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Redistribution or Recognition: Political Conceptions of Minority Ethnic Groups in European Education Policies

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Abstract

This paper examines the status of minority ethnic groups across a range of European nations and draws on initial research from the EPASI pan-European project looking at education policies and social inequality. It analyses different states' policies aimed at reducing social inequalities between ethnic groups and argues that the policy language and the type of interventions promoted for different groups in a particular state reflect different groups' positioning in what Nancy Fraser terms 'the struggle for recognition'. Policy-making processes (top-down interventions or community led projects) also provide an insight into different groups' relationship to the state

Introduction

This paper examines how different states across Europe conceptualise ethnicity and looks at the status of minority ethnic groups across a range of European nations drawing on initial research findings from a pan-European project looking at education policies and social inequality. This paper starts with an outline of Fraser's concepts and relates them to educational policy. It moves on to compare different state's approaches to ethnicity and race and the relative status of different minority groups. The paper looks at how policy language reveals not only societal attitudes to minority ethnic groups but their place in the social hierarchy and the levels of cultural respect afforded to them. Through this the paper hopes to explore the policy discourse and policy interventions analysed as part of the EPASI project and use them as a means to uncover the power relations between different ethnic groups across a range of European states.

Recognition vs. Redistribution

The countries in this study employ a range of policy interventions (top down, community led) and vary in terms of the groups targeted and their theoretical aims (assimilation to multiculturalism). This paper analyses different countries approaches using the two models of social justice policy proposed by Nancy Fraser: recognitive and redistributive policies.

Recognitive policy is rooted in what Fraser terms a 'struggle for recognition' a post socialist form of identity politics where social groups seek to move beyond resource allocation and demand cultural respect for their communities, e.g. a curriculum that embraces their history and language. While influenced by the unfair allocation of resources crucially their demands are not solely motivated by resource allocation. Policies which address the question of cultural recognition aim to challenge the existing 'cultural domination' of majority groups (Fraser, 1997: 11) but it is important to ask how

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much of the allocation of community resources is driven by recognition of diversity and how much as an attempt to create separate but equal educational systems that recognise difference but that aim to hold different groups at bay? For Fraser, the key to recognitive policy is how far it creates cultural or symbolic change. This could involve upwardly revaluing disrespected identities and the cultural products of maligned groups. It could also involve recognizing and positively valorising cultural diversity (15).

For Fraser the 'struggle for recognition' contrasts with demands for remedies to injustice via exploitation and unequal resource allocation. In terms of education this can mean improved access to higher status qualifications/ routes, equal opportunities to access better performing schools, improved provision in schools which serve disadvantaged groups. In countries which have a strong link between education and the labour force the issue of racism in employment can produce unequal educational outcomes for vocational programmes which rely on employer based apprenticeships. Indeed, when students leave education issues of economic marginalisation may still affect minority ethnic groups despite high academic achievement. Fraser defines redistributive policy as, redistributing income, reorganizing the division of labour, subjecting investment to democratic decision-making, or transforming other basic economic structures (Fraser, 1997: 15). In the educational context this could refer to attempts to widen access to higher education amongst underrepresented groups, attempts to change employer perception of young people from minority ethnic communities and increased spending for schools with high levels of minority ethnic pupils.

While all of these projects engage in resource allocation in terms of teacher time, additional training or budgets to address inequality, they differ in terms of their aims and the level of cultural recognition that underpin them. In terms of this paper, I have made what is admittedly a crude attempt to gauge recognition via constitutions (national minorities vs. newer groups) or via community involvement (in setting up schools or local educational projects) and redistribution by looking at where budgets are allocated for specific groups. It is important to remember that recognition and redistribution are often intertwined as Fraser makes clear; "Cultural norms that are unfairly biased against some are institutionalized in the state and the economy; meanwhile, economic disadvantage impedes equal participation in the making of culture, in public spheres and in everyday life. The result is often a vicious circle of cultural and economic subordination" (Fraser, 1997:15)

Approach to ethnicity as an issue

An important issue across the countries in the study is the way that the concepts of race and ethnicity are defined and framed in different states. Indeed in some states the use of the term ethnicity itself is contested as some countries e.g. France, Luxembourg who do not collect data by ethnicity and officially refuse to recognise ethnic difference. In Luxembourg despite its multicultural population (100 nationalities represented out of 480,000 inhabitants). A 2002 law on personal data protection expressly prohibits data collection about ethnicity and restricts the recording of such information to nationality instead.

This paper focuses on non-indigenous minorities (as indigenous minority groups are covered in a separate EPASI strand) and I have categorised the groups in this strand as follows:

- New arrivals to a country from established minority ethnic communities
- New arrivals from new minority ethnic communities to a country
- Descendants from established minority ethnic communities
- Descendants from new minority ethnic communities
- National minorities (constitutionally recognised minority ethnic communities)

The language used about groups is a recurring theme of this paper and the term immigrant is interesting in this context. These groupings are often crosscut with race as evidenced by the demographic changes in UK schools brought about by immigration from the EU accession countries. New white populations from Eastern Europe present a challenge to reified notions of whiteness (Bonnett, 2005:111) and can find themselves with ambivalent status in possession of a whiteness that is sometimes visible and sometimes ignored (Hartigan Jnr. 1997:188). Although some groups' minority status is stressed, for many (particularly those who are visible minorities) their assumed foreignness is stressed. Indeed the OECD's PISA study categorises pupils by their immigrant status, defining children as 'native' (both child and parents were born in the state), 'first generation' (born abroad to parents born abroad), 'second generation immigrant' (born and educated in country studied to parents born abroad). As Bonnett argues in European/ Anglo-US discourse, 'whiteness continues to be reified as a racial and cultural norm' (Bonnett, 2005:111) and across Europe whiteness often remains synonymous with the term 'Western' (Bonnett, 2005:110). Therefore the use of the term immigrant is complex and often problematic in this area, where for visible minorities the relationship between race and immigrant status form a constant reminder of the conditional nature of their citizenship. The status differential between groups is thrown sharply into relief by the demographic shift in population composition across the participating countries where families from visible minorities may retain a perceived immigrant status despite many generations of their families having lived in a particular state where newer white arrivals are presumed native.

Conflict and resultant refugees, EU accession and the impact of globalisation on labour flows have changed the face of Europe both in terms of the labour market and the classroom. The status of different ethnic groups also varies in terms of historical perspective e.g. the Irish community have historically faced racism within UK schools due to a colonial legacy and conflict between loyalist and nationalist groups in Northern Ireland and mainland UK. However the Celtic tiger effect and increased affluence has raised the status of Irish people in the UK and an Irish identity has become more desirable. The relationship between recognised communities and unrecognised groups is an important one across the states studied these two examples show how policies of recognition may be offered to minority groups:

The Polish community in the Czech Republic

In the Czech Republic the Polish community form an established 'national minority' who operate their own schooling system. Although members of all

ethnic groups are entitled to education in their mother tongue this is offered in proportion to their population's history and size.

The Armenian community in Cyprus

Armenians first settled in Cyprus in the late 6th century, but the main wave of Armenian migration followed the Armenian genocide of 1915-23 in Turkey. The Armenian population in Cyprus now numbers 2,600 Armenians living on Cyprus. There are also approximately one thousand Armenians living on Cyprus who are not Cypriot. In Cyprus although the constitution does not explicitly refer to 'national minorities' the Armenian community have the constitutional right to use their language in public and private and be educated in it.

Although these groups are able to claim constitutional cultural rights by virtue of their historical ties to the state they are also groups advantaged by geography. The geographical spread of ethnic groups is also important as programmes are more likely to be set up amongst groups who are concentrated in an area rather than dispersed. It also true that some states drives towards integration construct areas with a concentration of a particular ethnic group as ghettoised, a term which in current discourse has become linked with separatism, fundamentalism and an unwillingness to integrate. The drive in countries like the UK to disperse people seeking asylum have used the rhetoric of relieving pressure on areas with large numbers of migrants, however it has increased these groups sense of isolation and diminished their political power. Indeed in many states asylum seeker children are amongst the most vulnerable despite international conventions aimed at safeguarding their interests. In Denmark and the UK children seeking asylum can be housed in reception centres which do not provide the same standard of education available to other children.

It is important to note that only minority groups with recognised status are more able to lobby for and obtain the resources to form parallel systems. Their constitutional recognition means that they are afforded greater cultural recognition by the state though this is not unproblematic. It is interesting to note that countries with established (or constitutionally recognised) minority often opt for parallel systems of education where groups are entitled to education in their own language and a separate curriculum. Although this affords an important level of recognition it is not without problems. The notion of separate but equal education has been found to be problematic in the US and South African context as parallel systems may offer recognition to some groups but may provide a means for the majority population to avoid contact with them. This may in fact be a form of cultural disrespect where the cultural and linguistic heritage of such groups is filtered into specialised schools rather than integrated into a national curriculum.

Policy Language and minority ethnic group status

The different categorisations of minority ethnic group have a role to play in the kind of policies aimed at them. Much of policy aimed at minority ethnic groups stems from a deficit model of these groups and an assumption that their culture and language is a barrier to integration into the education system. Such families are often constructed as

not valuing education, lacking in education themselves and unable to engage with the education system. The impact of racism in societies and in schooling is often overlooked by policies which stress the importance of 'integration' and 'assimilation'. In this sense where educational disadvantage is identified in relation to ethnicity the policy remedy is all too often focused on what the minority can do (learn the language, become better citizens) instead of looking at what the institutions are doing to disadvantage particular groups. The deficit model also tends to overlook the differences in performance between minority groups which mean that some groups perform better than native population children (see Vietnamese origin pupils in Denmark and children of Chinese origin in the UK).

The policy response to a deficit model of minority groups often takes the form of a compensatory discourse (Siraj-Blatchford, 1993) which positions the school as a place to 'compensate' for the deficit culture and home life of immigrant families in Denmark this is evident in policy language. An official document from the Danish Minister of Education identified home background as a key cause of educational disadvantage: "...it is often children from home where education is not recognized as important. And there are also many bilingual among them..." (Minister of Education, 2007). But tellingly, this is linked to minority ethnic status and the assumption that these families are not supportive of education.

Policy interventions based on these constructions offer redistributive solutions (money for extra 'remedial' schooling or language tuition) but are lacking in cultural respect as they devalue the experiences and aspirations pupils bring from their home communities. In Denmark although pre-school provision is voluntary it is important to note that it is official policy that 'immigrant' children are expected to attend preschool to develop their Danish language and cultural skills in part, a response to fears about 'immigrant' children's ability to integrate with other children. In this sense that notion that children from immigrant backgrounds are somehow lacking is reflected in the kinds of policies designed to raise their educational achievement.

Across the states studied it is interesting to assess where minority ethnic groups sit in states priorities and how they are categorised in relation to other forms of disadvantage. In Czech Republic minority ethnic status is equated with special educational needs (a term used in some countries to refer to students with disabilities) and in line with many states the Czech framework for minority ethnic education is rooted in 'foreigner integration' policies. These policies often stress language support as a means to address inequality; indeed many are rooted in citizenship criteria which require language proficiency in the national language and are in some sense rooted in social justice in so far as the aim is to ensure that all citizens have the tools to navigate their way through society. The continued stress on the minority group integrating tends to overlook structural factors such as racism and unequal resource allocation which require intervention and the focus on minorities can exempt the majority population from working towards equality.

Indeed here too we can see how closely ethnic, religious and linguistic minority status are entwined. In many countries immigrant groups (particularly those from non-Western countries) face discrimination and difficulties accessing employment and are more likely

to be economically disadvantaged. However, policies aimed at reducing disadvantage can often compound 'cultural disrespect' rather than provide 'recognition'. Indeed a strong focus on the 'problems' of these groups can lead to them being framed as 'problematic'.

Conclusion

In this paper I have looked at the types of interventions promoted for different groups in a particular state and argued that they reflect different groups' positioning in what Nancy Fraser terms 'the struggle for recognition'. It would appear that longer-standing minority groups who live in geographically defined areas are more likely to have the political resources to obtain state recognition. In contrast newer visible minority arrivals may be more isolated and unable to gain the political strength to overcome cultural disrespect. The forms of respect offered also need deeper scrutiny as enabling separatism doesn't offer the deep rooted respect for minority history, language and traditions of a truly multicultural curriculum.

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