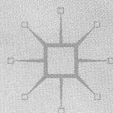# Migrant, Roma and Post-Colonial Youth in Education across Europe

Being 'Visibly Different'

Edited by **Julia Szalai** and **Claire Schiff**

Migrant, Roma and Post-Colonial Youth in Education across Europe

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Dampened Voices: A Comparative Look at Roma Adolescents' Discourses on Being 'Othered' at School

Margit Feischmidt

Introduction

There exists a considerable body of work in sociology and anthropology which addresses the issues of educational disadvantages and poor school performance of ethnic minority children. According to an influential paradigm resulting from an anthropological approach to the study of the educational process, significant differences in the cultural and religious backgrounds of minority and majority students provide the primary explanation for the achievement gap between these two groups. This assumption is challenged by John Ogbu, who has demonstrated that underachievement is characteristic of the members of communities who are integrated formally but who are actually restricted in their upward mobility (Ogbu 1991). Gibson's work has proved that children of identical ethnic background, or originating from the same country, can obtain different achievement levels at different schools, even more in different national educational systems, depending on the relationship of the immediate and wider social environment towards them (Gibson 1996).

Sociologists and anthropologists inspired by neo-Marxist theories have shifted the focus of education research: by reconsidering the role of schooling in achieving equality and offering a chance for social mobility for disadvantaged youth, the reproduction of inequalities and marginal positions has come to the fore (Chambers 1976, Willis 1981, Hall and Jefferson 1997). Yet from another perspective, scholars of cultural studies claim that working-class youths' opposition to the educational system and their emerging counterculture play a major role in the reproduction of their inherited class position (Willis 1981). Students' attitudes – manifested in their speech, everyday behaviour and interactions – have become the focus of a culturally oriented strand of new education research. Likewise, ethnographic investigations of youth subcultures have reflected on the multifarious deprivation of ethnic minority youth by posing the question of whether minority groups

could take an active position against racism (which most often appears in combination with other forms of social oppression). In this vein, authors such as Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy claim that the cultural politics of 'Blackness' can be seen as a response to the common experience of racism and marginalisation that produces a range of different popular manifestations (Back 1996, p. 3). Hebdidge, Chambers and others derive meanings of racism and anti-racism from style formations. However, their analyses leave aside the interactional components and the everyday experience of racism and ethnicity (Hebdidge 1974, Chambers 1976). In contrast, Les Back gave an ethnographic account of 'racism and multiculture in young lives' by claiming that, in most cases, racism is talked about in the context of lived relationships, events and experiences (Back 1996, p. 161).

The ethnographic approach and the neo-Marxist paradigm of British cultural studies have influenced scholarly work on education and minority youth in other Western European countries as well. However, they have had little resonance in research on young Roma and their educational opportunities in Central and Eastern Europe where mainstream studies have basically concentrated on the systemic aspects of education, the differences in educational opportunities, and the subsequent lack of integration of Roma into the labour market (Dupcsik and Vajda 2008). The EDUMIGROM research programme partly intended to fill this gap by giving an ethnographic account of what happens in schools and in the classrooms where ethnic minority students' marginal position, their low achievements and, in many cases, a gradual turning away from schooling are reproduced. One of the aims of our investigation was to map the social life and relations in the schools by observing the day-to-day realities of 'othering' (Jensen 2011) and by studying the processes creating categories of difference and the ways in which these categories become parts of the lives of minority youths (Cornell and Hartmann 2006, Brubaker et al. 2007).

In line with the ethnographic as well as the post-Marxist approach of 'othering', this chapter offers a comparative view of minority and, primarily, Roma adolescents' experiences and reactions to 'othering' by analysing the contents of their testimonies and also by looking at their reactions to and identification with the perceived forms of being 'othered'. The first section will study their sense of being discriminated against by the main actors of everyday life at school. The second part will focus on the manifest and latent racialising contents in adolescents' inter-ethnic encounters.

Actors, activities and explanations of 'othering' in minority students' discourses

In the context of minority students' discourses about experiences of being 'othered' in their school and social milieu, I will first present the most frequently mentioned topics and arguments that accompany this

phenomenon and introduce the ways in which students' experiences are interpreted.

'Othering' in students' discourse about school activities and relations to teachers

Although it is central in studies on ethnic minority students, the difference in achievement by ethnicity is less interesting for us in this discussion. We will only consider how these differences are ethnicised or racialised in students' discourses.

In this context, elements of an ethnicised dichotomist system could be revealed by which learning implies 'acting white' and refusing to learn correlates with 'acting Black'. A Slovak Roma boy said: 'Whites want to learn, they want to get something, most of them. They care about school. But this is a Roma character. They do not learn. This is their worst character.'

However, we also found more complex ways in which strategies of educational incorporation were influenced by students' perceptions of ethnoracial and/or social differences. Most ethnic minority students in our study think, just like their majority peers, that the school 'is about competition, successful are those who study and behave appropriately, and unsuccessful are those who don't learn or don't behave properly,' as a student from a migrant background in Denmark remarked. While committed and competitive minority students are found among economic migrants in Sweden, Denmark and partially in the UK, very few Roma speak in similar terms. A Roma girl in Slovakia, who is quite successful in school, emphasises the structural barriers that she has to face: 'that I am first of all a Roma and a Roma woman has never achieved anything'.

Some students feel comfortable in the school even though they are not committed to its official goals. They take advantage of it as a social space which helps them to create and maintain social relations beyond the neighbourhood and their families. A similar phenomenon could also be observed among second-generation migrant adolescents from post-colonial backgrounds, and it manifested itself in the investigated schools at the Central European sites too. These young people with a pronounced attitude towards networking are less concerned with their teachers than with their classmates. Their efforts to create friendships and peer communities help to differentiate them from those who are committed to learning. Ethnic or racial categories are often applied in their struggle to legitimise their alternative approach.

Many Roma students say that they do not like the school as such; instead of aspiring to meet the academic requirements they like to hang around together. If this preferred social activity can take place in school (usually the same peer groups are involved), they remain in school longer. Students in troubled classes, who are in constant disagreement with the teachers and who, at the same time, do not find partners for togetherness among

their classmates, might easily feel alienated from school and develop an oppositional strategy (Szalai 2011).

One of the most common subjects of minority students' conversations – as of students' in general – are the teachers and their judgements. It is important to mention here that most of the students in our study declared that they felt safer in their schools than in broader society and they usually regarded their teachers as more just and fair than most adults in the outer world. Complaints by minority students about being treated differently by their teachers were rare in the Western communities of our inquiry. Unjust acts of teachers were openly denied in France and reported to happen accidentally in German schools. However, complaints about teachers' unjust treatment were much more prevalent in the case of Roma students at our Central European sites.

Most of the British, French, Danish and Swedish school staff seemed to be conscious – although to varying degrees – of the relationship between school and society, including the role of the teachers in managing the conflicts and injuries arising from the relations between students from different social and cultural backgrounds. At the same time, most of their Central European colleagues teaching Roma students declare that they do not care about their students' social problems. Moreover, they seem to reproduce – intentionally or not – the worst anti-Gypsy attitudes of the dominant society – be it in Hungary, Romania, Slovakia or the Czech Republic. Roma pupils from a Slovak school talked about a teacher who often commented on the disorder when he entered the classroom by saying 'I feel like I'm in a *Gypsy* village!', by which he meant that he found the classroom messy and smelly. In all four Central European countries, students complained that cases of harassment among students (whether verbal or physical) were not punished at all by the teachers. Teachers usually do not even notice these incidents because – as the interviews with teachers suggest – most of them think that the school is 'not about changing cultural habits and presumptions'. The perceived cultural dichotomy between teachers and students is certainly less powerful when members of the ethnic minority are also represented among the teachers. We assume that minority students in our French, Swedish, Danish and, in part, also in our British schools feel more comfortable and relaxed because in these educational units one-third to half of the teachers are themselves of ethnic minority origin.

Students' complaints about 'bad teachers' are often expressed by the leaders of oppositional groups who think that they are more readily punished than their majority peers for the same act. The fact that students who have a negative image of the teachers have a decisive role in the narrative construction of the anti-school, anti-establishment position is very common in schools and not only in the schools of our study. However, the memory of 'bad teachers' was also widespread in our adolescent communities among students committed to school. Many Roma and some German Turkish

students claimed that negative experiences with some of their teachers broke their school career. A Slovak Roma girl recounted how she was the only Roma in her class and was humiliated by her teacher in front of her classmates. She then went to a grammar school, only for Roma, where her teachers were more helpful and her classmates kinder. This is a typical story supporting the perceived advantages of the minority-only schools, which nonetheless offer fewer opportunities for acquiring social and academic competence and hardly ever offer careers for upward mobility.

The 'good teachers' are also present in ethnic minority students' discourse, albeit less frequently. Among the children of the better-educated economic migrants there are students who are grateful that they have the opportunity to study and that they get the necessary support both from their parents and their teachers. The latter can provide such unbiased help because they 'don't make a difference,' as one of the Danish students from an immigrant background stated: 'the teachers look at who you are, not which country you are from'. Although a Hungarian study emphasised the significance of teachers in the career of the first generation of professional Roma women (Kóczé 2010), such commitment was unfortunately rarely mentioned in our Central European minority communities. In one of the Hungarian schools which ran a special programme supporting talented Roma children, a very strong positive relationship has developed between a couple of students and their teachers. Some students (both on the Hungarian sites and particularly in one of the Slovak schools) spoke about 'good teachers' providing support to students' extracurricular activities, either in music or in sports.

'Othering' in peer relations and students' talk about extracurricular activities

By looking at inter-ethnic relations and their variations in a range of Western and Central European communities, we were able to observe how 'othering' affects peer relations and how cultural and religious differences are presented in the domains of leisure and age-specific activities. The great majority of ethnic minority students stated both in interviews and in the question-naires that they had friends from the majority group. At the same time, adolescents from the majority hardly ever mentioned friends from among their minority peers. Hence one assumes that minority teenagers spoke more of their desires than of actual close relationships with classmates from the dominant group. As for the inception of these relationships, it turned out that the organising framework of friendships and gangs was often the neighbourhood that embodied a combination of the marginalised socioeco-nomic situations and the immigrant backgrounds of the involved minority youths. While a common 'us' includes many different ethnic minorities in Sweden, Denmark, France and the UK, where young people mostly describe themselves with reference to multiple identities, the descendants of immigrants in Germany do not consider themselves as Germans but rather

as Muslims. The Central European young Roma adolescents are even less likely to have a common identity that they would share with their majority peers as Hungarian or Romanian citizens. Their state of separateness is all the more worth noting because their formal citizenship was never disputed and in many cases they demonstrate strong cultural assimilation.

Cultural differences affect inter-ethnic peer-group relations, first of all if they derive from different religious practices and family norms. Compared with their German majority peers, Turkish and Arabic youths in Berlin have different time frames for leisure activities. They more often spend evenings with the family, their peer socialisation involves more social control from adults and prevents them from alcohol consumption, and they tend to meet in more gender-separated groups. From the beginning of adolescence, these differences seem to gather increasing significance. In the eyes of the Muslim youth and teenagers, the major distinction between them and their German, French or British peers is their different understanding of the gender roles and partner relations. Consequently, not only do liaisons between Muslim girls and non-Muslim boys (and vice versa) become prohibited but also a culturally defined distance and difference between Muslim and non-Muslim girls as well as between Muslim and non-Muslim boys becomes more and more important (Straßburger et al. 2010). Nevertheless, this is certainly less significant for those young people for whom religion is just a symbolic issue that does not regulate their choices. Although the most distinct gender roles and norms are defined by Islam, different understandings of gender roles manifest themselves concerning Roma as well. In the case of a Romanian Roma group (the Gabor Roma), a fundamentalist neo-Protestant church together with a very strong patriarchal ideology are the main guardians of ethnospecific gender distinctions. Though they generally accept public education, the attitude to school has different implications for boys and girls. The girls do not pursue their education beyond the lower secondary level. There are many cases in which Roma girls abandon school because of traditions which make them marry at the age of 12 or 13.

The ethnocultural proscriptions which prohibit any intimate relationship between Roma and non-Roma peers are sometimes even stronger than the religious differences, and these (re)produce the perception as well as the social reality of caste-like hierarchical relations. Financial constraints and the segregated place of residence are additional factors limiting students' possible options of leisure activities. Many Roma boys living in villages or slums, who would like to engage in different sports, cannot afford this. The separation of places for leisure activities, or rather the exclusion of Roma boys and girls from the common facilities, are the most powerful forms of 'othering' which our interviewees perceive as a major sign of discrimination against them. In one of the studied localities in Slovakia, we observed that there were several discos that Roma were prohibited from entering (Kusá

et al. 2010). The same is true of the Hungarian sites. At the same time there are certain locales – clubs and pubs – where young Roma tend to congregate while these are considered by non-Roma people as the most dangerous places in town.

One of the most important and sensitive issues regarding the perception of 'othering' is that of students' participation in extracurricular activities, especially class trips and outings. In the Western communities the problem arises from the general expectation that, regardless of their social, ethnic and religious background, all students should take part in a few days of outdoor activity regularly organised at the end of the academic year. Ethnic minority students, and especially their parents, argue that these organised leisure activities remove young people from the control of their families and afford the children more freedom than they would normally have at home. They feel that the school interferes with their private life in a way that they cannot accept. This is most problematic for Muslim families who think that teachers do not regard Islamic rules as acceptable or important.

The situation is exactly the opposite in the Central European schools. In Slovakia, as well as in Romania and at one of the sites in Hungary, Roma students do not attend any of the extracurricular activities (including the ones which take place in the school), but for very different reasons. In these countries the graduation ball after the concluding year of primary school has a similar important and symbolic role as the study trips in German-Muslim youths' relations. In one of the Slovak schools, the telling example of an excellent male student was revealed who did not take part in this festivity. His explanation was that he did not go because nobody would have danced with him. Others, both in Slovakia and in Romania, said that in fact they did not want to participate because these events were boring; nobody liked them. Or another, very common explanation made reference to the self-segregation of minority students and their parents who either cannot afford the expense of extracurricular activities or assume that they will encounter negative experiences that should be cautiously avoided.

Racism as students' explanation for experiencing 'othering'

To what extent do minority students recognise that what happens to them at school, in their peer groups or in their neighbourhoods is not accidental but is rather part of a system? This is an important question that one should address when discussing minority students' discourses on 'othering'. Students articulated two major systemic explanations for being perceived as fundamentally different and being discriminated against on this basis. The first one points to racism and leads them to consider that their experiences of 'othering' are the consequence of the working of a racist social structure, a racist environment, or are the products of a racist majority. The other systemic explanation refers to a cultural framework. According to this,

minority adolescents feel that their experience of 'othering' is due to the majority's perception of their fundamentally different habits, values and cultures.

We identified rather different interpretations in the nine countries studied concerning students' general discourses on discrimination and racism. In some countries, such as France, young people reported having very few experiences of racism while in others, such as Hungary, racism became the major explanatory factor for Roma youths' experiences of difference. Referencing majoritarian racism in the discourse of minority students is not only a derivative of their concrete and direct experiences but also of the general discursive context. In France, the official ideology does not accommodate the recognition of ethnicity and it also denies the existence of racism in school. Moreover, the fact that one-third of the teaching staff in the schools under study has an ethnic minority or immigrant background similar to that of their students probably contributes to reducing the significance of negative generalisations. The opposite is true in Hungary, where minority students tend to explain their failures by pointing to discrimination and anti-Gypsy sentiments. Such feelings are widespread among adult Roma as well and generally reflect the widespread ethnoracial fundamentalism among the majority of the Hungarian population.

Due to differences between the social composition of ethnic minority communities and those of the dominant groups, and also to the varying relations between them, the perceived relevance of racism can be different even in the case of different groups within the same country. In the UK, neither our teenage Pakistani interviewees nor their parents brought up the issue of racism as a matter affecting their personal lives. On the contrary, many of them emphasised that life in the UK offered better opportunities for young people than in Pakistan. At the same time, many interviewees from the Caribbean community were hyper-aware that ethnic disparities still continued to exist and that these worked to their detriment.

Those who consider racism to be relevant to their situation reported encountering such manifestations in four areas. The first domain is the general public discourse which affects them the most through stigmatising their residential neighbourhoods. Stigmatisation of the neighbourhood is closely connected to the issue of criminality, which is one of the worst and most oppressing forms of racist perceptions, notwithstanding certain real dangers which are faced by young people who are growing up in ghettos. The second area of racist manifestation is the media which often produces a degrading, dehumanising image of 'problem minorities'. Negative images of both Muslim immigrants and Roma limit the chances for the social recognition of minority youth, even in places where individuals belonging to these minorities do not have to face daily public manifestations of racism (Szalai 2003). This is the case with minority students in Copenhagen who reported investing enormous efforts into distancing themselves from the

perceptions of immigrants as responsible for gang violence, social problems and religious fundamentalism. The third issue raised by our young interviewees is that of discrimination on the labour market. Many have grown up hearing stories from their parents and relatives about being rejected or fired because of their skin colour or their foreign accent. In certain countries, notably the Central European ones, such testimonies are reinforced by age-group specific grievances arising from encounters with anti-Gypsy and racist youths and music subcultures. These symptoms, representing the fourth strong manifestation of refusal and discrimination, are widespread in the post-socialist region, being particularly virulent in the North-Eastern part of Hungary but also in Slovakia and some parts of Romania. Students attending segregated 'Gypsy' classes within formally integrated schools face daily reminders of their fears by way of the symbols and representatives of skinheads and extremist right-wing subcultures in the streets and bars, as well as in school.

Minority students' perceptions of the culturalisation of 'othering'

We encountered three types of cultural approach regarding the presence of ethnic minority students on the part of the institution. The most common school policy is a culture-blind approach which reflects the meritocratic and universalist perspectives of the educational systems in Europe. Less popular is a culture-conscious approach, be it in the form of a multicultural policy – as in the UK or Sweden – or by applying an ethnocultural perspective as a couple of Central European and German school-experiments demonstrate. In addition to these two official cultural policies we observed how a third form of hidden culturalisation of social distinctions transpired through teachers' discourses and behaviour, notably those working in Central European schools.

Many students said that they found majoritarian reactions concerning their particular religious or cultural habits to be demeaning. The most common complaint in the Western European immigrant communities was the prohibition on wearing the headscarf. A young German Turkish woman recalled with bitterness that teachers in primary school had criticised her headscarf and ordered her to remove it during sports: 'One female teacher was so brutal. She once even forced me to leave the sports hall without my headscarf.' Now in the *Gymnasium* she is allowed to wear a headscarf: 'They accept it. Therefore, I like to be here. Teachers here are used to us.' Other students are harassed by teachers who frequently bring up discussions about misunderstood features of the Muslim culture, such as arranged or forced marriage, partner relations, sexuality and family life in Islam. Often such teachers do not show any intention of entering into an open discussion but rather they want to assert their own perspective. In two Danish schools, minority students also complained about their teachers' tendency

to talk about cultural differences in a personalised way by referring to immigrant students in class as examples. Although this happens with the best intentions, certain students feel that such initiatives on the part of the teachers undermine their attempts to become similar and to hide their cultural habits in the school environment.

The cultural peculiarities of ethnic minority students are not regarded with condescension in all of the public schools. Many schools, such as the above-mentioned German *Gymnasium*, have developed a kind of multicultural policy. However, in the critical eyes of adolescents, the negative aspects of multiculturalism are predominant. For instance, the British case shows that, although there were schemes in place which sought to recognise and promote diversity and to increase inter-ethnic community cohesion, in practice they were not utilised effectively as learning resources and thus tended to increase distinctions on cultural grounds (Swann and Law 2010).

While the Central European schools were the least likely to give any significance to minorities' cultural peculiarities, very few students complained about this. This is most probably the consequence of longstanding assimilationist policies applied by the respective states amidst the concurrent and wide support of the non-Roma majorities. One of the schools hosting a large number of Roma students in South-Western Hungary started to deal openly with issues of Roma identity. Since many Roma teenagers feel ashamed of their origin, the school put special emphasis on stressing the positive values of Roma culture. A 'Gypsy club' was organised once a week in order to teach all students dances, songs and tales from the minority culture. This activity was soon terminated due to a lack of financial support and interest. Paradoxically, the initiative had started at a moment when most of the local Roma population, notably young people, had already been acculturated and therefore had lost the affective emotional ties to their language and specific traditions.

The performative reactions of minority youths to 'othering'

Focusing on the interactions between minority and majority peers, we studied how 'othering' was realised and replicated in three performative contexts: (1) through the verbal conflicts and insults among youth; (2) during acts of teasing and joking; and (3) when showing off one's anti-school position through youth and ethnic subcultures.

A glance at these inter-ethnic occurrences highlights very clearly that being different is not a continuous experience or an omnipresent issue in minority young people's lives and social relations. The issue comes up intermittently, most often through ritualised forms of communication. Interestingly, the experience of 'othering' presented in the preceding section

is played out in these situations and reveals how different categories and systems of difference (gender, class and ethnicity) intersect and take on special meanings in particular interactive contexts.

Verbal conflict, insults

Analysts of working-class youth have introduced the idea that school represents an arena in the life of students where they not only reproduce their current social positions but also develop new rebel positions and cultures (Willis 1981, Hall and Jefferson 1997). There exists a conflict-driven relation between the followers of an accommodation strategy and those who adopt a strategy of resistance. The school as an arena for the opposing parties and their struggles not only offers a space to act out the conflicts between the conformists and the rebels but also makes it possible to reproduce the general conflicts and contradictions of the larger community from which the students come.

Les Back believes that incidents of racist name-calling among British youth lead to flight from multiethnic peer space and result in moments of heightened 'race' consciousness. In a different Central European multiethnic environment, Brubaker et al. (2007) also found that conflicts and insults demonstrated the manner in which ethnicity became salient in everyday relations.

While French youth acknowledged the ambivalence and the playful character of verbal conflicts, in the Central European localities, similar exchanges between Roma and non-Roma peers were considered rather as verbal abuse. Some teenagers painfully recalled situations in which they were called 'Gypsy'. 'I did not tell anything to anybody. It was that way. It was such a peculiar feeling. Then it has stopped when I have grown older.' Another student remarked on how it felt very unpleasant and frustrating when her schoolmates regularly treated her differently because of her darker skin: 'It is disgusting this shouting... For instance, if a Roma girl walks around, they start to shout at her: "Gypsy goes, look at her, Gypsy!" However, if a white girl walks around, it is normal, nobody cares.'

Some of our young Roma interviewees spoke of 'radical peers' as fomenters of anti-Gypsy instigations. A Slovak Roma girl recounted how in her primary school there were often quarrels, usually started by 'radical schoolmates': 'The teachers either did not know about it or did not want to know, or did not believe it. Therefore the conflicts were not handled.' Outside school, more conflicts and physical attacks were provoked by a group of skinheads from the village. The Hungarian Roma teenagers living in a ghetto district also complained about the verbal insults which they had to endure from their 'racist' Hungarian peers.

Ethnicity is not evoked during the conflict but rather immediately after it when the idiom of race or ethnicity provides a readily available explanatory framework for the dispute. Whenever a conflict takes place among

students that involves Roma youth, the latter immediately resort to an ethnic interpretation. We occasionally witnessed contradictions between the interpretation of Roma students and our ethnographic observations. While Roma students in Hungary reported frequent conflicts between Roma and majority peers, none of the conflicts that we witnessed during our field observations appeared to have any direct and evident ethnic or inter-ethnic motivations or implications. However, all quarrels were readily ethnicised and made to fit into this explanatory framework. In one instance, a clumsily thrown snowball caused a fight. While boys from Class A played among themselves, one of the snowballs hit by chance the head of a boy from Class B. This was immediately interpreted as a deliberate ethnic offence in which a Hungarian student had attacked a Roma boy, who promptly answered the insult by beating his offender. All of the Roma and non-Roma youths who were present when this story was recounted agreed that the conflict had taken place for ethnic reasons, thus demonstrating how both the minority and the majority contribute to the fixation of such interpretations (Kovai 2012).

Teasing and joking about 'otherness'

Several years ago we studied the relevance of joking relations in the everyday construction of ethnicity (Brubaker et al. 2007, p. 285). In line with Les Back's ethnographical description of 'duelling play' in everyday relations among youth in London, we found that joking in inter-ethnic situations was a practice whereby young people tested the limits and the potentials of their personal relationships versus group belongings.

French students reported frequent teasing among classmates and usually tended to minimise the role of ethnicity in the interpretation of these events. Our interviews show that urban minority youths find kidding and teasing to be the most acceptable ways of facing and treating 'otherness'. The manifestations of such teasing can vary to a very large degree, the most common subject of teasing being skin colour, as illustrated by the following excerpt from a focus group discussion with Roma youths in Hungary: 'but we have our little jokes ... Like, for example, chocolate boy ..., like that ... That's how we show Feri we like him'. (Feri is a successful Roma student who is popular among his peers, not so much because of his academic achievements but because of his sporting prowess and masculinity).

When students are teasing each other about their skin colour in an ironic way, they subvert racial meanings and create an anti-racist stance. However, teasing relations may also reproduce social and racial inequalities – for example, if the protagonists of the jokes obviously differ in status. Ethnic jokes have a special meaning in deeply divided societies since they reproduce inequality in a mild, delusive way, appearing harmless to the dominant majority while often being offensive to the affected minority. The following example from Slovakia illustrates this very general relationship. A Slovak

Roma boy was describing his positive relations with a 'good' non-Roma classmate with whom he spent a lot of time. 'He is more often with us than with whites.' However, he and his Roma friends feel embarrassed when they see that their non-Roma friend is laughing at jokes about Roma or comes up with remarks which make Roma ridiculous. The Roma boys emphasise that they share their embarrassment with him: 'When he is with us, we ask him why he has laughed at such jokes. [We tell him], you are either with us or with them' (Kusá et al. 2010).

Performing 'otherness' by showing off

The third performative reaction to 'othering' is typical of students who adopt an oppositional stance. Such attitudes of opposition become meaningful within a larger context as manifestations of a culture of resistance. Resistance to school is materialised in a continuous fight between a certain category of students and the institution. Through such struggles, those who resist accommodation strive to appropriate physical and symbolic spaces from the school in order to introduce their own rules and gain control. They resort to truancy in order to undermine the educational objective of putting people to work. We met the highest rate of truancy and drop-out among Roma students in the Central European schools. This is an individual strategy of opposition which, in some cases, is also supported by the students' family. However, in most of the cases, minority students and likewise their majority peers resort to collective strategies of opposition, targeting the educational system in its entirety. Through their clothing, their manners of speech and their ways of amusing themselves which are different from what is considered by the school as the norm, they express their resistance to the institution. We have found that young people living in the multiethnic Western European ghettos manage to find effective performative tools and opportunities to show off and to develop reactive positions against their structural inferiority. By contrast, Roma teenagers from our Central European communities who feel rejected by the school do not develop clear and articulated reactive positions against the educational system. It was interesting to see how far ethnicity became relevant in fuelling certain reactive positions and how it was instrumentalised in order to create a kind of 'identity politics' against racism.

Conclusion

In conclusion of our discussion about minority students' experiences of 'othering', it can be established that there are two major types of discursive position which ethnic minority students can adopt: downplaying and overcommunicating 'othering'. There are social factors which influence these discursive positions, such as the students' perceived chances of inclusion and social mobility, as well as their relation to the educational system. Our comparative empirical material shows that undercommunication of

'othering' seems to be coherent with an attitude of accommodation, while overcommunication of 'othering' correlates with an oppositional stance towards schooling.

To avoid or to downplay the experience of 'othering' is what minority students tend to do when the difference that they are supposed to represent in terms of religion, language or culture is too far from their everyday practice and therefore does not prove relevant for their self-understanding. The students engaging in this strategy are preoccupied first and foremost with topics that are common to minority and majority youths alike: these are age-related issues for the most part. Additionally, the strategy of 'downplaying' implies an enduring conscious effort on the part of the minority teenagers who would like to be accepted and appreciated by the school system and/or by their peers, and to this end they try to hide elements from their personal history that they think might impede such efforts.

Downplaying the experience of 'othering' is strengthened by an attitude of subordination of all other interests to those of schooling and to efforts to get ahead. This attitude is found among second-generation economic migrants and some youths from post-colonial migrant backgrounds. Successful students who are often striving to accomplish the upward mobility project of their families through a promising school career, as well as those who report having more friends among the majority, certainly are less affected by and therefore less preoccupied with 'the differences' assigned to them, and more inclined to hide or downplay their experiences of unwelcome 'othering' (including injustice and discrimination on the part of representatives of the majority – be they teachers, parents or peers).

Possessing social and cultural capital which brings minority students closer to the school and offers them some protection against being defenceless to 'othering' was emphasised in many cases, most of all by ethnic minority youths in Sweden, Denmark and the UK. At the same time the Roma students of Central and Eastern Europe have virtually no opportunities to downplay their experience of 'othering', except those few adolescents who come from a solid middle-class social and economic background and who are integrated into their non-Roma environment in terms of both their residence and their schooling.

Overcommunicating 'othering' and emphasising discrimination is the most common strategy of Roma youth in the schools and communities of all four Central and Eastern European countries. Personal stories about abuse and discrimination are central to their narratives. Though less essential in a personal sense, we met narratives of discrimination and the tendency towards overcommunication in Western cities with large immigrant communities too. However, an important difference derives from whether young people can or cannot find their own voice to react against the perceived 'othering'. The self-assertive capacity can be strengthened from two directions: either from the ethnic community which provides minority youth

with enough safety and powerful symbolic capital to build reactive strategies, or from the peer community which empowers them with the social capital deriving from the class- and neighbourhood-based inclusive relations. When none of these capitals are at their disposal, minority youth become defenceless and downtrodden by the majority discourses. This is what characterises the situation of Roma adolescents and shows, at the same time, the most remarkable difference between the relative social positions of Roma and post-migrant youths.

This book compares the educational experiences of adolescents from a variety of 'visible' ethnic minority groups such as Roma in Central Europe, post-colonial minorities in France and England, Turks and Arabs in Germany, and recent immigrants in Scandinavia. Focusing on underprivileged urban contexts, it reveals the structural inequalities and also the often conflict-ridden inter-ethnic relations which develop in classrooms, playgrounds and larger communities. Ranging from explorations of quasi-ghettos to experiments in racial and ethnic integration, the encountered situations shed light on the challenges of managing diversity in local communities and on an all-societal level. The book considers both the routine practices of ethnic distinctions and colour-blindness in schooling, as well as the ways in which various actors – students, teachers and parents – experience and understand these practices. In doing so, it reveals that despite the broad consensus on equal opportunity as a desirable aim, ethnic differentiation remains a key source of exclusion across Europe.

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