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MOTHERING, HABITUS AND HABITAT: THE ROLE OF MOTHERING AS MORAL GEOGRAPHY FOR THE INEQUALITY IMPASSE IN URBAN EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Following Bourdieu, residential location as habitat may provide spatial profit when it matches with a habitus – but how? How can we conceptualize situations of mismatch between habitat and habitus, and what may they mean for urban inequalities? This article explores this topic through the lens of mothering practices in elementary schools. Qualitative interviews in two neighbourhoods in Berlin, Germany, suggest how moral geographies at intersections of class and race/ethnicity structure parents' opportunities to organize resources for children in their specific spatial contexts. It argues that mothering practices can help us see not just that, but how habitus and habitat are related. Empirically, it suggests that the moral geographies in which these schools are embedded reinforce the exclusionary consequences of their institutional practices. I theorize that the moral geographies of neighbourhoods as sites of mothering practices vis-à-vis the class-based state logics in institutions may contribute to an urban impasse of educational inequality.

Key words: Moral geography; mothering; parents; urban education; Berlin; qualitative interviews

INTRODUCTION

Segregated cities have unequal neighbourhood outcomes, for example, in education (Sykes 2011; Bernelius & Vaattovaara 2016; Boterman *et al.* 2019). Depending on where children live (Blokland & Vief 2021), elementary schools work differently for them, and social positions are reproduced (van Zanten 2003). The literature shows that the condition of our existence, or habitus (Bourdieu 1990, p. 52), plays an essential role in such reproduction, as the habitus generates 'normative *propensities* of actual social practices' in actual places like neighbourhoods (Friedmann 2008, p. 316; also Savage 2011). Neighbourhoods may thus provide spatial profit when the place where we are 'situated', or our habitat (Bourdieu 2018, p. 107, Bourdieu 1994), reinforces our habitus. But what happens when our habitus is out of place? What subtle exclusions may take place then? How can we conceptualize mismatches between habitat and habitus? And could such a conceptualization contribute to our understanding of the urban impasse in educational inequality (cf. van Zanten 2005)?

Public elementary schools are good cases to study the everyday spatiality of (subtle) exclusions at the intersection of race/ethnicity, class and gender both horizontally between citizens and vertically in citizen-state relations. In Berlin, Germany, the public school system with catchment areas and a strong norm that children should be able to walk to school makes schools important local institutional hubs. These schools are also examples of spatially fixed state institutions.

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State logics, one of the core concepts in the introduction of this thematic issue, are put to practice in schools. On the scale of 'micro-social processes' (Gordon 1996, p. 420) such as those in schools and neighbourhoods, rules, regulations and norms are implemented through relations. Educational outcomes are thus contingent on 'social relations and perceptions' (Gordon, idem). This is one way in which inequalities of positions and locations are 'stabilized' (also: Griffith & Smith 2005, p. 126). It has often been said that a general value system or even hegemony of middle-class values rules education per se (Bourdieu & Passeron 1990; Karsten 2003). But, following Smith (1987), the everydayness of such rulings must be studied: it is unclear *how* such ruling of relations is done.[1] How does it *happen*?

The emergence of ruling regulations can be captured with the bridging concept of moral geographies, place-rooted cultures developing from people doing things. Through the lens of 'mothering', this article shows not just *that*, but *how* habitus and habitat are related. It thus expands Griffith and Smith's argument (Griffith & Smith 2005, p. 127) that family-school relations form one of the engines of inequality as they 'interlock' the educational work that women do in and for schools. My article is not primarily meant as an empirical contribution. I do not address the educational choices and strategies of parents. I compare practices of mothering in schools in two neighbourhood contexts to explore the possible value of applying the concept of moral geography to 'bridge' habitat and habitus. I develop the thesis that a mismatch contributes to an urban impasse of educational inequality: *where* mothers are in the city influences norms of mothering practices. This, in turn, may influence inequality.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Two sets of literature help shed light on this thesis. First, Bourdieu's work on habitus and habitat, which is also central in many studies of school segregation (Butler & Hamnett 2007; Reay 2007; Vowden 2012). Reproduction of class inequalities relies on *people doing things*, as well-studied for the middle classes (Butler & Robson 2003; Skeggs 2004). As van Zanten (2009) wrote, bottom-up practices affect the shape of educational policies (and school's orientations following these). Such practices thus matter for inequality, as does space.

School choice research abundantly makes this point (Ball & Nikita 2014; Breidenstein *et al.* 2014; Lareau & Goyette 2014). It investigates how parents assess and selects or circumvent the instrumental and expressive orders of specific schools (Bernstein 1977 cited in Vowden 2012, also Kosunen 2014) while searching for a 'good mix' (Vowden 2012). As Raveaud and van Zanten (2007) demonstrated for London and Paris middle classes, this entails ethical dilemmas. Kosunen shows that Finish middle-class parents make school choices through evaluations of school reputation especially by 'social surroundings *in* the school' (Kosunen 2014, p. 449, my italics) or the school's organizational habitus (see also Reay *et al.* 2001; Nast 2016, 2020; Vaughan 2008). In Bell's (2009) work on Detroit's parental secondary school choices, parents ascribe meanings to locations of schools before making decisions. Bernelius *et al.* (2021, p. 162) show that parents in Helsinki draw on narratives of neighbourhood hierarchies to form views on school reputations. Neighbourhoods, however, are predominantly discussed as spatial imaginaries in this work, and less strongly developed as relational settings (Blokland 2017).

This scholarship aims to understand school choice. It does not discuss how neighbourhoods as relational settings feed into how parenting is done *in* schools. Indeed, most studies address parents' strategies before entering schools (Teske & Schneider 2001; Noreisch 2007; Goldring & Phillips 2008; Burgess *et al.* 2015) to get one's child in the 'right' school or even classroom (Raveaud & van Zanten 2007; Blokland & Grosse-Löscher 2016). This is not enough to secure cultural capital, given how teachers classify students (Oates 2003; Diamond *et al.* 2004; Redding 2019). Teachers also assess perceived parental qualities (Comber 1998; Whyte & Karabon 2016): 'close, cooperative and 'positive' family-school relationships' increase educational outcomes (Weininger & Lareau 2003, p. 376; Epstein 1987). Schools have 'standardized views of the proper role of parents in schooling', according to Lareau (1987, p. 73). Parents thus need 'cultural knowledge' of 'how institutions work' (Lareau 2015, p. 2).

But *do* schools have *one* standard view? Nast (2016) ethnographically investigated how two Berlin neighbourhoods influenced organizational practices in schools to analyse what different neighbourhoods provide rather than what aggregated outcomes they produce (Nast 2016, p. 52 after Blokland *et al.* 2016). Depending on the neighbourhood context, 'organizational practices' of teaching, fulfilling formal and recognizing problems and needs 'differ[ed] considerably between [the two schools]' (Nast 2016, p. 190). Parents created 'islands' for their own children in certain classrooms (Nast 2016, p. 191). In schools with very diverse populations, social segregation within classrooms between students may occur (for example: Kronenberg *et al.* 2021). Nast and Blokland (2014) showed, however, that child-related social capital may also emerge among parents across boundaries. They argued that the workings of the spatiality of social and cultural capital may require additional work from a relational angle.

Geography's relational turn to 'relations through which space is constructed' (Massey 2005, p. 101) resonates with relational sociology. This approach can be summarized in the image of inequality as 'donut-shaped' (Zerubavel 1991, p. 77). Outwards, relational boundary work pushes people over edges at the intersection of their race/ethnicity, class and gender by active exclusions.[2] Inwards, processes of 'opportunity hoarding accumulate advantages on one side or the other of a relation, fortified by construction of social categories that justify and sustain unequal advantage' (Tilly 2001, p. 362). Bourdieu referred to such boundary-work as club-effects. When club-effects concentrate spatially, he assumes 'spatial profit'. In other words, Bourdieu expects that the fortifying of categories match habitus – the conditioning associated with particular conditions of existence as people constitute it in practice (Bourdieu 1990, p. 52) – with habitat. Bourdieu defines habitat as 'outcome' of habitus leading to where 'each agent being characterized by the place where he or she is situated more or less permanently (…) and by the relative position that her localizations (…), occupy in relation to the localizations of other agents.' (Bourdieu 2018, p. 107). Bourdieu's habitat is thus not an ecological unit. It does not describe a neighbourhood or a specific institution, like a school. Habitat is the characterization of the *agent through his or her ascribed location*, usually a place of residence. It includes the many propensities of actual practices of others in this location that confirm the dis/congruence with one's individual habitus. When people use music classes, playgrounds, swimming lessons or school classrooms locally, these institutional settings provide a congruent habitat where parents with similar positions can lean on one another to reproduce status. In highly heterogeneous neighbourhoods, neighbourhood institutions may not unconditionally facilitate such a habitat. Bourdieu does, however, little to show how habitus and habitat connect. While there are many dimensions to a habitat, one is the set of ideas and practices of what it means to 'mother', and this is the focus of this article. This dimension may work as a moral geography: 'a localized discourse [on] what is considered right and wrong in the raising of children' (Holloway 1998, p. 31; Philo 1991).

This idea draws on the second set of literature: literature on mothering. Mothering, as a subset of parenting more generally (Gatrell 2005, pp. 145–147) is a set of practices of women doing care work for dependent children. It reaches beyond the 'instrumental act of meeting children's needs' (Everingham 1994, p. 6), sometimes discussed as 'emotional capital' (Reay 2000; Allat 1993; Hochschild 1989), and is embedded in spatial settings:

> While nurturing, women are guided by the particularities of their situation. Their decisions are context-dependent and embodied, responsive to, and often highly preoccupied with, the affective signals of those around them. (Everingham 1994, p. 7)

Mothering as a normative ideal of heterosexual women in nuclear families staying home to take care of children does not match with many women's and children's realities (Young 1997; Glenn *et al.* 1994; DiQuinzio 1993). As imagination, it centralizes white middle-class women's positions over other positionalities (Glenn *et al.* 1994;

Collins 2000). It is politically necessary to broaden this view of mothering. But when governments talk about parenting, their 'benchmark of good parenting' is still what *women* in heteronormative family settings do (Gatrell 2005, p. 3). It is therefore useful to include the gendered nature of habitus, habitat and the moral geographies that frame women's actions.

Mothering is a historically variable, not natural set of 'dynamic interactions and relationships, located in a societal context organized by gender and in accord with the prevailing gender belief system' (Arendell 2000, p. 1193; Gerson & Peiss 1985, p. 320; Hays 1996, p. 6) and 'historically, socially, culturally, politically and importantly, *morally* shaped' (Miller 2005, p. 3). To note the dominance of this imagination in 'society' alone does not explain well how it *works*.

The 'mothering obligation' that women 'are charged with (…) for the moral training of their children' (Kaplan 1997, p. 67) brings women's emotional capital in a particular relationship to the state (van den Berg & Duyvendak 2012, p. 557). This citizen-state relationship is actualized in localized positions of women interacting with institutions like elementary schools. Schooling a child is not only parenting for the best of one's child, as discussed in much of the education studies which see education as consumption (Holloway *et al.* 2010). It is also the acting out of a relation of state and citizens, each from their logics. State demands on women are 'geared towards reinforcing existing forms of state and society' (Pateman 1989, pp. 10–11). Mothering this is not an isolated practice behind the doors of the home, nor a set of parenting decisions alone, but a project in which society has vested interests. Neo-liberalization has increased the 'role of everyday agents' as 'idealized citizens' in public (Holloway & Pimlott-Wilson 2012,p. 640; Boyer 2020). Mothering, as Griffith and Smith (2005) showed, consists of mundane tasks of mothers ensuring *for* schools *that* schools function.

Much mothering literature evaluates its challenges without explicit attention to spatiality, and focusses on the home (Johnson & Johnston 2019, p. 14). Geographies of child rearing (Karsten 2003) and family formations (Duncan & Smith 2002; Hall 2016; Turner & Almack 2019) discuss moral geographies as 'place-rooted cultures' that 'shape and validate mothers' choices' (Holloway 1999, p. 456). This scholarship importantly connects class to space, and mothering to power relations (Johnson & Johnston 2019, p. 12).

Class, however, is often ascribed and not relationally studied (Epstein 1987; Graue & Walsh 1998; Vincent & Ball 2007). Intensive mothering, 'wholly child-centred, emotionally involving, and time consuming' (Arendell 2000, p. 1201) and 'concerted cultivation' (Lareau 2015) are found in white middle class, heterosexual dual-parent nuclear families that laws and policies generally assume as normative model. The literature describes well that women feel pressured to do right by their children: a class-based ideology reproduces the middle classes and 'civilizes' others into good citizens. It also demonstrates powerfully how women internalize this in child-rearing views and school choice motives. Less clear is how such views are put into practice when mothers do things in localities. *How* do 'cultures root in place' (Holloway 1999, p. 456) and *how* do habitus and habitat relate?

METHODOLOGY

My exploration of this question draws on 'Mothering in the Metropolis', a research project on how women organize resources for children in various neighbourhood contexts, consisting of semi-structured interviews and ethnographic notes between 2010 and 2014. We conducted 39 interviews in a Berlin neighbourhood 'Deerfield' and 37 in 'Forest Lake', transcribed and coded in MAXQDA.[3] Participants were recruited in public elementary schools through emailing parents in two classes in a Forest Lake school, a school-wide email in one Deerfield school (D1), and snowballing from four contacts in school D2. All but two parents who agreed to interviews identified as women. Four interviewees had children on a second Forest Lake school; in Deerfield, 18 interviewees had children in school D1, 16 in school D2 and 5 in a third school.[4] Interviewers visited most

interviewees at their homes and, in Deerfield, in the school's café (D2). Interviews lasted from 40 minutes to 2.5 hours. Two public schools had special educational programs: a Montessori program (Forest Lake), and a program for intellectual giftedness (D1). Strictly speaking, these schools were not neighbourhood schools as their admissions did not depend on catchment areas. Yet, all but three interviewees lived close to the schools. D1's program may have made the school socio-economically more diverse than D2 (but Berlin makes no statistics available on this). With no systematic sampling, it is impossible to draw empirical generalizations from the data, nor is this intended. Following a pragmatic-realist approach, I compare the contextual conditions (as in Sayer 2000, p. 118) of the practices of mothering (as women retold them when they spoke with us) in particular schools in particular neighbourhoods[5] where they were positioned and located in order to address a *theoretical* concern.

Forest Lake is an early 20th century 'villa colony', but also has four-story 1970s apartment buildings. Deerfield was built for workers in the late 19th century, with housing stock renewed and added after WWII. The indicators in Table 1 suggest differences in economic and cultural capital, which was the reason to choose the research sites. Deerfield scores low in statistics on school performance. Fewer pupils continue in the university-preparation high-school tracks than in Forest Lake (Vief 2014). As we will see, mothers with strong cultural class positions in Deerfield constructed advantages out of this difference, whereas mothers with cultural resources divergent from local standards in Forest Lake did not.

MOTHERING THROUGH PARTICIPATION

Schools depend on the habitus of teachers, children and parents to do things, in congruence with unwritten rules, localized experiences and expectations, embedded in state logics of law and of state policy demands (Holloway & Pimlott-Wilson 2012, p. 641). Schools thus reveal the relation of citizens and the localized state, because habitus generates 'common sense behaviors' possible within 'limits of regulations' and excluding 'extravagances' (Bourdieu 1990, p. 57). The habitus enables an institution its 'full realization':

> An institution (…) is complete and fully viable only if it is durably objectified not only (…) in the logic, transcending individual agents of a

Table 1. *Standard demographic data on Deerfield & Forest lake.*

	Deerfield	Forest lake
Standard demographic data (interviews)		
Number of interviews	39	37
Number of children (mean)	2.24	2.32
Number of children (median)	2	2
Share of single mothers	23.68%	18.75%
Mothers with higher education (M.A., Ph.D.)	16.66%	66.66%
Mothers with secondary school degree or less	22.22%	20%
Median Income (based on averaged income classes)	16.500 €	71.500 €
Average Income (based on averaged income classes)	20.821 €	66.000 €
Standard data of neighbourhoods (city council)		
Population (total)	29,707	11,156
Share of children under 12	9.54%	9.63%
Share of population with migration background	51.45%	28.9%
Share of underage population with migration background	75.26%	29.34%
Foreign recipients of social welfare	31.03%	4.47%
Child poverty (children living off social welfare)	51.7%	4.06%
Share of unemployed	7.51%	1.29%

Source: Amt für Statistik Berlin–Brandenburg; own calculations.

> particular field, but also in bodies, in durable dispositions to recognize and comply with the demands immanent in the field. (ibid, p. 58)

Mothering means developing a feel for 'the game' (after Bourdieu 1990) called 'participating' in school. This section highlights differences in Deerfield and Forest Lake of mothering in schools, at the intersection of ethnic/racial and class positions of women.

German state law[6] gives parents a right to information and organization. The *Gesamtelternvertretung (GEV)* (general parents committee, with elected representatives from each class) delegates members to the *Schulkonferenz* (assembly of school leadership, teachers, parents and students) and various committees. In each class, teachers must periodically call parent meetings (PMs). Not legally required but common are *Schulfördervereine (SFV)*, voluntary membership-based associations that support educational goals. Berlin public schools thus have formalized parents' involvement. PMs and GEVs work with agendas, chairs, elections and minutes. The ministry of education has long recognized that participation is not ideal in all Berlin schools. It sees the deficits in parents:

> […] Especially schools in so called 'social hot spots' [*soziale Brennpunkte*] [have] difficulties finding parents for the GEV. Many parents don't know what school looks like today and what their role in cooperation could be. Different language and cultural backgrounds and different socialization experiences or school biographies of parents and teachers and the expectations, prejudices and role images make cooperation difficult.[7]

A ministerial briefing in 2008 connects pupils' deficits – low test results – directly with deficits of parents:

> to not further widen the gap between "education-oriented parents", who can use [the] […] participation-possibilities in interest of their children and parents with migration background, whom often are not aware of the value of cooperation with the school for the learning development of their children, participation offers must be made that are better tailored to the preconditions and contexts of parents with migration background.[8]

The policy brief illustrates the state logic towards integration: parents need 'positive integration experiences and agency to arrive at a position to understand the Berlin education system and participate in it. This will help [them] develop acceptance and esteem for education.' This reflects Germany's public debate that defines educational inequality as product of circumstances within families without 'enough' parental support. Such families are often called *bildungsfern*, translating as 'uneducated', but literally meaning 'far from education.' The term easily acquires a moral connotation of not interested in education. By consequence, schools in areas with high concentrations of '*bildungsferne*' families are *assumed* to be low performing.

Neighbourhood as moral geography in parent–parent relations – In Deerfield and Forest Lake, elected white middle-class mothers (and some fathers) run the SFVs and GEVs. In Deerfield, they talked about their engagements with a general reference to the school's locations in a disadvantaged area with 'many foreigners and people who do not have much '*Bildung*'. White stay-at-home mum Yvetta lived on the edge of Deerfield facing a park, had an M.A. degree and was married to a lobbyist. She was vice-chair of the SFV at D2. She called Deerfield 'very multicultural but not child-friendly', busy, 'lacking good infrastructure' and 'without nice places to go to.' She did not use its playgrounds, as her children had many organized activities, and used only specific local shops. She explained at length how she ran school activities, initiated sponsorships and had put forward ideas. She noted lower participation among migrant mothers: 'for foreign children it is more likely the fathers … because depending on eh… the mothers do not leave the house so much' and 'language is a barrier because we cannot and do not want to translate everything.' Yvetta explained that practical events, '*Kleinkram*' ('incidentals'), got done by a 'rather separate circle' of mothers, activated through the school's social worker, mothers 'from the parents' café.'

Hannah, white professional resident of Deerfield, member of the GEV at D1, explained

that the school's program for giftedness was also attended by children who lived in an adjacent, more middle-class area. This meant that 'we have people that are really super-fit (…) who can bring a lot (…) and that saves the school a little (…) because (…) there are parents from the other [non-special program] classes, but there are clearly fewer, who eh… who help out.' She explained that women like herself, 'with a better education who are more engaged' felt recognized for 'the more constructive criticism they bring forward'. Such recognition depended on doing something *better* than others in the school that needed to be 'saved' from its location in a disadvantaged neighbourhood. Note that the necessity that Hannah felt to point out that parents came from outside constructs a moral geography: it ascribed a place-rooted cultural trait (see above).

Hannah and Yvetta constructed a hierarchy in who did what that positioned them as especially skilled middle-class white women in a moral geography of localized practices of sociability and practical help. Both reported 'short lines' to the school in case they needed to organize access for their own children. Taking pride in addressing the principal with '*Du*', German's informal address of other people for 'you' which adults offer to one another to signify closeness or downplay hierarchies (*'das Du anbieten'*) and talking 'on the highest level', Yvetta emphasized the importance of her work for the school.

Deerfield working-class mothers spoke differently about their participation. Aware of the expectation to be 'involved', some women juggled this with limited time resources. Sharon, a secretary, believed being 'involved' had 'value': 'If I wasn't a single parent, maybe I had more capacities and I could get into the social network of the school more.' Josie, a white woman, planned to get 'more involved': 'I really could not [get involved] because I had my new son and I was in my vocational training. It was a lot of stress, too. Now I simply try, as much as I can, I try to keep track'. Simone, a white working-class stay-at-home mother, worked on D2's garden project and was a GEV representative, because she believed it helped her to 'know what happened' in school. Ayse, born in Berlin to parents from Turkey, full-time mother married after secondary school to a logistics worker, explained:

> I am always in touch with the teachers, at all the meetings, I am always there. I have always tried to be, when possible, elected or something, so that I always have insight (…) I try to protect my children.

Silvi, from Berlin with Turkish family roots, with a vocational training degree, was a parent representative to ensure to 'have an idea (*Ahnung*) of all aspects' of the D2 school. In these interviews, women strived to enter networks to secure knowledge, in a context where leaders of SFV or GEV assumed that they were not interested or competent. They framed participation as joining, not leading, aimed at being informed, not running things. While Ayse tried to always be 'there' and Josie 'to keep track', Yvetta and Hannah spoke of participation with ownership. Their 'recognizable, accepted practices' gave legitimacy to and reinforced the institutional logics of participation.[9] The formal participation structures meant that one must acquire the 'language' to the cultural practices (Miller 2005, p. 39). All these accounts suggest that GEV and SFV practices validated certain cultural resources (Skeggs 2004) that matched with a habitus usually associated with middle classes, while drawing on a moral geography of the neighbourhood as *bildungsfern*.

In Forest Lake, mothering included attending meetings as well as baking and even cleaning. In the school application process, parents answered a questionnaire, including: 'in our school, parents engage themselves a lot. How will you engage in our school?' Once a place is offered, parents attend workshops on Montessori pedagogy, one of the results of *Schulkonferenz* actions.[10] This landed well in the neighbourhood, an area conducive to 'concerted cultivation' (Lareau 2015), with its infrastructure of music lessons, dance schools, sports clubs, creative arts courses and therapists. With grades 1–3 in one classroom, new parents always entered an already established group of parents at the PM, who few questioned the gendered school routines. Mothers' intensive use of the local

infrastructure made the school one of the sites for a moral geography, sustained by economically settled, heteronormative families without migration backgrounds. That women understood mothering as a moral geography in which they localized and positioned themselves showed their comparisons to other neighbourhoods. They expressed 'fortune' of not having to deal with 'difficult' pupils, resonating Bernelius *et al.* (2021)'s finding that difficult behaviour was located in 'notorious' neighbourhoods. They ascribed to their area a common sense of 'seriousness' about child raising. More than in Deerfield, women reported to stay home *in order to* be fully available as mothers. Participation went beyond legally required structures. GEV, principal and teachers agreed that the regular classroom cleaning wasn't enough. On a (bi-) monthly basis, 3–4 mothers signed up at the PM to get the classroom key after recess and washed shelves, desks and materials. Food for school-events like the Christmas bazar must be freshly prepared or home baked. Ilse, a white lawyer with two children, related:

> Our school is really active there, so to say […] and the parents are right from the start then required [*aufgefordert*] to get themselves involved, as a parent presentative or a member of the SFV or some sort of actions taking place in the classroom […].

When authoritative knowledge of what children 'need' is institutionalized (Miller 2005, p. 30), its naturalization 'leaves little cultural space for alternative ways of knowing' (Miller 2005, p. 40). This became apparent[11] when Maria's son got involved in a classroom conflict. Maria, renting in the apartment buildings, was a white single parent of four boys. Her youngest was in 3rd grade. She worked shifts as an airport baggage handler and regularly picked up her son in work clothes. The conflict was discussed at the PM in her absence. Her child's behaviour was interpreted as an 'absence' of 'parenting' (*fehlende Erziehung*). Someone commented that 'of course she doesn't care so much, she doesn't have the time to raise her children *properly* because she is always working'. Maria was not *visibly* performing intensive parenting. The cultural validation of *all* forms of participation as a necessary display of proper mothering disqualified Maria. The Forest Lake school depended on such a moral geography of mothering to operate as it did.

Moral geographies of mothering in parent–school relations – In Forest Lake, parents entered the educational settings of classrooms, for example, when Sheila, a stay-at-home mother with a teacher's degree, had a newborn. She appeared with the baby in the class of 3rd grader son, and she and the teacher taught sexual education together. The school drew on localized expectations that parents will engage, and all assumed their willingness to adhere to this norm. This engagement is child- and school-oriented and less oriented on networking among parents. Networking happened as a by-product in the school and other neighbourhood sites constantly: 'everyone seems to know everyone', Sheila noted. The high-cultural capital of parents fed a match of habitus and habitat. High cultural and economic capital of the neighbourhood population who could reasonably access the school's location as they lived nearby meant that mothering through participation did little boundary work. But lack of participation did work to exclude, as in Maria's case. Norms, however, must be carried out to develop a permanency. Newcomers must be socialized into the habitual norms. Large-scale ideologies in society do not explain how things get done: habituation and socialization are practices. Such practices of very day-to-day doings of small things through habituation *become* a habitat. Nina, a white stay-at-home mother married to a diplomate, explained:

> You have to participate always an awful lot, (…) I was active in the library, at the moment I care for the aquarium in the classroom. That is my task. But you always have to engage in something, and they are all so very engaged. Those are incredibly engaged parents.

Forest Lake mothers often elaborated that they participated as direct investment for their children. They found ways into the classrooms: they volunteered as 'reading mum' (*Lesemutter*) to spend time in their children's classroom and *observe the teacher*.

Maggie, mother of a 2nd grader and IT-manager, reported 'a lot of difficulties' with her son so she 'worked very closely with the teacher together on my boy' (*arbeiten an*, an expression used for projects). Children with educational or behavioural 'challenges' met a concerted effort of after-school therapies. Maggie and teachers alike 'pulled at the same strings', with parents like her doing vital work in schooling (see Griffith & Smith 2005). Maggie had 'a good basis to monitor':

> Just because I am there for reading every week, I have witnessed a lot of the interaction between the teachers and the pupils. Just how they speak with the pupils. It is, yes, I cannot explain it. It is just, so friendly, so full of respect […]…everything …so positive […]. So, these children are being built up all the time. That's my feeling.

Other interviewees spoke of teachers rescheduling assignments or activities when they informed teachers about children's stomach pains, headaches and other stress indicators which the teacher had 'understood'. Some noted some conflicts in normative ideas, like public-sector economist Sabine, after parents asked for *more* homework at a PM:

> Some parents feel that their children are not pushed far enough. I mean, it is really rare that something comes up like, maybe the children have too much homework, maybe they need more time to play. More the other way around. Or yes (…) when can they really write their first sentences or when can they read properly? So, hmm, that's where I am a little skeptical, where I always think, school should really be fun, and surely without performance it doesn't work but without pressure.

The Deerfield schools had social workers to enhance 'participation'. They organized daytime parental cafés, often with thematic meetings to engage parents with low-PM attendance. The themes aimed to transfer parental skills, for example, regarding media use or nutrition. In D2's café, mothers sewed costumes for the school theatre, and cooked for events: the *Kleinkram* that Yvette had mentioned. Interviewed in the café, Elif, a stay-at-home mother with Turkish roots and trained as a Kindergarten teacher, noted that the school expected mothers to 'know what the children do in this school' to support them home: 'that is, really, mutual expectation.' Deerfield mothers were welcome *outside* of classrooms. For Silvi, the school transpired that teachers did not wish more parent involvement:

> I believe they are happy when simply more than half of the parents appears at the PMs. And regularly… they have this 'post folders', [the teachers are happy when], when [mothers] have looked through [the folder] for important messages, or information, because that is what the communication between teachers and parents is… so, really more basic stuff.

Servicing the school by sewing costumes provided information access, but not control over school-wide issues and agendas as did GEV and *Schulkonferenz*. The cultural validation of both sets of activities kept the mismatch of habitus and habitat in place. The sewing mothers received recognition as active parents, but power dynamics did not change. The café was one site of various meeting locations, next to playground, shopping street and homes for Elif and her peers, a site for reinforcing existing neighbourhood and family ties.

Many Deerfield mothers referred to 'informing themselves' non-obtrusively – few criticized the school. Seemingly more than white working-class women Sharon and Josie, who thought of themselves as failing to be sufficiently active, women with migration histories seemed positive that they could address individual problems, *if* these would occur. Umdu, a shop-assistant of Turkish descent, thought problems usually had causes 'in the family' and schools were not responsible for children's behaviour. 'No school could be bad', because:

> …they are pedagogically trained people inside. They have been trained. So it all depends… it really depends on the family (…) So I never had a complaint.

Ayse was 'content' with the school as she had 'no problem': children's uneventful functioning in the system seemed important for lower middle-class and working-class Deerfield mothers. Meanwhile, Deerfield's diversity in lifestyles, languages, religions and cultural identities meant a standard that people differed. There seemed less pressure

among mothers themselves to keep up which each other. This suggests that Deerfield as a neighbourhood displayed various moral geographies of how mothering 'ought' to be done, sometimes making zones of conflict visible (cf. Johnson & Johnston 2019). Working-class women of Turkish descent had built ethnically homogeneous networks, using Deerfield's infrastructure, meeting in the parents' café or a local bakery. For some, assigning importance of religious values and the mosque as primary site of socialization and habituation of norms, it was important to ensure uneventfulness in the school context (see Kulkul 2022). Yet Ceren, a mother with a BA in business administration, described how the D2 school continued to categorize her as having a 'migration background'. Born in Germany but still praised for her 'good German' repeatedly, her habitus did not match with the institutional logics. As she wore a headscarf revealing her Muslim identity, her habitus was assumed to conform to the imagery of the *bildungsferne* mother for which the café was initiated. Positioned between the white middle class women in GEV and SFV and the migrant working-class women in the café, accessing resources in such mismatch was an impasse. Meanwhile, white middle-class women organized direct access to teachers: 'As a member of the SFV, I have another entrance to the teachers, that is very clear,' Yvette said, 'but I have heard from problems between teachers and parents.'

CONCLUSION

The reproduction of positions is enhanced when habitus and habitat match. This article showed that moral geographies of motherhood emerge in citizens–citizens and citizens–state relations. While not all mothers may 'subscribe to [a] particular ideology of mothering, [they] must, nonetheless, negotiate its consequences in everyday life' (Holloway 2013, p. 439). The mothering accounts of elementary school participation in the two neighbourhoods reveal three variations of an impasse, following from a mismatch between habitus and habitat.

First, assumptions about habitus may cause expectations to vary. This matters especially when positions of power among citizens vary. An impasse may occur through citizen–state relations. Ceren, an educated middle-class migrant woman, showed this. She was excluded by her Muslim identity on the one hand and her class position on the other, in her location in Deerfield. Second, homogeneity among affluent urbanites in citizen–citizen relations *and* matching logics between state and citizens may strengthen the reproduction and enhancement of positions. An impasse may follow from a mis-matching habitus of women like airport worker Maria, localized in a moral geography of the intensive parenting in Forest Lake. Third, white middle-class mothers in a disadvantaged neighbourhood still 'matched' to institutionalized state logics of formal participation. The moral geography of the neighbourhood spoke to their advantage, as they drew a boundary between themselves and 'the neighbourhood' from which they distanced discursively. In moral geographies of mothering, expectations of lower class, especially migrant women seemed less high in Deerfield – for those who were expected to fit its habitat. Forest Lake interviewees did not make such differentiation. While exhausting for working mothers, the gendered concerted cultivation had settled in locally here and women reinforced it through their mothering practices. Capital accumulates through mechanisms of spatial profit. In turn, a mismatch between habitus and habitat may prohibit advancement when the mismatch is institutionally embedded. In Deerfield, at the intersection of class and race/ethnicity, a boundary emerged between locally networked mothering of lower-educated migrant women around the café and the loosely networked resource-organizing through formal participation of white middle class women, leaving more middle-class migrant women and working-class white women relatively excluded.

Existing studies on the motives of parental educational choices refer to the normative settings in which parents choose. Micro-social processes operate to produce the 'contingency' of educational outcomes with 'social relations and perceptions' (Gordon 1996, p. 420). Geography of education research has paid much attention to perceptions and

motives. This article complements this literature. It addressed how relational practices of participation in elementary schools in two neighbourhoods draw on and contributed to moral geographies which connect habitus and habitat. This contributes to our understanding of the relational reproduction of positions. It does not result from given shared values or adhering to a given ideology per se, or alone. When there was a match of state logics (standards of parental involvement as formalized by the law) and habitus (social networks, cultural competences and time to develop a feel for the game and the actualization of this feel in practices), advantages could be secured. While mothers are agents in the creation of moral geographies. Moral geographies, in turn, also structure their actions. Neighbourhoods are thus not contexts *in which* people make choices, taking all possible information and considerations into account. They are relational settings and institutional hubs in which practices emerge – which may or may not match an individuals' intentions and motives. The analyses of the legally framed settings of parental participation showed that relations of mothers to institutions differed depending on location. This article thus suggests that the moral geographies of mothering practices, here discussed for the dimension of parental participation in elementary schools, contribute to urban impasses in educational inequality.

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Endnotes

[1] Smith writes: 'The practice of ruling involves the ongoing representation of the local actualities of our worlds in the standardized and general forms of knowledge that enter them into the relations of ruling' (2004, p. 3) and critiques literature on education: 'Virtually the whole of this literature presupposes a one-way relation between school and family' (2004, p. 21).

[2] This is currently also discussed as 'othering' (Kollender 2021) or as symbolic boundary work (Lamont & Molnár 2002) a process described in earlier sociology of reference group theory as the alchemy of vice and virtue (Merton 1967). I acknowledge the necessity to discuss this in more detail, but it goes beyond the aims of his article to do so.

[3] M.A. Students conducted ca. 40 interviews, paid research assistants the rest. I conducted five interviews in each area and supervised all others. Students signed consent for further data use. My analyses draw on discussions that led to unpublished student–papers by M. Bergermann, M. Felder, I. Higiro, S. Linneman and S. Lindemann. Interviews in Turkish are transcribed and translated into English by C. Kulkul.

[4] The interviews in D3 are not cited here. All but two parents interviewed in Forest Lake lived within walking or biking distance from the school. I have omitted the two living further away. In D1 and D2, one of the interviewed parents cited here lived outside of the area.

[5] With neighbourhoods I mean: areas around the school, less as a grid of streets and built environment or statistical unit than as hubs of institutions where people interact. Elementary schools are one such institutions.

[6] The law draws on a basic right of guardians/parents to information and participation in education (*Erziehung und Bildung*) and their duty to contribute. The law *Berliner Schulgesetz Teil UV Abschnitt V, §90 SchulG* contains 2 sections on the GEV: (5) The General Parents' Committee (GEV) represents the interests of all parents/guardians of a school. The committee may convene parents' meetings. These meetings serve to inform and discuss important school matters. The sub-committee may convene parents' subcommittees. They serve to inform and discuss important school matters of the school's respective organizational area. (6) The whole GEV and its sub-committees may form panels for specific issues and to prepare proposals. The parents' committee as a whole and its sub-committees shall decide on a case-by-case basis whether or not to involve those guardians of students of the school who do not belong to the committee.

[7] SeBFW (2009): Gemeinsam in Interesse der Kinder, p. 5: Gemeinsam.pdf (foermig-berlin.de).

[8] SeBFW (2008): Fachbrief Kooperation von Schulen und Eltern mit Migrationshintergrund, Fachbrief - Kooperation von Schule und Eltern mit Migrationshintergrund (berlin-brandenburg.de).

[9] The point is not only that they fitted well in a somehow given institution, but that they

co-produced its very nature, not only in citizen-state but also in citizen–citizen relations, which is less central in the literature so far.

[10] It would be too easy to assume that this is simply what the institution required and to which parents adhere. The participation of parents is the product of the historical process of how the school established itself 15 years before the research was conducted in the neighbourhood. This cannot be discussed in detail here. Institutionalization always requires agents.

[11] Ethnographic fieldnotes by author, 2012.

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