peugeot, ironically becomes the trademark of the riots, in addition to the tragic destruction of ghettoised community infrastructures.

I cannot but relate my research topic to this actual present, to what may merely become a news chronicle, fading away as yet another manifestation of the violence of our time. Nonetheless the riots in Paris re-frame some of my subjects from another critical perspective. In this study I have tried to capture how a young life transforms

itself in a new place, under different conditions shaped by class, language, psychological safety and more generally the many cultural contexts experienced through the phenomenon of migration. I have tried to capture some of these issues through the prism of the memories and stories the migrant children bring with them, which they are often asked to put away, leave behind or simply downplay. But what are they offered in the new country? How can we make sense of the new knowledge they acquire and reproduce when building a reality in a new environment? What type of allegiances are they going to express in the future, given their history of migration across multiple spaces, both physical and psychological? What types of agency will they perform?

Throughout the study I have repeatedly explored these questions, using film as a means through which the minutiae of everyday practices in the intimate worlds of the children provide a way to look at how identity formations are produced in situ, that is literally in the moment. What's happening in France these days would seem to illustrate a pattern that will remain with us for a long period of time. The situation will not simply be resolved through state policies of policing and temporary social and economic restructuring. For what is at stake is a larger issue concerning identity, culture and what I would call an emergent 'transcultural agency'. The eruption in France leads me to reflect on the young 'voices' I have been documenting in this research as they struggle to be recognised, respected and included in their new environments. For many of them, in particular the children in Ireland, the riots can only exist through the media and in their imagination, to be perhaps buried in their sub-conscious? One hopes that we will not see a similar and desperate response by them, as we now see in France, in having to adapt to a hegemonic culture, which does

not allow for the full cultivation of a sense of personhood, and where occasions for agency, dreaming and cultural dignity are not only censored but in fact repressed through years of assimilation and imposed acculturation. For even a violent reaction, if it is the only dramatic form available, remains a mode of cathartic collective expression.

In his illuminating dialogue with his daughter Merièm, *Racism Explained to My Daughter*, the Moroccan writer Tahar Ben Jalloun (1999), reflects upon the questions of school children after he had read his book in classrooms in France and Italy. Pupils of African origin openly expressed their worries and explained their experience of racism; they said they wished to act differently from their parents and wanted to utilise school as a location in which to learn how to avoid racist acts. They wanted to articulate thoughts and actions based on models of difference and diversity. The book ends with one of the most crucial questions, posed by some primary school students in Bazas, France: 'How would you like to see us growing up?'

This seems to me to be *the question* that many of the children with whom I had conversations with or had observed never asked in a direct way, but yet always seemed to imply, at least indirectly. I realise now that such a question can justify the pedagogical principles and practice of adults in the children's eyes, but only if caretakers, teachers and even parents respond honestly and critically to it. Education is essentially and ideally a *utopian* practice. It provides a laboratory for the production of real possibilities, the not yet materialised nevertheless imagined realities; it shapes the contours for the envisioning of a future reality (Rancière 1991). Part of the vacuum, or even misunderstanding experienced by migrant children *vis-à-vis* most

school's current methods and programmes, derives, in part, from the fact that such an envisioning of ideals, which point to a shareable and democratic future, is not articulated by adults in a manner in which children and young subjects can both grasp and fully participate. In other words, the dynamics of power must change. Rather than stay subordinated to a monocultural national educational project, migrant children and in addition, national children, should be interpellated as both agents and subjects, through egalitarian, inclusive and creative pedagogical platforms. This remains for me the ultimate transcultural challenge, one that I hope I have begun to address in this small-scale comparative and visual ethnographic project, in classrooms and family homes in Paris and Dublin.

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Appendix A (Chapter Three)

Interview with Liz Morris

Rossella: Operating one year in your school now, I remarked that most of the Non National pupils who were there when I came last year have gone. Sometimes after one month, other times after three or four... Most of the time it happens suddenly, without even saying farewell. When Non nationals disappear from one day to the other, how to you deal emotionally and pedagogically with this precariousness?

Liz: Well, I think that every teacher gets used to deal with children who are in and out, in and out. (...) In our school we also have a lot of Irish born children who move. In my roll, when I started up, they were 3 Irish children in my room... that are no more there. It is not only... 'Non English speaking', 'Non-nationals' or whatever (...) Irish children do it as well. But when it is like this, in a sudden, you don't expect them to go... it is very sad. This is a part of life anyway, especially in the city centre schools, where all sort of kids are in and out. It would be like this even in an Educate Together school. (...) You know, people move. Teachers get used to it, especially in the urban than in the rural communities.

R: One could say that you get almost used to it.

L: Well, that is what I expect... I mean... It's horrible, and I hate it, when the likes of Jordán, Tahar and the others go... I do hate it, but I know that they will do... One part of me feels very sad and another feels not... they'll probably get better houses, maybe a better school... a better community or whatever! They are moving to a better place, rather than being in a hostel. Jordán and some of those kids were into flats with 20 people! Some of them live in hostels, where they cannot eat till 6pm... and must get up early, it is not their home... So if they get a house...

(...) I am happy if they move.

R: Do you think that the current mainstream pedagogy in Ireland fulfils the expectations of Interculturalism?

L: No, I do not think it does. (...) But I think that the current curriculum would go long way to change people's attitudes and interculturalism if it was followed by the letter of the law. If people was doing exactly what was in the book it would. (...) But that curriculum only came out in 1999, so it is very very new, the whole thing of different cultures is very new in Ireland, it's very very new, people aren't just used to deal with it. When I was a kid I never saw anybody from a different nationality, never ever ever! So... It is just one generation which is used to it, that kids from Philippines, Poland came in. It is totally new! I think that Irish education did take it on board, but still the teachers haven't been trained how to use it. In order to work its way through it is going to take a generation.

R: I know that you've studied in depth and you've been applying the curriculum of '99, also because you told me. Have you also participated in its making?

L: No, no. Well, that's was what I was doing in O'Brien Press (*Irish Publisher for Children's book among others. N.d.r.*). And that curriculum was only very new, it wasn't even printed, it was in draft. And teachers got drafts guidelines... (...) So what I did when I sat down in O'Brien Press it was : how do you turn novels, using the curriculum (...)

What could we do with our books? So I studied it (*the 1999 curriculum, n.d.r.*), I went through every single page of it. (...) I was retired from teaching. I was thinking I was examining or studying, whatever for O'Brien Press, not for teaching. But in fact when I went back (*to teaching n.d.r*) I knew it, although I had missed some training days

because I was sitting in Victoria Road (*O'Brien Press address, n.d.r*), I knew it... I had read it all....because I was doing their books, from junior infants all the way up.

R: And do you know that a new curriculum is coming up very soon, after that of 1999?

L: A new curriculum in what?

R: In "Interculturalism".

L: A new subject? I do not think it is going to be called "interculturalism" it is going to be part of the SPHE (*Social Personal Health Education. N.d.r.*). And it is already there. It is just that the resources are not maybe there, maybe books aren't there... there's really very very little for teachers who say "Ohh! I have got a kid from Bosnia, from Poland, I have got a kid from..."

You know, a part from the IBBY Ireland multicultural guide (*children's books guide 'Changing places changing faces' n.d.r.*) you look and you say: where can I get books, where can I get material? But as far as I know, there is a thing called 'Creating diversity', or something like this, in the SPHE already.

(...) The SPHE starts at the infants, on 'Myself' and then it goes on 'Myself and the family', and then 'Myself, my family and my friends' in third and fourth, and then 'Myself, my family, my friends and the wider world'. So, by the time they grow up to sixth the wider worlds is the EU, you know... and then the whole world. But it starts with the European Union and then out. It is all about tolerance, diversity, other people's culture, it's all there already. What isn't there is the resources, or whatever, to back it up.

R: And to implement it... and maybe what's not there are the courses for teachers...

L: Yes, the training is not there. We got just two days in how to do the whole SPHE! And the whole SPHE was 'Relationships and Sexuality Education' (*We both smile, as*

to suggest it was shorted down really, n.d.r.). And then there are a couple of hours in service, like next week there is somebody coming to do two hours in the school. But it is not really... I am going out for half hour and somebody is taking my class... but you're aware that your kids are upstairs...

R: Yes, it is always in a kind of stress... So, more means should be allocated to training...

L: (...) I was talking with some people, they are teachers in Wexford, and they have no non-national's kids, they have no children from a different culture, from a different nationality... they have no... I was explaining about Samio (*one Romanian Roma child just arrived in her class. N.d.r.*) and the problem with Atillio (*another Romanian child, a veteran in the class, who resisted being assimilated to the new Romanian comer, n.d.r.*) not translating or translating not exactly... They just said we have no idea, because the situation has never risen, but all teachers should get trained because one day somebody will move down to those schools. For the moment is very focused in the inner city, is where non nationals arrive and where the hotels are. But it'll be everywhere. And I do not think they'll get a lot of training for it.

R: And do you think... what was that was helping you to be what you are, a person who deals very nicely with such issues? I have observed it, as one of your professional abilities... but there is also something else that you have: a sort of openness, and also a very warm understanding enabling you to express yourself with foreigners. Not everybody is able to communicate sometimes with people who cannot speak even one word in your language...

L: I think it is because when I lived in Spain! And also, you know when I was a kid I went to Vance, you know as a group, my parents weren't there (...) I still remember

the first night when I was eleven, I thought I spoke French but I could not understand anybody!

And you just feel so awful, and you feel so alone and you feel you do not know what everybody is saying... (...) I think I would hate to be like Patrick (*a Polish child in her class, very reluctant to learn even basic English, n.d.r.*) and sitting there and not know what happens. He started to cry yesterday, you missed it, because Barbara asked him to read, she did not know that he did not speak English... he was going like this (*Liz mimes panic in Patrick's movements, n.d.r.*). He did not know what she was saying, she did not know that he did not know... etc. What a frustration! (...) It's just so hard for them...

R: Yes, it is. But for some of them... like for Patrick for instance, the Polish identity is very strong and he points it out all the time, he sticks to it and I think for him... it'll always be there. I do not think he will ever become a full Irish even if he stays here until his death... I see him like being always Polish in some ways...

L: You missed Gavin (*a local child in her class, n.d.r.*) who said to Atilio: 'Well, I do not know why you are here anyway, because I am Irish, this is *my* country!' and I said 'Well, he was here since he was one year old!'

R: Two, well, yes! Well, what I was saying is that... This does not mean that one cannot feel Irish anyway, but maybe one can feel both!

L: Yes, yes!

R. You said once that you were born in Canada, it was because you father migrated or for professional reasons...?

L: They both went to Canada while my grand parents held the farm (*in Ireland, Wexford. N.d.r.*). Mom had been living in England and she got a job in Canada (*she*

was a nurse. N.d.r.)... and they both went there and me and my brother we were born there.

R: Do you have any memory of you... *(she shakes her head as to say no. But I wanted to ask something different, not her memories from Canada. N.d.r)* of you...coming back to Ireland and feeling that this is your country?

L: Yes, this is true! Yes, I have memories of coming back to Ireland and again, not knowing what I was doing wrong. I was going to the local shops with mum and Dave and we were saying 'Hi!'...I remember my mum saying 'Say Hello. Don't say hi'... We say 'hello' here!'. You know in Canada people were doing more like 'kissing-kissing-kissing' *(she mimes hugs for greetings n.d.r.)* than in Ireland at that time. So again feeling that what I was doing wasn't right. (...) And as a kid you want to do exactly as everybody else. So when my mother said 'Hello' I said: I want to say hello, I want to be like everybody else. They *(now she refers to non national pupils in her school, n.d.r.)* want to know, Patrick wants to know how to be the same.

R: Yes of course. You want to know how to be like everybody else. And this is the kind of knowledge that the school can provide too.

And this is bringing me to something, which I think is very important. As a teacher you are meant to teach all the time, but I suppose that you also get some pleasure in learning from the children, and you probably learn a lot from the children because you are very open, I've seen you also enjoying it. What do you learn from the stories the children tell you sometimes, informally, not in the sense of homework, or text that they have to compose, but sometimes in between doors, in the corridor... How do they transform autobiographical accounts into scholarly acceptable products, texts or performances...? And how this can help intercultural exchange among children with

very different life-stories, for instance the settled children from the inner city versus the migrants?

Well, this was the question... I am not sure if it was too huge...

L: Well, me neither! I don't know... When, say, Atilio or Sean... like today they were talking about going to Dellimont, they were talking about the local football team (...) Séan and Gavin had been up there, and Atilio for example had never been there and he came up and said: 'What is that?' and they said 'Oh, well, this is our local football team! It's not yours is *ours* local football team!' (...) The local is the one nearby Peter's church... and Atilio said: 'I want to go up there!' and I said to Séan: 'Why do not bring him up?' and he said 'Well, he has never been up there?' (...) I do not know, I do not know what the question is... but you can help them, you can make the kids part of... (...)

R: Ok, so you are teaching them a lot of curiosity for each others, respect, tolerance... a lot of things which are very important as a behavioural aspect...

L: Well this was to say that Séan and Gavin were very very happy to say: 'Oh, you haven't been there?' (...) But if I didn't had that conversation happen maybe they would have never thought about it. (...)

I was today in the yard at half past eleven and you know the little tiny wall? At this side of the wall they were all Filipino, at the other side they were all Irish... I said: 'What is going on here?' I was furious and I said 'You have to join in here!' but they said 'No, no, no, we are going to play like this' and it is something they have made themselves!

R: Yes, I know... I have talked with the Filipino actually about this and they said that this was their way of not getting bullied... and... it...

L: Yes...

R: ... was by forming a gang with their community...

L: I know, I know...

R: So that it seems to be a defensive thing.

L: Awful! It was never that rigid or that formalised before! They used to...

R: Because now the community is increasing and they are becoming really a 'community'.

L: And so, they have enough to make a gang on their own... but that's awful! When they did not have enough they had to mix with the Irish born kids.

R: Yes, of course.

L: Oh! But it's awful!

(...)

L: Tomorrow we have a meeting to decide whether we are going to have the Antiracism World Cup (*football cup series within the school, multicultural teams etc. n.d.r.*) and what are we going to do? To leave these things as they are? Because I think it is awful, I hated it!

R: But... What I was meaning by autobiographical accounts were things that you hear from them because they really need to express them with you, because you can listen, and you are not moralistic all the time. Somebody else would maybe point the finger, a priest for instance, and say 'why did you do that? It is a sin!' whereas you will never react to it in the same way... You will try to be very open, also maybe to the suffering of the child, without thinking about punishment at once and only afterward letting him (the child) understanding what was wrong and what he had provoked... But you do not judge moralistically a child.

L: I think that this is something we all learn in teaching that you don't comment, you don't criticise, you take it here (*she shows her ears as to mean that she keeps*

confidential what pupils can confess. N.d.r.) and you Not use it, but... you remember it and you try to bring it up again without mentioning the child and without making any judgement. That's what teachers are meant to do! That's how to teach about their behaviour. (...) It's what Audrey (*her colleague, resource teacher. N.d.r.*) keeps on saying: it's about keeping on taking decisions: the right decisions, the wrong decisions... and you know that maybe they are taking the wrong decision, but you don't keep on saying 'this was the wrong decision!', but you try to use weeks after... But every single teacher does it, that's part of every teaching.

R: Yes! But then, are you sometimes allowing them to bring these autobiographical accounts into their scholarly work? Like texts, or if they have to make drawings...

Because I saw with Oisín (*a writer and illustrator who came in to teach children to draw storyboards and comics. N.d.r.*): something happened with the monster: it was possible to identify with the monster as well, actually most of the children identified with the... monster!

L: Monsters are always more interesting! That's also what Oisín said.

The heroes are all the good guys, but nobody wants really identify with the good guys! When we were kids and we played 'Cow-boys and Indians'... you wanted to be Indian! You do not want to be the cowboy!

R: Yes! (...) But when it comes to their own texts with you... Well, they do not really write, isn't?

L: Well, this is true. They don't. But even if they did... if one of them wrote a story that... was autobiographical, I don't think I would read that. Especially if it was something deeply... something they did want me to know. I would never ever read that out, or used it. I would read it. But I would not say so and so had written and such and such... Because (...) that is between them and me.

R: So, it cannot become public for the class. Are there any ways to teach the child to transform it into a story...?

L: Yes, there are. As I was saying: in one month's time when that all thing is being forgotten or whatever, the exercise, the writing is being forgotten, because otherwise they are going to say: 'Ah! I know who wrote that!' So, you let some time pass and then you bring it up but you do not say who wrote it.

R: And don't you think that the children know that their lives are very similar to each other's?

L: No, no, they don't. No. But their lives aren't similar, in that case. In our school they are not!

R: Do you think that some of the children suffer more than others?

L: Yes, I do. Yes they do. And they do not have any conception what so ever about what's happening in other people's houses. At all! They think that their situation is the kind of... the normal. And I suppose most children think that.

R: And don't you think that this could be part of intercultural education, to get aware and curious about other people's life?

L: *(She say no with her head. N.d.r.)*. I do think I would not want to discuss what every body's home is like, in any school, ever. Noooo.

R: So, you see as good the separation between the private sphere and the school...

L: Because I think that everybody, every family, every unit... every home has its own problems... (...) I would not discuss why some people had such and such thing happening and some people that...because I think it is too personal for the kids. I don't think I would never do it, in any school.

R: And also their stories from before? I mean those which they can tell from the past? Their autobiographies, this too you think it should not be brought in the class?

L: Well, I think that they might think that they are telling a story, and somebody will not recognise as true, but some others will. (...) Nobody wins there. The kid who tells the story which is open to everybody else's teasing, and people who maybe are worse off, would think: 'Oh, Lord! I thought his life was bad but in fact it is much better than mine.' I don't see who wins, or who benefits from it...?

R: (Pause) Ok. I have observed you implementing a synergetic communication among your pupils. For instance, asking them to appreciate the texture of a book's cover, to smell rubbers and pencils, to spread colours in their hand's skin to check the nuances, to listen to music and to mime the emotions got from each instrument... are you aware that you mobilise all your and their senses to teach? Were you taught to do so? Or it is simply your own way, your temperament?

L: I do not know (*she laughs*). I am sure we were probably taught to do it, but I don't know I am doing it.

Until I saw that question I didn't know I was. I was going like: I did ever ask them to smell a rubber! I do know that with books... Yes! Because books are so important to me! When you get a new book, you know... I love the texture of the book, the smell of the book... This is why books aren't CD, books aren't... it doesn't match the printed, actual physical book! And the ink, the cover, and everything about it. So, yes, I do want the kids to feel that the book is something that...

R: Yes, an esthetical experience as well...

L: Yes! (...)

And the thing with the paint on the skin (because I do not remember the rubber) yes, I do not know... I think that painting it has to be... you know they get their hands dirty all the time, but they will not put painting in their hands! So (*she mimes one pupil complaining. N.d.r.*) 'Look Miss I have gotten paints in my hands!' and so what? And

with the pottery. (...) He (*another teacher intervening in the class. N.d.r.*) gave each a big slap, a huge slap and he put water on it, and they were going 'Uuuhh! Now it's wet, now it's dirty!'

It's pottery clay!! I hate the fact of them thinking that they cannot get dirty or make a mess in art. Of course they can! And I know that if I was not putting it on their hands they wouldn't and I did it. And Sean kept saying: "You're mad! You're mad!" But then he loved it and he kept on putting black on them.

R: I find this very, very liberating, your way is really interesting because, again, it is like with the earlier example of the moralistic attitude, sometimes typical of mothers who are very obsessed with cleanness, which sometimes is only in surface, the way you must look from outside. But I think that it is very important that these children are liberated in their exploration of the senses, because it is not, really, in terms of the architecture, it is not really a school that is inviting the senses. It's quite oppressive as... because it is a very old building, the yard is really gloomy, there are no special structures to climb, which the children adore to do. And I am not surprised when the children start to jump the wall!

Because to climb is really a necessity for a child, and also to do a lot of other stuff which is not only football. In the sense that that yard enable the children to act wild, not to be wild (because they are not wild) but they act wildly. Because I feel that, if they don't accept to play football, there is not much else one can do over there, really!

L: Yes, yes and again, in the new curriculum there is a lot of emphasis in all sort of sports, but where you would do them in that school? There is a gymn., that we only have twice a week (...) the girls share the same yard, you cannot put up any climbing fences: the girl are in their uniform, they have skirts and stuff, you see. You can't. And there is nowhere to expand. We were hoping, you know, when Gregor (*former*

acting principal. N.d.r.) was there, that the row building besides us, that there were some talks of making them into apartments, and we objected to the planning permission unless they did not give us...a space with grass, so that the non-football kids could make stuff. But then, I do not know what happened... There is nowhere where you can go, there is nowhere to expand. And there are hundred of kids between the two schools.

R: Yes, it looks like sometimes it gets so hot, the children are becoming so aggressive with each other, and so, you also start to think about the place, the architecture which has an influence, it is not really an innocent place.

L: It is also that the new curriculum is all about that they are not supposed to make things. They do not have to make a pot, to produce anything at the end, because before it used to be that you had to have a picture, a piece of pottery you know and now...

R: ...It is the process, which is important, I think...

L: Yes, and this is only since the 1999 curriculum. Before the teachers at the end of the year had to have two pots, ten paintings, etc. and now... they have to have done it. They have to have played with strings, fabrics, fibres, clay, but they do not have to have produced anything. You see?

R: Yes, this is very interesting, and also liberating.

And now one of my main questions: you decided very conscientiously to be a teacher, as you said, since you were a child. This role was for sure fascinating for you and you were probably made for it! But you had also, in parallel with this profession, passion, skills, and work as a translator, consultant, reviewer, and cultural agitator for children's books. You worked every day for years with issues concerning literacy and

literature for children and also, with literature in itself, not only for children. Can explain more this point please? Or simply comment upon it?

And to tell yourself how these two worlds are bridged together. It is a long question!

Maybe we should shift the tape before you start!

L: I think that... There wasn't really much crossover until I started to be a Bisto judge in my other school (*"Bisto" is the national competitions where adults and children can be judging committee and vote for the best yearly books awards, n.d.r.*). Because I was reading all these books and you have to write about them; you have to write about the illustrations, the quality of the text, and they were kids' books and you know and one day I said, I am reading all these books, why I do not get them to some of these? So we started this... shadowing. I read, kids read, I wouldn't tell them what my opinions were.

I had a notebook, they had a notebook, and it was just so brilliant... that... I would never, never look at their copybooks, so they could say what they wanted to say. The only thing was that they had to give a proper reason. You can't just say 'I hate the book' or 'I love the book', you have to say why. And they would come up to me eventually and I would say: "Well we are going to eliminate ten books and you have to sit down and just seriously think", and I am going to sit down and I would sit at my table, and they could see it and they would do it. It was absolutely brilliant! And the parents came in and said that they were going to the library, like we had only my one copy of the book, so I would read it and then we would share it, the parents came in and asked: 'Where we can find these books? Can we get them for the library?'

And the libraries were producing, I would say: 'Can we get some extra copies and they did!'

R: So! That's the way it all started!

L: That's the way it started.

R: You were already involved in this since many years. You could really make a borderline between the two activities?

L: Well, I think that was the first time I got the kids actively involved. Before that I would say: 'Let's do a project about... say, an illustrator, or let's do...' and I would bring in books obviously and say this is about so and so... And I used novels instead of text books for example.

R: This is quite revolutionary, or...? You were one of the few doing this?

L: Yes. At that time, yes. And I did it because I was just so tired of textbooks! I was bored! And I remember in 1984, I went to a course with Robert, Robert Dunbar...

R: Yes.

L: And he said like... and I thought I had read books all the time. And he gave us three books to read, it was Monday and he said that by the end of the week he wanted us to discuss these books, I still have the books, I couldn't believe how good they were! I remember I said to him I had thought to do the textbook, or whatever, and then actually I said: I won't do any text book! And actually, sorry, it was on Thursday he said that we were to do a project, or we were to spend the day, and just pick a book and say: how could I use this book in the classroom? And I had 'Juliet's Story', that was and still is one of my favourite books, by William Trevor who wrote books for grown ups, and so I had read him as a grown up author, and I thought God! You could do this for Art, you could do this for English, you could do this for Geography... and I rang up O'Brien and I asked: 'Can I have 30 copies of the book?' and that was all. And it was fantastic! Because it worked! The kids just loved it! They spent 6-7 weeks just doing one book, and we went up looking at old houses, and they... we got a

storyteller in, because it is all about telling stories, and it was just so brilliant! And I said to myself: never, never ever am I going to use a textbook!

R: And so this was also your liberating moment! From then ahead you have...

L: Yes, yes!

R: And then you have also convinced your colleagues that this can be a good pedagogical tool... You have managed to convince many colleagues...

L: Well, some, some. People like Judith, she does now, all the time, even though she has gotten four classes, third, fourth, fifth and sixth in a small little school. She does a novel in 3d and 4th and a different novel in 5th and 6th. I do not even know how she does! This is part of the revised curriculum again. A textbook isn't enough anymore. I cannot say to throw away textbooks, because a lot of teachers want textbooks. I just do not see the point, if you could read real books!

R: Because the textbook is a kind of anthology with quotes from different authors?

L: Little extracts, it's all.

R: I remember my own frustration as a pupil, I often wanted to read the whole book.

L: I hated them! Because if you like the story, then you want to read the whole thing, but if you hate the story you say: why am I reading this?! And so... if you like it you go to the school library and ask: 'Where is the book?' and they say: 'Well, we do not have it'... So it's all...

But there are questions: so if you are feeling very tired, or the class is going mad, the advantage is that there are questions and it goes: 'Who did what?' and that's much easier than saying: 'What am I going to do with this book?'

R: I understand... It demands teachers' slants.

L: And it's fine for me, because I read the books for Book-Fest, for O'Brien, anyway, and for IBBY, for all these things, but if you do not read Children's book then you

have to sit down and say: 'Well, which book am I going to pick?' So, you see, there is an awful more work involved.

R. I know, I know, and this probably the reasons why...

L: But not for me, because I read the books anyway!

R. I know that you are a devourer of books! And this brings to my next question, you as reviewer and translator, but before that I have to shift the tape.

Dublin, June 2004