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1

Introduction: Understanding the Salience of Ethnicity in the Educational Experiences of Minority Adolescents across Europe

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What does it mean to be an ethnic minority student in Europe today? The research programme *Ethnic Differences in Education and Diverging Prospects for Urban Youth in an Enlarged Europe* (EDUMIGROM), which brought together a consortium of researchers from nine countries from the 'old' and 'new' member states of the European Union (EU), has sought to shed light on this issue by examining the educational experiences of adolescents who belong to some of the most stigmatised groups in their respective societies: Roma in Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and the Czech Republic, and non-Western second- and third-generation post-colonial and immigrant minorities in France, England, Germany, Sweden and Denmark.[1] These categories of young people constitute 'visible' minority groups who, although they have been living in their respective societies in many cases for many generations, tend to suffer from discrimination and low social status. Most of the contributions to this book are based on the results of this research programme, which combined a variety of methods, ranging from the administration of a common survey questionnaire to over 5,000 students aged 14–17 in over 100 schools and close to 300 classes, to in-depth interviews, focus-group discussions and in-class observations with students, school personnel and representatives of families and the local communities. The study focused on schools in which 'visible' ethnic minorities of non-Western origin or Roma youth represented a significant portion of the student body, ranging from approximately one-third to over 90 per cent, depending on the location of the schools, the degree of segregation due to factors such as residential ethnic concentration, modes of allocation and selection of students (free choice, designated catchment areas) or the existence of specific schools serving certain minority groups – for instance, Muslim schools in Scandinavia or Roma-only 'special needs' schools in Central Europe. Because high concentrations of 'visible' minorities in schools tend to exist

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in neighbourhoods which are characterised by poverty, high unemployment and social exclusion, many of the sites in which we carried out our investigations are regarded as quasighettos, at least from the perspective of the more middle-class, dominant groups.

The research project aimed to understand the manner in which the educational experiences, inter-ethnic relations and identities of minority students develop in the social and urban contexts in which they most frequently live. The study is, on the one hand, a sociological approach of the ethnicised aspects of the daily working of the educational institution, and, on the other hand, a multidisciplinary attempt at revealing the manner in which various actors – students, teachers and staff, as well as parents – experience and understand ethnic differences in relatively low-prestige schools in a variety of national contexts. How are such differences played out in schools receiving students who have often been negatively selected according to factors such as ethnicity, low social status, poor academic performance or residence in disadvantaged urban areas? These are the questions to which this book hopes to furnish some answers.

Looking beyond the comparative study of minority students' school performance

Most of the recent literature on the schooling of minority students in Europe has developed in the wake of the international comparisons made possible by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and other such large-scale studies (Marks 2005, Entorf and Lauk 2008, Dronkers and Fleischmann 2010, Dustman et al. 2012, OECD 2012). The concern of much of this research has been to understand the factors which influence the performance gap between first- or second-generation immigrant students and their non-immigrant peers, and to shed light on the phenomena which might explain the differences between countries in terms of minority educational attainment. The studies in question have examined the impact of various factors, such as the more or less differentiated structure of the school system and the timing of tracking into vocational and non-vocational training (Crul and Vermeulen 2003), the extent of social and ethnic segregation and the peer effects associated with concentrations of pupils with similar backgrounds (Entorf and Lauk 2008), as well as certain specific traits associated with students' country of origin, such as the language used at home or religious affiliation (Dronkers and Fleischmann 2010). While the present collection of essays takes stock of the new knowledge and debates, the EDUMIGROM programme differs in several ways from the usual approach of immigrant students' educational attainment.

First of all, we have included Roma students in the equation since they constitute the primary focus of the research carried out in the four

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participating countries of Central Europe. Although the issue of Roma education has recently become a major concern for the EU, there exist very few cross-country comparisons on the schooling of Roma students (Roma Education Fund 2010, UNDP 2012), and no comparative study on minority education in Europe that includes this category of young people. In the Central European countries, the reluctance of many of those who are considered to be Roma by the majority to be identified as such constitutes both an obstacle to sociological inquiries and an interesting phenomenon for the analysis of inter-ethnic relations and processes of minority identification (Csepeli and Simon 2004). While their Roma identity was occasionally presented by our young respondents as a source of pride in face-to-face interviews and group discussions, it is clear that in terms of their educational prospects this designation essentially functions as a stigma akin to that which has been experienced by Blacks in the US until recently.

Indeed, within the framework of our comparison of second- and third-generation immigrant youth in Western Europe and Roma in Central Europe, the differences between these two broadly defined groups is reminiscent of the opposition between 'voluntary immigrant minorities' and 'involuntary caste-like minorities' theorised by the anthropologist John Ogbu in his analysis of the education of immigrant and racial minorities in the US (Ogbu and Simons 1998). Similar to what scholars of the African-American condition have observed during the first part of the twentieth century (Myrdal 1944), we encountered explanations for Roma children's low performance that tended to pathologise families' educational style, while ignoring the issues of discrimination and economic deprivation. While the struggle against Roma segregation and early school drop-out has benefitted from substantial EU funding and mobilised numerous non-governmental organisations, there is still considerable ambivalence and resistance to school integration on the part of schools and non-Roma families. One might hypothesise that within the context of social, economic and political instability brought on by the demise of the Soviet Union, the prospect of Roma assimilation and social mobility may threaten the majority's sense of group position and aggravate prejudice (Blumer 1958). Among Roma students, the mixture of ethnic pride and self-hatred, the desire for assimilation and the reflex of self-marginalisation, as well as the value placed on non-academic forms of expression, such as dance and music, recall the condition of Black Americans before the Civil Rights Movement.

A second original aspect of the EDUMIGROM research is that it addresses the experiences, the differences and the relations between minority and majority origin pupils who actually attend the same schools, and who are therefore real-life peers. By selecting particular schools as the primary unit of analysis, and by focusing on those in which minority students are over-represented, we have voluntarily chosen to consider the effects of the more or less pronounced contexts of ethnic segregation and to compare

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minority students with the majority peers which they actually encounter in these schools and with whom they are collaborating, competing or simply cohabitating (in the case, for instance, of strong within-school segregation between classes). In most large-scale international or national studies such as PISA, the Integration of the European Second Generation study (TIES) or the French study Trajectoires et Origines, the position of minority pupils is compared with that of a control group representative of 'average' majority origin pupils in order to assess the relative disadvantage of pupils of immigrant origin. While such studies offer pertinent information about the attainments of minority students within a larger national or international context, they do not tell us much about concrete inter-ethnic relations in disadvantaged schools attended by very significant numbers of minority origin youth. Moreover, they reveal nothing about the profiles and experiences of the non-immigrant youth who are enrolled in such schools and who often represent a particular segment of the majority population. Indeed, these students are likely to be from underprivileged families who have not resorted to 'white flight', an issue that proved to be of major concern in all of the sites observed. On the contrary, immigrant students attending schools in which they are in the majority often form a much more socially and culturally heterogeneous group than the popular perceptions of 'ghetto schools' might lead one to believe. Indeed, the latest analysis of the PISA results concerning immigrant students notes that 'immigrant children with highly-educated mothers – as well as those with mothers with lower levels of education – are over-represented in disadvantaged schools' (OECD 2012, p.13).

The third original aspect of our study is that it combines an extensive survey of students in such schools with in-depth ethnographic observations, and individual interviews and discussions on inter-ethnic relations. While the survey study offers detailed information about the characteristics of the school population and permits comparative analyses among students according to a variety of factors, the qualitative study makes it possible to delve more deeply into their experiences and perceptions. It will be of no surprise to those familiar with sociological analysis to learn that, particularly concerning sensitive issues such as racism and discrimination, there exists a certain discrepancy between what people say and what they do. Indeed, as far as issues of ethnic identity, inter-ethnic conflict and experiences of discrimination are concerned, answers to the survey questionnaire tended to point to the limited salience of such problems when they were formulated explicitly and independently of other questions. By contrast, the in-class observations, individual interviews and group discussions revealed how such issues could become pertinent frameworks of interpretation in certain situations, and how intricately they were linked to other dimensions of students' identity, such as residence, social status, academic profile and youth subcultures or styles. At least as far as students of immigrant origin are concerned, the weak effect of ethnicity as a descriptive variable in

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terms of the more objective academic dimensions of schooling contrasts strongly with the importance of ethnicity in the more subjective areas of interpersonal and groups relations and as a source of self-identification.

This leads us to the last important contribution of the EDUMIGROM study, which pertains to the distinction between the more formal academic aspects of minority schooling, measured by performance on standardised tests, educational attainment and the degree of ethnic segregation, on the one hand, and the more informal, relational and context-dependent dimensions of school life, such as those which relate to students' perceptions of the self and the other, to their identities and relations with teachers and peers. From an international comparative perspective, much more is known about the objective position of minority students than about their subjective experiences of schooling. Although there is a rich body of ethnographic studies on minority students' school experiences and inter-ethnic relations, especially in the Anglo-Saxon literature, most of these are limited to specific national contexts and therefore tend to adopt an analytical framework which is strongly influenced by the particular society's paradigm for understanding majority–minority relations. In the UK, qualitative studies on ethnic relations and inequalities have predominantly adopted a race-relations approach which focuses on students' experiences of discrimination and on the manner in which teachers' practices reflect structural inequalities based on race and ethnicity (Stevens 2007). In France, the few existing qualitative studies which address the issues of minority schooling and inter-ethnic relations rarely do so in an exclusive and explicit manner. Rather, they tend to subsume ethnic distinctions under the larger category of 'underprivileged' urban youth (Payet 1995, van Zanten 2012). In Scandinavia, ethnographic investigations of minority education have seldom addressed the issue in terms of race relations or of socioeconomic or residential inequalities, but rather they have reflected the predominant view that immigrant pupils' educational experiences and disadvantages are largely influenced by their linguistic and cultural distance from the native majority (Beach and Lunneblad 2011). A comparative international approach such as the one adopted here makes it possible both to reflect on the effects of national contexts and dominant discourses on the manner in which majority and minority actors make sense of ethnic differences, and to reveal some of the constants of the minority experience and its social implications as they appear by crossing national borders (Osborne 2001).

Major differences and common issues among the case studies

The national case studies differ in a variety of ways which need to be taken into account in the analysis of minority students' diverging experiences. Some of these differences relate specifically to issues of ethnicity, such as the types of minority groups observed, or the historical models of

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inter-ethnic relations prevailing in each society. Others pertain to the more general aspects of schooling in the different countries, such as the structure of the secondary school system, which determines the way students are selected and distributed across schools, classes and streams, as well as the educational cultures and pedagogical styles which define how schools take into account students' social, cultural and family life.

In the French and English cases, the most 'visible' ethnic groups have historically been incorporated into the society as colonial subjects and subsequently through post-colonial migration. While groups such as North Africans in France and Black Caribbeans or South Asians in England have suffered from discrimination and inferiorisation inherent to the colonial ideology, they have also undergone a degree of cultural and linguistic assimilation. Among the most disadvantaged and segregated urban minority youth, a heightened awareness of racial and ethnic distinctions and inequalities is encouraged by a post-colonial complex and played out in collective or individual outbursts of revolt against institutional authority (Lapeyronnie 2005, Gillborn and Ladson-Billings 2010). Yet this oppositional attitude is also articulated with legitimate claims to membership in the national community enforced by common citizenship, widespread use of the national language and national models of minority integration which recognise the existence of a multiethnic and multiracial society, whether explicitly through the celebration of diversity, as in the UK, or implicitly through a republican ideology which minimises and transcends ethnic difference, as in France.

In Germany and Scandinavia, non-Western minorities have been incorporated more recently, mainly through labour migration and political asylum, and their distance from the majority population is more readily formulated in terms of linguistic, cultural or religious attributes, even though, in the case of the emerging third generation, such perceptions may be more in the nature of representations than reality. In these countries, notions of cultural incompatibility, value conflicts or incomplete acculturation are part of the repertoire of explanations for differences between groups. PISA data indicate that ethnic segregation between schools, ethnic inequalities in performance and educational achievement between majority youth and young people of immigrant descent are particularly pronounced in these countries (OECD 2012). Yet claims to equal treatment and collective revolts denouncing discrimination are much less frequent than in England and France, perhaps because members of the most 'visible' minorities are more inclined to resort to the resources of their own group in order to resist marginalisation and because their framework for judging their economic and social position in the host society is more readily informed by comparisons with their country of origin than is the case for post-colonial minorities.

Roma in the four Central European countries included in our study represent a third type of minority which resembles a variant of the 'urban outcast'

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or 'pariah groups' described by Loïc Wacquant (2008). Despite a period of more or less enforced acculturation under the state-socialist regime, Roma are still viewed by the majority group as culturally and racially distinct and suffer from a tainted or stigmatised identity that associates poverty and deviance with their particular group. Some Roma exhibit a certain degree of ethnic pride and develop ways of protecting their self-worth through a discourse stressing their authenticity, resilience and artistic talent. However, throughout the study it appeared that efforts at maintaining social distance and group boundaries were much more pronounced on the part of the non-Roma majority, especially in cases where involuntary school integration of formally excluded Roma pupils threatened to undermine the distance created by residential segregation. While Roma are often portrayed as intrinsically or culturally deviant when they are characterised collectively, in many of the observed schools, the relegation of Roma students into special classes is not formulated as recognition of diversity but rather as a way of dealing with what is labelled as mental retardation or behavioural problems by the institution.

Beyond the specific historical tradition which structures ethnic relations in society at large, one must also consider how the educational system itself influences the meaning and salience of ethnicity for students' identity. Indeed, many of the contrasts observed in the way minority students feel about their education in the different societies reflect fundamental differences in pupils' experiences of learning (Osborne 2001), rather than the type of ethnic relations or the specific policies concerning minority integration and provisions for multiculturalism.

In Denmark and Sweden, despite the high degree of segregation in several of the schools observed and the prevailing inequalities between non-Western minorities and the majority in terms of economic resources, employment and residential standing (Horst 2010), minority pupils did not express feelings of being stigmatised or discriminated against by teachers or society at large, and seemed relatively confident in their educational prospects. Social distance and physical separation between minority students and their majority origin peers do not translate here into a sense of being disadvantaged, but rather create a context in which the school becomes a protective microcosm where the belief in equal opportunity and the promises of the welfare state are embraced by most students. Minority students' ethnic and cultural identities are not in conflict with their identity as Danish or Swedish citizens. Rather, they seem to exist on an entirely different and complementary plane. Since the main obstacle to becoming full members of the society is conceptualised in terms of their lack of fluency in the host country language – a 'problem' which teachers and bilingual assistants are there to address – the classroom is not viewed as a place of cultural conflict. Because the Scandinavian school system favours collaboration, consensus and community cohesion, and is undifferentiated until the end of ninth grade, minority

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students, like their majority peers, develop a sense of integration and belonging to their school and continue to believe that their options remain open, despite the reality of ethnic segregation and the evidence pointing to their limited long-term prospects (Schindler 2007, Jonsson and Rudolphi 2011).

In Germany, in contrast, the selection of students into separate and unequal tracks at an early age coexists with the fact that the most ethnically segregated schools are also low-status vocational *Hauptschule*. This creates a situation in which ethnic and cultural differences potentially function for teachers as a synonym for lack of educational conformity, while for students they become a resource for resistance against the negative evaluation of their worth as students. The classroom can thus easily appear as an arena of cultural conflict and competition between teachers and minority students. Due perhaps to the limited chances for spontaneous acculturation to take place in a system which offers few possibilities for pre-school attendance and limited hours of presence in school, teachers see it as part of their task to acculturate students of immigrant origin. Minority students, especially those of Turkish origin in vocational schools, feel in turn the need to defend their family and community against the judgements of the dominant group, by, for instance, insisting on the moral superiority of Muslim values as compared with what they portray as the hedonistic lifestyle and weak family cohesion of native German youth.

In the secondary schools observed in Britain, ethnicity was also particularly salient as a component of youthful relations between groups of students defined not so much in terms of their families' educational style or their religion, but rather through differing urban subcultures and neighbourhood affiliations. In contrast with the French, German and Scandinavian cases, where we observed a degree of inter-ethnic solidarity and instances of common identification among students of different non-European origins (Africans and Arabs in France or Turks and Lebanese in Germany), tensions and conflicts more often opposed British Afro-Caribbean and Asian students than majority and minority students. While this could be interpreted as the downside of the differentialism encouraged by the British multicultural or multiracial model of ethnic relations, it may also reflect a more engrained tradition of strong differentiation of pupils into socially defined subgroups, both outside and inside schools (Osborne 2001). Indeed the competition between the persona of the oppositional Afro-Caribbean youths and the more academically conformist Asian students resembles a contemporary ethnicised version of the conflicts between the working-class 'lads' and the middle-class 'earoles' described by Paul Willis in *Learning to Labour* (Willis 1977). Due to a pedagogy which aims to consider the various social, cultural and emotional dimensions of students' existence, and given the importance of social as well as ethnoracial distinctions in British society at large, schools appear very permeable to tensions and conflicts which are imported from the local milieu. While ethnic segregation and inequalities of educational

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performance and attainment between majority and minority pupils are less pronounced in England than in the other countries observed (OECD 2012), British multiethnic secondary schools are an arena in which the salience of ethnicity in defining peer-group relations and self-identification is much more explicit.

In contrast with England, where young people's identity as students seems to be relatively secondary to their sociocultural and peer-group identities, in France, the various dimensions of young people's self-image are strongly influenced by their identity as pupils and by their position within the hierarchy of schools, streams and classes. French minority students presented themselves as such in interviews and discussions only to the extent that they clearly occupied an inferior position in the academic hierarchy, when, for instance, they were relegated into dead-end vocational streams. Although some spontaneous groupings of students with similar immigrant origins were occasionally observed, inter-ethnic friendships appeared more frequent than in the other countries and were often encouraged by a sense of solidarity with those who were in the same class-group.

In the Central European countries, ethnic relations in schools between Roma and non-Roma are characterised simultaneously by ancient and engrained racial stereotypes and mutual suspicions, and by a context of considerable political transformations and upheaval in the organisation of the national educational systems over recent years, notably with the introduction of a free school market and increased pressures for Roma integration from the EU. While this has created the opportunity for a variety of innovative schools to develop experiments in Roma integration, it has also heightened the general level of hostility towards Roma and fuelled strategies of 'white flight', thus aggravating teachers' sense of powerlessness in a context in which integration reforms have often been poorly planned and unequally implemented at the local level.

The issue of ethnic segregation, which was of central concern in all of the sites investigated, reveals an interesting paradox when one looks more generally at the variety of cases examined in this book and at the link between the objective and subjective dimensions of minority education. The salience of ethnic identification and the degree of inter-ethnic tensions seems in many cases to be aggravated by the actual proximity between minority and majority pupils. In other words, the more segregated schools, which appear as quasighettos, offer a degree of protection against stigmatisation, a relative feeling of comfort to pupils who are shielded from the negative self-awareness which direct contact and unfavourable comparisons with their more privileged majority peers might imply. The schools receiving the highest proportion of minority students were not the conflict-ridden places of anomie and youthful resentment which popular opinion often assumes them to be, even though they undoubtedly tended to have a negative impact on students' educational performance, a fact of which students

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are not necessarily aware or overly concerned. In Allport's intergroup contact theory, four conditions must be present in order for relations to be pacified and prejudice to diminish: equal group status within the situation, common goals, intergroup cooperation and authority support (Allport 1954). Given the competitive nature of the educational process and the fact that majority and minority students seldom enter school with the same resources, these conditions are rarely united in the situations in which minority students constitute a significant proportion of the student body. It is not surprising therefore that it is often in the relatively more integrated contexts, such as those found in England, in France or in some of the recently reformed Central European schools receiving a new population of Roma students, that ethnic tensions and peer-group conflicts appear to be most pronounced.

Structure and organisation of the book

The significance of ethnic difference in schools is produced by a complex interplay between, on the one hand, the manner in which the educational system distributes students of diverse origins throughout the educational process and attributes meaning to students' ethnoracial and cultural traits, and, on the other hand, the ways in which students react to such processes by investing or contesting ethnic categories at large, using the resources which they find within their families, their communities or their peer groups. This book is structured in such a way as to address these two dimensions of the problem, first from an international comparative perspective and second from within the particular national framework of ethnic relations in several of the countries participating in the EDUMIGROM research.

Part I, 'Ethnic differentiation in education across Europe: internal and external mechanisms', is made up of five contributions that each address a different aspect of the structural determinants of ethnic differentiation in education, using a cross-national perspective which points to some of the most significant differences between the societies observed. Vera Messing (Chapter 2) addresses the complexity of ethnic segregation in schooling by describing the various forms of minority student concentrations, ranging from the voluntary schooling of Muslim students in faith-based schools in Denmark, to the enforced relegation of Roma students into 'special' schools or classes in the Central European countries. In terms of the impact that these different forms of segregation have on students' relations and their educational experiences, she shows that the most detrimental configuration is that which combines in-school ethnic segregation between classes with a diversity-blind school policy which justifies such differential treatment by 'blaming the victim', using the labels of social deviance and mental deficiency. Philipp Schnell and Maurice Crul (Chapter 3) draw on some of the data from their TIES study on Turkish and Moroccan students' educational trajectories in various European countries, focusing here on the

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Index

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Copyrighted material – 9781137308627

Copyrighted material – 9781137308627

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