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Reference:
Kostet Imane, Verschraegen Gert, Clycq Noël.- Repertoires on diversity among primary school children
Childhood: a global journal of child research - ISSN 0907-5682 - London, Sage publications ltd, 28:1(2021), UNSP 0907568220909430
Full text (Publisher's DOI): https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568220909430
To cite this reference: https://hdl.handle.net/10067/1664240151162165141

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Repertoires on Diversity among Primary School Children

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Published in Childhood
https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0907568220909430

Abstract

This article examines how children in super-diverse schools draw on cultural repertoires to construct ethno-cultural similarities and differences. Based on 47 interviews, we show how, first, children talk about diversity as a commonplace aspect of daily life. Second, we describe how cosmopolitan arguments are used to make sense of diversity. The third repertoire focusses on 'otherness' and emphasizes the 'cultural frictions' that would stem out of diversity. Finally, we describe how some children share a strong belief in group disadvantages.

Keywords Cultural repertoires, ethnicity, identity, primary school, super-diversity

1. Introduction

In recent decades, many school environments in Europe have become super-diverse (Vertovec, 2007), in the sense that pupils have increasingly diverse migrant, cultural, religious and socio-economic backgrounds. Yet, how do children perceive the diversity around them? While research has shown that children are able to actively construct distinctions between ethno-cultural and religious groups (see e.g. Spyrou, 2002; Zemblyas, 2010), less is known about how super-diversity affects day-to-day intergroup relations between children. Drawing on the concept of 'cultural repertoires' (Lamont and Small, 2008; Swidler, 1986), this article examines the various and sometimes contradicting narratives that children in super-diverse schools develop to make sense of diversity. While diversity as a concept is a notoriously slippery and context-dependent term, we primarily explore everyday conceptions of diversity among children (see also Bell and Hartmann, 2007). We analyse how children strategically draw on different sources of meaning-making to navigate their super-diverse school environment and give meaning to the diversity they perceive around them.

Our study is based on 47 interviews with sixth-grade children in six different schools in the super-diverse city of Antwerp. We believe that this specific research context offers us analytical leverage in understanding the nuances of how children make sense of a super-diverse environment and how they position themselves within it. All the interviewed children are confronted with diversity on a daily basis, which raises questions about the meaning they attach to this diversity and how this affects their relations with other children.

We proceed by highlighting our theoretical framework, and go on to describe the research context, our methods and data. Next, and prior to our conclusion, we present four different cultural repertoires

which children use when talking about diversity and analyse how these enable them to position their own identities in their super-diverse environments.

2. Children's repertoires of diversity

In the last decade, concepts such as super-diversity have stimulated scholars to investigate how different forms of diversity are experienced in European urban settings. While the discussion on super-diversity has challenged previously dominant multicultural, 'groupist' and assimilationist approaches and provided a broad recognition of the 'diversification of difference' (Oosterlynck, Verschraegen and van Kempen, 2018) it has not yet resulted in much empirical knowledge about how super-diversity affects day-to-day intergroup relations (e.g. Foner et.al, 2019), including relations between children.

There is some literature showing that children are aware of and talk about the diversity in their environment. Iqbal and colleagues (2017), for instance, have shown that London children generally consider diversity as unexceptional and mix with each other without major tensions. In the same line, Sedano (2012) argues that ethnic differences are not particularly relevant for children in deciding whom to play with, even though they recognized ethnicity in their narratives. In contrast, other studies have shown that children's views of diversity have real consequences for daily interaction. This seems to be especially true in contexts with 'bright boundaries' (Alba, 2005) between majority and minority groups, such as in Cyprus (e.g. Partasi, 2011; Spyrou, 2002; Zemblyas, 2010), Ireland (e.g. Devine et al., 2008) and Northern Ireland (e.g. Connolly et al., 2009), but also in less polarized contexts, such as the Netherlands (e.g. Verkuyten and Thijs, 2001). Other studies indicate that children draw on dominant discourses when narrating their opinions on diversity and can reconstruct these discourses. Hajisoteriou and colleagues (2017) for example, found that Cypriot children perceive diversity through three perspectives related to three dominant theoretical models of integration. The pupils conceptualized diversity through a 'cultural-deficiency perspective' (derived from the theoretical model of 'monoculturalism'); a 'cultural-celebration perspective' (e.g. 'multiculturalism'); and to a lesser extent through an 'intercultural-exchange-perspective' (e.g. 'interculturalism'). In the same context, Partasi (2011) showed that despite the 'monocultural character' of Cypriot society and the evidenced educational discrimination against non-Christian pupils, children themselves formulate more positive views on diversity.

While these studies emphasize that children perceive different forms of diversity and draw on dominant discourses to make sense of them, they focus less on how different children actively and situationally use these discourses to navigate their social environment and position themselves within it. To grasp these processes of active meaning-making and identity positioning, this study will draw on the notion of 'cultural repertoires' (Lamont and Small, 2008; Swidler, 1986). Cultural repertoires can be conceived as socially constructed frames of reference in which individuals are (partly) socialized and through which they perceive the world. As children construct their views on diversity from culturally available narrative templates, this notion allows us to highlight the multiple, and sometimes conflicted ways in which children make sense of the diversity around them. However, the term is especially useful as it also emphasizes a behavioural component: repertoires are commonly seen as 'sets of tools' people can actively draw on to manage their social world. This means that children are not only socialized into different repertoires but can actively draw on various (elements of) repertoires to make sense of a particular situation or problem. Furthermore, since different children are socialized in different cultural environments, they do not have the same set of repertoires available (Calarco, 2018). Some have a wider array of repertoires of action than others, and therefore more possible ways

to manage different situations in the social world (Lamont and Small, 2008; Swidler, 1986). Calarco (2018), for example, shows how middle-class children are more likely to ask for help in class than their lower-class peers, because asking for assistance ('tool') in an educational setting is part of the repertoire ('set') into which middle-class children are socialized.

Hence, the term of cultural repertoires allows us to highlight the connection between the narrative templates available to children (implying that some children have a wider array of repertoires than others) and their individual agency (i.e. children can choose to use specific repertoires to make sense of the particular reality and social relations they experience). Because of the emphasis on agency, the term also recalls recent research into the New Sociology of Childhood, arguing that children not only take part in social life but also make 'things happen'; they are not only 'socialized', but also contribute to wider processes of social and cultural reproduction and transformation (James, 2013; Pache Huber and Spyrou, 2012). By analysing the interplay of both public narratives and children's own meaning-making, we aim to provide a nuanced description of how children differentially interact with others in their environment. We recognize children's agency and their active intervention in social life as a 'relational dynamic', and at the same time we recognize the influence of the social, cultural, economic and other kinds of constraints and boundaries they have to navigate (Spyrou, Rosen & Cook, 2019; Balagopalan, 2019).

3. Research context, data and methodology

The data we draw on are part of a larger study investigating children's identity formation in the super-diverse city of Antwerp, wherein we use in-depth interviews and small focus group discussions with children, teachers and parents. Through repeated data collection rounds, we follow a group of children during their transition from primary to secondary school to examine how they construct and re/deconstruct their differential identities. This transition is particularly relevant as it can challenge children's repertoires on diversity. Many children, for example, leave their primary 'neighbourhood school' and move to a larger secondary school in another district with a more or less diverse school population. Previous research has shown that this transition can disrupt interethnic friendships among children (Hollingworth & Mansaray, 2012).

This article presents data from the first research round in which we conducted 47 interviews with sixth-grade children aged 11 to 13 in six different primary schools. With more than 500,000 inhabitants, Antwerp is the largest city in Flanders and a good example of a 'majority-minority city' (Crul, 2016) in which there is no longer a numerical ethnic majority (see Oosterlynck et al., 2017). Antwerp has citizens from 171 different nationalities, and in recent years the population with a migration background (50.1%) has become larger than the share of 'native' Belgian residents (49.9 %). The share of residents with a migration background is expected to increase rapidly, as in the group of children aged 10 to 19 only 29.6% children are considered 'native'. The largest immigrant groups originate from Morocco, The Netherlands, Turkey and Poland (Stad Antwerpen, 2019).

Yet, while Antwerp has a highly diverse population, the Flemish far-right also gained landslide electoral victories in the city during the 1990s and 2000s with an anti-immigrant rhetoric. This made anti-immigration discourses highly visible and created a political atmosphere highly receptive to resurgent neo-assimilationist tendencies and the backlash against multiculturalism (Saeys et al., 2019). The social segregation between immigrants and the established 'white majority', characteristic of many Western European countries, is also particularly pronounced in Flanders. In recent decades, a gap has emerged in work, education and housing opportunities between individuals with and without

a migration background, the former including first, second and third generation immigrants (OECD/EU, 2015). According to recent OECD figures (2015), nowhere else in Western Europe has this chasm remained so deep and persistent as in Belgium. In addition, researchers have demonstrated the continuing presence of discrimination based on racial (e.g. skin colour), religious (e.g. headscarf) and linguistic (e.g. foreign names) markers of foreign descent (Van der Bracht, Coenen and Van de Putte, 2015) and its impact on children and youth (Awel, 2018). We believe that the strong prominence of ethno-cultural boundaries in our research site makes it highly suited to develop a more thorough understanding of children's views on diversity.

We selected children within six primary schools (see Table 1) which were, based on government statistics,[i] carefully chosen because of their location in more or less disadvantaged neighbourhoods, degree of ethnic and social mix among pupils and school network (see below). We also used information available on school websites to include the criterion of teacher diversity. However, in some cases, the statistics do not accurately reflect the classroom's diversity. In school 2, for example, the table shows that only 8% of the children have a non-Dutch home language but this figure should be nuanced in two ways. First, this percentage only indicates the proportion of pupils who *only* speak a foreign language at home. A large number of children, however, come from bi- or multilingual families where another language is spoken in addition to Dutch. Second, this figure concerns the entire school population while the sixth grade in school 2 is clearly more diverse than the lower grades (this was confirmed by the teacher). Hence, in order to provide a more comprehensive overview, we mention – for both ethnic and social diversity – our own classification alongside the official figures.

In Flanders, primary education is targeted at children aged approximately 6 to 12. The education system consists of different networks, mainly 'government-provided schools', 'subsidized public schools', and 'subsidized free schools' - the largest network, mainly organized by Catholic Education Flanders. While these educational networks officially have a different ideological base, schools have large autonomy in shaping their policies with regard to diversity in reality. Our qualitative data point in the same direction: the broader ideological orientation of the network does not seem to have a crucial influence on children's narratives.

After an introductory interview with the principals or teachers, we gave all sixth-grade pupils information letters and consent forms. We handed out copies for the parents and copies in accessible language for the pupils themselves. For non-Dutch-speaking parents, letters were translated into English, French, Arabic and Turkish. Additionally, the project was verbally presented to all pupils. We stressed that participation was voluntary, and that the data would be handled confidentially. The study was also submitted to and approved by the university's ethics committee.

Table 1: School and pupil characteristics
** = official figures; ° = authors' categorisation*

#	n	pupils non-Dutch home language*	Sixth-grade pupil population°	Origins	receiving study allowance*	mothers without secondary education*	Teachers	Network
1	12	23%	Mixed	Belgium, Portugal, The Netherlands, Morocco, Turkey, Ghana, Congo, Lebanon, Sweden, Sierra Leone, Poland	20%	15,3%	Native	Catholic
2	7	8%	Mixed	Belgium, Morocco, France, Brazil, Nigeria	16%	13,6%	Native[ii]	Catholic

3	11	49%	Mixed	Belgium, Afghanistan, Morocco, Iraq, Iran, Ireland, Kurdistan, Tunisia	57%	49,4%	Native	Subsidized public school
4	8	27%	Mixed	Belgium, Guinea, Georgia, Morocco	30%	16,6%	Native	Catholic
5	4	78%	Only 'minority' children	Turkey, Morocco, Algeria	78%	84,7%	Moroccan descent	Government-provided
6	5	66%	Only children of Moroccan descent	Morocco	68%	71,5%	Moroccan descent	Subsidized free school

Based upon their migration background, 12 respondents can be considered as 'native' (i.e. both grandparents and parents are born in Belgium) and 35 respondents have at least one (grand)parent of non-Belgian descent. Table 1 gives an overview of the participant's countries of origins. Yet, it is important to note that non-participating children also have origins in other countries. This means that the classrooms are even more ethnically diverse than described in the table above (except for classroom 6 in which all children are of Moroccan origin). 25 children self-identify as Muslim, 12 children as Christian and 10 children as non-religious or atheist. All children spoke Dutch intelligibly and no significant linguistic barriers occurred during the interviews.

The semi-structured interviews lasted between 23 and 75 minutes and took place at school. After they introduced themselves, the children were asked to share their experiences on their well-being at school, their identifications and belongings, aspirations and future dreams. After we had assured ourselves that the children understood what 'ethno-cultural diversity' meant, they were asked questions such as:

- *How diverse do you think your classroom is?*
- *How do you feel about that diversity (can you name some positive and negative aspects)?*
- *How do you think different ethnic or religious groups are being treated in our society?*
- *Do you believe that people from different backgrounds get along well?*

The authors of this paper recognized and reflected on the influence that their own background and position could potentially have on the trust and openness of children. All interviews were conducted by a female Moroccan-Belgian researcher. The fact that she, since birth, has lived in Antwerp herself, allowed her to pick up on most children's stories from an 'insiders-perspective' and to probe notions of diversity in a fruitful way. Some children seemed to believe in a 'shared background', which was expressed, for example, in their spontaneous use of Moroccan-Arabic filler words, youth language or use of Islamic sayings while claiming that they do not 'talk like this to Belgians'. To ensure that all children spoke openly about diversity – and particularly when native children were questioned about non-native groups (to which the interviewer belongs) – the researcher used children's own group classifications unless they were clearly racist or stigmatizing (but this was almost never the case). Hence, if the children spoke of 'children from another country', 'foreign children', 'Moroccans', 'non-Belgians', 'allochthonous children' and so on, the researcher also adopted these terms. Despite the researcher's Moroccan-Belgian background, almost all native children spoke both positively and negatively or even stigmatizing about 'Moroccans' (see results). This may be due to established trust and openness or because the children simply did not know what the ethnic background of the researcher was (no child actively asked about her background).

The interviews were fully transcribed and coded inductively with NVIVO 12. After a first analysis of the attached codes, we developed a coding framework or scheme bringing together different views on diversity. These different perceptions were analysed thoroughly and were refined through a repeated coding process. All interviews were conducted in Dutch, apart from some (Moroccan-)Arabic, English or French filler words. The quotations in this article were literally translated into English. When additional information had been necessary to clarify quotations, information was added in square brackets.

4. Results

While explaining their understandings of cultural diversity and narrating their specific intercultural experiences, four broad repertoires emerge in our child-respondents' narratives. First, most children talk about diversity as a commonplace aspect (Wessendorf, 2013) of daily life. Second, children appear to use cosmopolitan arguments (Pichler, 2008) to make sense of super-diversity. A third repertoire among the children emphasizes 'cultural frictions' that supposedly stem from diversity. Finally, a fourth repertoire centres around a shared strong belief in group disadvantages. These repertoires are, although sometimes contrasting, not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, various repertoires emerge simultaneously in children's narratives and children shift easily between them. In addition, all four repertoires resound in all six schools. This means that children within the same classrooms hold very different views on ethno-cultural diversity – differing from open to more essentialist perspectives. Where differences between schools do occur, we discuss them in more detail.

Commonplace diversity

Cultural diversity seems to be experienced as commonplace in daily life by many children in our study. Wessendorf (2013) conceptualizes this perceived normality as 'commonplace diversity'. Similar to the author's own research with adults in London, some children do not necessarily discuss their own or others' ethnicity directly, as diversity has become an ordinary aspect of their lives (see also Iqbal et al., 2017):

> Olivia: I have to say there are so many friends who are from Turkey. (…) I mean… I think… I'm not really sure where all my friends come from, but I think… Merve[iii] is also from Turkey and Ayse also, I guess. But I'm not really sure. And uhm… Sarani is from Bangladesh, I guess.
> Researcher: But you're not sure about all of that?
> Olivia: No, not really. We rather play [with each other], we don't really talk about where we're from, so…
> (11y, school 1, self-identifies as Swedish)

The notion that ethno-cultural diversity is not always highly relevant for some children is also evidenced by the lack of spontaneous references to this form of diversity. When we discuss diversity in their classrooms, some pupils solely refer to differences in appearances, interests and hobbies. However, they do notice ethnic, cultural and religious differences. Nevertheless, children who strongly emphasize this repertoire tend to downplay these differences. A striking example is found in the narrative of Oskar, a boy in a super-diverse school with a strong concentration of disadvantaged minority children. While Oskar values diversity in its broad sense as positive, he is less inclined to express his normative position on ethnic diversity:

> Researcher: Do you believe that the class' diversity is positive or negative?
> Oskar: I think it's positive because if everyone is the same… I also don't think that you can talk if you… [if] everyone watches the same movies; everyone looks the same. (…) In that case, you can't say "hey, he never watched that movie but it's good" because everyone has already seen it. Everyone would be the same anyway.
> Researcher: And when it comes down to religious and ethnic diversity?
> Oskar: (…) I am a bit neutral in that case, because I don't think it matters [in] what you do or who you are so… I mean, it matters if you do stuff according to your religion, but I don't think it matters a lot. (…) I don't think it's [ethnic diversity] necessarily nice, I also don't think it's necessarily bad because yeah… You're all just human.
> (11y, school 3, self-identifies as Belgian)

Children who draw on this repertoire do not draw bright boundaries between different ethnic groups but emphasize other things that are more important to them. This does not impede some of them express at the same time a high level of ethnic self-identification. As Sedano (2012) argues, it is important to analyse which aspects of children's social lives are mediated by ethnicity and which are not. Although ethnicity is highly relevant for some of our children's self-identification and senses of belonging, they simultaneously claim to attach little importance to other children's ethnicity in the formation of their peer groups.

Notably, although some children perceive diversity as 'normal', they realize that this perspective is not shared by everyone and that people can also hold negative views on diversity. These children thus combine repertoires of commonplace diversity with 'repertoires of group disadvantages' (see further), acknowledging that some ethnic groups are treated badly in society. However, a few others express no awareness of exclusion on either individual (e.g. racist name-calling) or institutional level (e.g. racism in school) and seem to hold a 'colour-blind' (Bonilla-Silva, 2018) perspective:

> Researcher: The children at this school, do they ever say anything racist to or about each other?
> James: No.
> Researcher: Never?
> James: Never.
> Researcher: And if you look at the broader society, which social group is treated more badly than others? (…)
> James: I think that everyone's treated equally.
> Researcher: You wouldn't say, for example, that racism occurs in Antwerp?
> James: No.
> (11y, school 3, self-identifies as Belgian)

One could expect children who perceive diversity as commonplace to 'evidently' engage in interethnic friendships. Yet, while this is the case for some pupils (e.g. Olivia), others (e.g. Oskar) seem to have an ethnically homogenous group of friends. Some of these latter children believe that this group composition is purely 'coincidental' or that it has to do with a lack of diversity in their school or neighbourhood (see table 1, this is the case in some schools). A few others refer to hobbies and interests that they 'coincidentally' have in common with children from the same ethnic background:

> Researcher: Do you feel just as comfortable with, let's say, Arne and Anton [both native Belgian] as you feel with the children from another country?
> Oskar: I feel more at ease with Arne and Anton because they… Those children… I mean, most children from another country, they don't… I just don't think they… They don't have my interests and that stuff. I can't talk with them that much.
> Researcher: So basically, you share more interests with your classmates of Belgian origin?
> Oskar: Yes, but I don't know… [With] the children in my classroom, but I don't know if that would be the case in others [classrooms].
> (11y, school 3, self-identifies as Belgian)

Importantly, unlike his native classmates, minority children in Oskar's classroom are generally from a working-class or poor family. These latter children rarely participate in paid leisure activities as Oskar does (e.g. korfball) which explains his argument. Furthermore, Oskar and his native friends are also mentioned (by most children, regardless of background) as the best performing pupils, which probably 'connects' them. As children's ethnic background intersects with other important factors such as class position, it is hard to analyse which (overlapping) criteria are consciously and unconsciously used by children to structure their social world. Interestingly, however, Oskar does not 'ethnicize' the perceived differences in interests and his rather homogeneous group of friends (see also Sedano, 2012).

While this repertoire is present in all schools, it is more prominent among children in school 2 who almost never use stigmatizing language when discussing diversity. While the sixth grade in this school contains pupils originating from, among other countries, Belgium, Morocco, Nigeria, France, Portugal, Nigeria and Brazil, the school does differ from the others in this study because of the overrepresentation of middle-class children (i.e. in the other schools almost all minority children are from working class background).

Cosmopolitan repertoires

A second repertoire widely shared among our child-respondents is the idea of cosmopolitanism, i.e. the children's emphasis on openness towards and appreciation of other cultures and their imagined shared values as 'human beings'. Generally, children who draw on this repertoire aim for a sense of belonging across borders, express trust and tolerance towards others, support equal rights and highly value respect for all human beings (Keating, 2015). While this repertoire seems rather similar to that of 'commonplace diversity' – and in some children's narratives both repertoires emerge simultaneously – the repertoire of cosmopolitanism takes a more normative approach to diversity. More particularly, children who rely more strongly on a cosmopolitan ideology *explicitly* perceive diversity and cultural openness as *goals to be pursued*. In that sense, diversity is not necessarily 'common' or 'self-evident' but is explicitly experienced as a great benefit for society.

When we gauge children's perceptions of diversity, some spontaneously emphasize their respect for other cultures and religions. We argue that in doing so, native children, especially, aim to demonstrate their openness towards others, but also respond to a discourse of exclusion from which they wish to distance themselves. For example, some of these children mention, without being asked, that they do not have a problem with diversity:

> Researcher: Do you think there's a lot of diversity in your classroom?
> Victor: We do have a few but I also have a lot of respect for them. If I were from another country and they all started calling me names for another religion or something, I also wouldn't like that. I actually really wouldn't like that.
> (11y, school 1, self-identifies as Belgian)

> Researcher: Do you think there is a lot of diversity in your classroom?
> Louise: Yes, I think so, but I don't mind or anything. I think it's nice.
> (11y, school 1, self-identifies as Belgian)

These children seem to actively approach diversity in positive terms in order to construct broadly shared collective identities. By pointing out that children are above all human, they create a cosmopolitan identity: 'being human'. In a previous quote from Oskar, we saw how he uses 'humanness' to downplay ethnic or other more particular identities. Other children also stress this humanness:

> Alexander: (…) everyone should be treated equally because everyone is the same, yes, everyone is human.
> (11y, school 4, self-identifies as Belgian)

Despite this focus on a shared identity category, more particular identities are still recognized. Most children who use this repertoire do not downplay differences but rather consider this cultural diversity as enriching. In this sense, cosmopolitan ideologies are also strongly related with repertoires of 'cultural celebration' (see also Hajisoteriou et al., 2017). Diversity is appreciated because it allows cultural exchange, mainly of language skills, cuisine and general cultural knowledge.

Repertoires of cultural otherness and deficiency

While children who perceive diversity as commonplace and/or draw on cosmopolitan repertoires consciously or unconsciously downplay ethno-cultural boundaries, we also found narratives in which brighter boundaries were drawn between different ethnic groups. This is especially the case in school 3, which is even more diverse in terms of socio-economic background and ethnicity than the other schools. While school 5 and school 6 have a higher percentage of pupils from lower-income families than school 3 (see table), ethnic boundaries between native and minority children are not frequently drawn within the first two schools. This is probably due to the fact that these schools have only minority children (school 6 even has only children with a Moroccan background). In other words, while the children in school 3 draw mainly bright boundaries between native and minority children, there are arguably less reasons to do so in the other schools.

In the narratives in which bright ethnic boundaries were being drawn, children spoke in terms of 'otherness' and attributed certain (mostly negative) characteristics to certain ethnic identities. Some of our interviewees seem to believe that cultural differences lead to frictions in society. Jordy, a native Belgian pupil, explains that 'the Moroccans' cause trouble in his neighbourhood:

> Jordy: I'd like to live in another province because here… Here are a lot of Moroccans. Moroccans…
> Researcher: And you think that's…
> Jordy: Less nice.
> Researcher: Why is that less nice?
> Jordy: They… As you can see, there's a lot of dirt here [in the neighbourhood] and that's mostly because of them. And they're sometimes bad, and they do graffiti. They act a little different than us and they never want to act a little bit normal.
> Researcher: How do they act differently?
> Jordy: They want… They for example want to drive mopeds when they're not allowed to.
> (…)
> Researcher: Why do you think they act that way?
> Jordy: Because… It's a bit like a colony here in Antwerp because… There're a lot [of Moroccans] here and then they feel… they feel at home here.
> (11y, school 3, self-identifies as Belgian)

Jordy believes that minority groups should assimilate into mainstream society by adopting what he perceives as 'Belgian culture'. He draws clear boundaries between native Belgians and Moroccans. For him, Belgian identity is an exclusive identity with clear characteristics:

> Jordy: He [a Belgian] may… He may sometimes drink a beer or two, may drink beer but he also has to eat properly.
> Researcher: Eat properly? What do you mean by that?
> Jordy: People eat with their hands in Morocco, I don't think that's decent.
> (11y, school 3, self-identifies as Belgian)

According to Jordy, the majority of Moroccans based in Belgium do not 'act' Belgian. Jordy takes his friend Sam as an example of how minorities should behave:

> Jordy: Yes, my friend Sam for example is from Iran and he's a normal boy like everyone else.
> (11y, school 3, self-identifies as Belgian)

These repertoires also emerge in Sam's narrative. Like Jordy, he draws clear boundaries between native Belgians and pupils with a Moroccan background:

> Sam: Those from Belgium do less stupid stuff. Actually, just less dangerous stuff. And then the Muslims, most of the time Moroccans actually, they try to do stuff, like getting into a fight or doing something that's not allowed. And then I prefer to play with Belgians.
> Researcher: They [native Belgian children] get less into fights?
> Sam: They just don't get into fights at all. Only if they're joking around…
> Researcher: And what's the dangerous stuff the Muslim or Moroccan children get into?
> (…)
> Sam: Umm… In general, they act very tough and they confront others. And… throw stuff. And in school they just act very tough and then, if you, if they do something to you and you do something [back], you talk, you say stop, then they start to act very tou.. very cocky, like 'I'll knock out all your teeth!'
> Researcher: And those are things that Anton or James would never do?
> Sam: No, they'd never say that.
> (11y, school 3, self-identifies as Belgian and 'partly Iranian')

Although Sam and Jordy express more negative feelings towards 'Moroccans' than others, similar narratives emerged among children in other schools concerning minority children, particularly 'Moroccans', as more likely to argue and get into fights.

While only a few children mention cultural frictions as a downside of diversity, a slightly larger group refers to language differences as a disadvantage of classroom diversity. Even children who do not adopt an assimilationist perspective in general prefer monolingualism at school, regardless of ethnic background. Their fear is that children will bully each other in foreign languages that are not understood by everyone. Remarkably, children value diversity in classroom because it enables them to learn words in foreign languages but want to limit or control the use of these languages. However, this point of view is not shared by everyone. A few children emphasize the importance of multilingualism and do not expect children to abuse this with bullying behaviour.

Repertoires of group disadvantages

Whereas most children consider diversity to be enriching, a relatively large group is also aware of exclusion based on ethno-cultural characteristics. These children believe that some groups are treated more badly than others. Pupils regardless of ethnic and social background seem to draw on such 'repertoires of group disadvantages' (see also Lamont et al., 2016), as Oskar, a native Belgian pupil, shows:

> Researcher: Which group is being treated most badly in this society; you think?
> Oskar: Muslims because with the… Because Belgians are sometimes racist, most, some Belgians are uhm racist towards Muslims.
> (11y, school 3, self-identifies as Belgian)

Yet, these repertoires seem to affect minority children the most as they belong to the group they perceive as vulnerable to bad treatment. The children seem to have internalized primarily repertoires of exclusion of Muslims[iv], but experiences of racism based on culture or skin-colour are also mentioned by a few. Some children report that they are verbally attacked by adults because of both religious and ethno-cultural factors:

> Researcher: Can you give an example of a racist incident?
> Layla: Ummm… Especially when they go on at us "fucking Moroccans" and so on or "fucking Muslim"! On the tram if they push us away all the time and then start to scold or… If the tram is overcrowded, for example, then we have to… We're forced to stand in front of the doors and when we stop people suddenly start yelling "Go away, stupid Moroccans!".

(…)
Researcher: Do you experience that kind of incidents frequently?
Layla: Frequently.
(11y, school 4, self-identifies as Muslim)

Some Muslim children not only feel exposed to racism but also mention a lack of respect and recognition for their religious identity at school. Although the vast majority of Muslim (or other minority) children do not report a lack of appreciation by their teachers and principals, a few children have experienced otherwise. A frequently mentioned concern is that their religious experiences are not taken into account and that teachers do not respect their choice to practice their religion. Children express these concerns with regard to their own school or with regard to other schools they do not attend (anymore). The feeling among some Muslim children of being disrespected is not necessarily based on personal experiences. Some pupils claim that they feel appreciated in their own school and environment but are nonetheless suspicious of other schools because of the stories they hear from others. Stories made available through the family in particular seem to have a strong impact. Ikram, for example, feels respected at her current school but expects to feel less well when she will move to secondary education. She currently attends a neighbourhood school where religious symbols are allowed but this will not be the case in the secondary school she will go to[v]. Although Ikram does not wear a headscarf herself, she believes that such an environment will affect her well-being:

Researcher: What do you expect [from the transition to secondary school]?
Ikram: Umm… That I'll be less happy there than I'm here at this school.
Researcher: How come?
Ikram: Umm yeah… At that school, for example… My sister wears a headscarf, she can't [wear it] there. Then my sister feels… feels a bit guilty that she can't wear her headscarf there and… She doesn't like that. And also… Those teachers are a little racist towards my sister. (…) Yes, they [Muslim girls] aren't treated very nicely. And yeah… Umm… Especially Muslims, a Muslim girl. They're treated less [well] than boys [in schools], much less. And yeah… A bit… racist or something at me… at Muslim girls.
Researcher: Because of their headscarf?
Ikram: Yes.
Researcher: How would you feel, if you wore a headscarf and you had to take it off?
Ikram: Uhmm, not very well. Then people aren't respecting you for who you are.
Researcher: That's the feeling you have? That Muslim girls who have to take their headscarf off aren't respected [because of the school's policy]?
Ikram: Yes.
Researcher: Why do you think they have to take it off?
Ikram: Yeah… Then they think that she's… an IS fighter or something. That a bomb will explode.
(12y, school 6, self-identifies as Moroccan and Belgian)

Another example of how these repertoires are made available through family stories, is found in Layla's narrative. Like Ikram, Layla is satisfied with the openness in her school but expects to be confronted with racist name-calling when she moves to secondary school. Her expectations are partly based on the described experiences of her family:

Layla: When you're Muslim, some children say: 'Oh, it smells like Muslims in here!' the whole time… and I'm also afraid of that, that they'll do that to me.
Researcher: Do those things already happen? Do children bully you because you're Muslim?
Layla: No, it hasn't happened yet, but it happens a lot in secondary school. It also happened to my dad, to my uncle but he's still in secondary education. Umm… My sisters, it also happened to almost all of them and I don't like that, and I'm also very afraid that it'll happen to me too. (…)
Researcher: What did your dad tell you?
Layla: It also happened to him, the same as to my sisters and also to him like 'Oh, it smells like

Muslims in here!' and like the whole time… And then he changed school again and again because he was bullied in each school he went to because he was Muslim.
Researcher: Bullied by whom?
Layla: By the students and sometimes by the teachers.
(11y, school 4, self-identifies as Muslim)

These repertoires affect children's well-being and how they imagine their future:

Ikram: Racism is getting bigger and bigger and how are we supposed to live [like this] in the future (…)?
Researcher: Where did you get that feeling? That it's getting bigger and bigger?
Ikram: Yeah uhmmm… on TV. Most of the times I see nothing but people talking about the headscarf, Muslims, and yeah…
(…)
Researcher: So you think there'll be more racists in the future?
Ikram: Yes.
Researcher: How do you think you'll act [if that happens]?
Ikram: Yeah… Stay at home and don't go anywhere. (…) I won't be welcome nowhere anymore or so...
(12y, school 6, self-identifies as Moroccan and Belgian)

In order to feel recognized and create a safer environment for themselves in a perceived 'hostile' world, most of these pupils would like to surround themselves with people 'like themselves'. Children also stress the need to stick together as minorities and are more aware of their selective peer group formation. This confirms other studies showing that pupils who feel stigmatized feel more secure in intra-ethnic friendships (e.g. Hoare, 2019).

5. Conclusion

In this article, we have shown that children hold multiple and sometimes contrasting perspectives on diversity, as is also evidenced in other studies (see e.g. Hajisoteriou et al., 2017; Iqbal et al., 2017; Partasi, 2011). However, to our knowledge these perspectives on diversity among children have not been systematically analysed through the lens of cultural repertoires to highlight the multiplicity of perspectives. We argued that children in the super-diverse city of Antwerp use repertoires in flexible and differential ways to give meaning to various forms of diversity, as well as to position their own identity and support their sense of belonging. We have shown here that four broad repertoires emerge from our interviewed children's narratives.

First, many children perceive diversity as a normal aspect of their daily lives. Although these children acknowledge (and often highly value) the classroom diversity, they do not necessarily consider it to be exceptional or worth discussing. This is line with other studies in super-diverse settings, where diversity is experienced as commonplace by both adults (Wessendorf, 2013) and children (Iqbal et al., 2017). Second, cosmopolitan arguments are revealed in children's narratives to make sense of super-diversity. These children do not necessarily perceive diversity to be 'common' or 'self-evident', but explicitly experience ethno-cultural, religious or linguistic heterogeneity as a great benefit. However, a third repertoire among children reveals bright boundaries between different ethnic, cultural or religious groups. These repertoires of cultural 'otherness' and deficiency were much less present among the pupils. Yet, the few children drawing on such exclusive boundaries do so strongly. They believe that cultural diversity leads to cultural friction if minority groups are unwilling to assimilate into mainstream society. In these narratives, ethnic identities are defined very exclusively, with rather stereotypical characteristics. Fourth, we described how some children share a strong belief in group

disadvantages. Whereas most children consider diversity to be enriching, a relatively large group is also aware of exclusion based on ethno-cultural or religious characteristics. Muslims, especially, are perceived to be disadvantaged in society. Children, particularly Muslim children, indeed seem to be aware of religion as one of the most pertinent symbolic boundaries in Western European countries (Alba, 2005) and the exclusion or discrimination this might entail. We argued that this reflects partly the extent to which repertoires are made available, for example within families. The respondents who narrate stories about racism or anti-Islam experiences within their family, also report more insecurity and fear about their future.

The cultural repertoires perspective thus highlighted the importance of being socialized into specific repertoires. It was also fruitful, however, as it integrates the notion of 'sets of tools' into the concept of culture (Swidler, 1984). This allowed us to highlight children's agency, their ability to navigate their diverse environments and manage tensions or contradictions in their social environment (see also Pache Huber and Spyrou, 2012). Although the children in this study grow up in a setting where ethnic and religious boundaries are very salient (because of the strong presence of anti-immigration and anti-Islam discourses in Antwerp), most of our respondents perceive their diverse social environment to be unproblematic and construct open and positive narratives on ethno-cultural and religious diversity (see also Partasi, 2011). They actively 'shape' inclusive narratives by downplaying boundaries between different ethno-cultural or religious groups, for example by emphasizing people's 'humanness' that is more important to them than group characteristics. At the same time, they realize that this perspective may not be shared by everyone in society and that people can hold negative views on diversity.

While all four repertoires resound in our six schools, we have observed small differences between schools. Children in a school with a more or less even mix of native and minority children draw comparatively brighter boundaries between ethno-cultural and religious groups than children in schools with a population of predominantly minorities – except for school 2. In this mixed school, in which most pupils have a middle-class background, our respondents predominantly downplayed differences between groups and hardly used stigmatizing language while discussing diversity. These results seem to suggest that the ethno-cultural and social class composition of the school play a role in children's reasoning about diversity. Obviously, our small-scale and qualitative study can only provide a first indication here. Furthermore, although there was some social class diversity in our sample, the intersection between class and other forms of diversity was not at the core of our study. Further research can possibly provide more details on the conditions in which children draw on more inclusive or more exclusive repertoires to give meaning to super-diversity.

Nevertheless, several of our results resonate with findings of other European research on super-diverse cities (e.g. Iqbal et al., 2017), suggesting that processes occurring in the specific context of the super-diverse city of Antwerp resemble those in other European cities. The main finding that seems to emerge out of our research and the current state of the art, is that children generally seem to be able to navigate super-diverse environments quite unproblematically. However, given the strong resurgence of populist and extremist discourse across Europe, it will be crucial to understand how these repertoires will evolve in subsequent life stages. Will Europe's next generation indeed remain at ease in super-diverse contexts, or will boundaries become brighter if societal tensions remain strong?

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[i] Data were generated from https://stadincijfers.antwerpen.be/?var=natcube (demographic data) and https://www.agodi.be/cijfermateriaal-leerlingenkenmerken (school composition data).

[ii] In the course of the research the permanent (native) teacher was replaced for a few weeks by an interim of Moroccan descent.
[iii] All names are fictional.
[iv] As Alba (2005) argues, Muslims in Western European countries are confronted with bright boundaries and exclusion based on religion rather than on ethnic background, skin colour or nationality.
[v] Pupils, students and teachers are not allowed to wear headscarves in most Antwerp primary and secondary schools.

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