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Guest editorial

Explaining ethnic inequalities in educational attainment

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In a number of western countries we are now seeing a ‘new second generation’ – the children of the migrants who came to Europe and North America in the second half of the 20th century and who are now completing their education and entering the labour market. Many of these migrants came from less-developed countries such as Pakistan, Turkey, North Africa or Mexico as migrant workers.

How this new second generation has fared within western educational systems may well prove crucial for the eventual integration and cohesion of western countries. Pessimists have been concerned that this new second generation may be much harder to integrate than the older migrants of European ancestry: cultural differences may make it harder for the new second generation to thrive within western educational systems, and in the current political context, there are particular worries about the incorporation of Muslim groups. In contrast, optimists believe that immigrants tend to be ‘positively selected’ for their ambition and drive and that their high aspirations will lead to educational success for their children and, in turn, to occupational integration.

The educational outcomes of the new second generation also provide a challenge to orthodox explanations of educational inequalities in the western academic literature. Can traditional explanations be used exactly as they are to account for ethnic inequalities? Do they need to be broadened in order to apply to the circumstances of the new second generation? Or do we need radically different kinds of explanation? Western literature in the sociology of education has tended to focus on class inequalities in

educational attainment and two broad families of explanation focusing on 'structure' and on 'culture' respectively have been developed. The structural explanations (typically indexed by parental occupation) tend to focus on the different costs and benefits facing families, in particular the inequalities in material resources (making it more costly for children from working-class origins to continue in education beyond the period of compulsory schooling). Cultural explanations (typically indexed by parental level of education) tend to focus on aspects such as familiarity with western 'high culture', parental skills in helping children with their school work, and knowledge about how to navigate the educational system.

Given the disadvantaged position of the first generation in the labour market (see for example Heath and Cheung, 2007), and the fact that few of the parents will have had much exposure to western education, these traditional explanations look quite promising as potential explanations of second-generation ethnic minority educational disadvantage. Clearly, it is essential for any serious study of ethnic minority education to take into account any structural or cultural disadvantages that their parents have, and that is the central task that the contributors to this special issue address. Our contributors also address the question of whether these traditional explanations (or, rather, the measures conventionally used to tap these traditional explanations) work as well for the second generation as they do for the majority populations. Measures of parents' social class or socioeconomic position, the stock-in-trade of western sociologists of education, may simply not be as appropriate for the children of immigrants as they are for the majority groups: the immigrant generation (that is the parents), and especially the more highly educated immigrants, were often forced to take lower-level jobs than similar members of the majority group. Traditional measures of social background may therefore be rather poor indicators of the educationally relevant resources within the family, although, of course, they will still be appropriate as measures of the immigrant family's material resources. The question is whether lack of material resources is sufficient to explain educational disadvantages in the second generation.

In this special issue, therefore, we bring together seven papers by scholars from western Europe and the USA who have been studying ethnic inequalities in education. The common theme running through their articles is whether traditional measures of social background can explain the observed ethnic inequalities in educational attainment. A particular challenge has been to find datasets that enable one to examine simultaneously ethnic origins and social background. Our contributors use rather different kinds of datasets, although always employing the best available in each specific country for examining simultaneously ethnic background and social origins. In several cases, they use panel studies, in others cross-sectional

surveys, and in others linked data on parents and children. Our contributors also use rather different measures of educational attainment since they are restricted to those measures available in the relevant datasets. Thus, some focus on attainment during the period of compulsory schooling, while others look at the highest qualification obtained throughout the whole educational career. Hence we are not able to carry out standardized analyses that would permit rigorous cross-national comparisons of the extent of ethnic disadvantage. We cannot therefore assess whether one country provides a more favourable context for ethnic minority education than another. Constructing an international 'league table' is not our objective. Rather, we are interested in seeing whether there are common processes in the different countries. In particular, do we find that social background plays the same kind of role in explaining ethnic inequalities in education in each of our countries?

The countries covered in this special issue are:

- Belgium, where Phaet and her colleagues look at the experience of young people of Turkish, Moroccan and Italian ancestry (focusing on the highest level of education reached);
- England and Wales, where Rothon examines the experience of students with Indian, Caribbean, and Pakistani ancestry (focusing on performance in the public examinations taken at age 16);
- France, where Brinbaum and Cebolla-Boado look at students with North African and Portuguese ancestry (focusing on test scores and track chosen in upper secondary school);
- Germany, where Kristen and Granato examine the experience of young people of Turkish, Italian, Yugoslav, Greek and Iberian ancestry (focusing on attainment of the Abitur at the end of secondary schooling);
- the Netherlands, where van de Werfhorst and van Tubergen look at the education of young people of Moroccan, Turkish and Surinamese/Antillean ancestry (focusing on test scores at the beginning of secondary school and the type of track in secondary school);
- Norway, where Fekjær looks at young people of Turkish, Pakistani and Indian ancestry (focusing on the qualifications obtained during one's whole educational career);
- the USA, where Lutz looks at Hispanics, particularly those of Mexican and Cuban ancestry (focusing on high-school graduation).

PATTERNS OF ETHNIC INEQUALITIES AND THE ROLE OF SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUND IN EXPLAINING THEM

The results show some clear patterns, which are relatively consistent across our seven countries. First of all, we see some large overall (or 'gross') differences between ethnic groups before taking account of their socioeconomic background. A number of minorities have substantially lower educational attainment or qualifications than do the majority groups. The most disadvantaged groups in this respect are young people of Turkish ancestry (in Norway, Belgium and the Netherlands), those of Moroccan ancestry in Belgium and the Netherlands, of North African ancestry in France, of Mexican ancestry in the USA, of Pakistani ancestry (both in Norway and in England and Wales) and of Caribbean ancestry (in England and Wales).

Rather more successful, although still somewhat behind the majority groups, are people of Italian ancestry in Belgium (although faring as badly as the Turkish ancestry group in Germany), of Portuguese ancestry in France and Germany, of (former) Yugoslavian ancestry in Germany and of Caribbean ancestry in the Netherlands.

In contrast, the second generation of Indian ancestry, both in Norway and in England and Wales outperform the majority population, while young people of Greek ancestry in Germany match the performance of the majority.

How far, then, can this pattern of inequality be explained by the differing socioeconomic positions of these groups in the parental generation? Broadly speaking, labour market research has shown that this hierarchy of educational success is parallel to the hierarchy of occupational outcomes found among the parental generation, with the migrant workers from Turkey and other less-developed countries being particularly disadvantaged (van Tubergen, 2006; Heath and Cheung, 2007; Kogan, 2007).

However, the most consistent finding reported by our contributors is that it is the educational disadvantage of groups of European ancestry that can be most fully explained by their parents' socioeconomic positions. Thus in Germany, Kristen and Granato show that the raw disadvantages of groups of Yugoslav and Iberian ancestry (but not Italian) can be wholly explained by social background (indexed by parental occupation, education and income); in France, Brinbaum and Cebolla-Boado show that the overall disadvantage of children of Portuguese ancestry can be explained completely by their social background (indexed by their parents' level of education); in Belgium, Phalet and her colleagues show that the disadvantage of young people of Italian ancestry is wholly explained by social background (indexed by parents' social class, level of education and housing). We should also note that, once we take account of social background, some groups that appeared only to match the

majority population now outperform them – for example Greeks and Iberians in Germany.

However, among the most disadvantaged groups, largely the ‘visible minorities’ from less developed countries, we find that, sometimes, educational disadvantage persists even after taking account of parental socioeconomic position. The results do, however, vary quite considerably from one country to another. In France, social background explains all the raw disadvantages in test scores. In the Netherlands, it explains all the raw disadvantages in test scores for children of Turkish and Moroccan ancestry, but additional variables are needed to explain the Caribbean disadvantage. In Germany, social background explains all of the Turkish disadvantage, but not the Italian disadvantage, in securing the *Abitur*. In the USA, parental socioeconomic background explains around half the Mexican disadvantage in high-school graduation and similarly in Norway, socioeconomic background also explains around half the Turkish and Pakistani disadvantage in completion of secondary education.¹ In Britain, too, over half of the Pakistani disadvantage in examination performance is explained by social background but rather little of the disadvantage experienced by boys of Caribbean ancestry can be explained in this way. In Belgium, it is the same story with significant remaining disadvantages for people of Turkish and Moroccan ancestry with respect to tertiary education, even though measures of socioeconomic background explain a great deal of the raw differences.

Our results show, therefore, that traditional explanations emphasizing social background go some considerable way towards explaining the ‘new’ educational differences between minority groups. These traditional models and measures of social reproduction from the sociology of education appear to work rather well in explaining ethnic minority disadvantage, and are particularly successful in explaining the educational disadvantages of the children of migrants of European ancestry. Moreover, our contributors find few interaction effects. That is to say, parental socioeconomic status appears to stratify ethnic minorities in much the same way that it stratifies majority groups, and appears to have very similar consequences for educational attainment. Only in Norway is there compelling evidence of interactions, with socioeconomic background playing a smaller role among ethnic minorities.

One possibility that Fekjær mentions for the weaker impact of socioeconomic background among minorities in Norway is that our standard measures of social background may not have the same meaning for the parents of the second generation as they do for parents from the majority population. In some cases, the parents (that is the members of the migrant generation) may have had to take low-level jobs in the country of destination that perhaps do not give a true indication of the level of educationally relevant resources in the family. This may be particularly true of migrants

who came from middle-class jobs in their countries of origin, although it is unlikely to apply to most of the classic migrant labour groups who came from unskilled manual or farming jobs in their origin countries.²

There is a potentially even more serious problem of comparability in the case of measures of parental education, since educational opportunities are very different in most developing countries from those in the West. A parent in the majority population who has not completed secondary schooling is likely to be in the lowest deciles of the educational distribution, whereas a parent from a developing country with incomplete secondary education could well be above the average level of education in the country of origin. A western parent with less than secondary education may thus be more 'negatively' selected than a parent in a developing country with a similar lack of qualifications. However, we also need to remember that the kinds of selective processes involved in completing secondary education are almost certainly very different in western and in developing countries, rural location for example being a much more important factor in many developing countries than it is now in the West (Buchmann and Hannum, 2001).

How much of a comparability problem we have depends largely on what kinds of mechanisms we believe to lie behind the correlations between parental occupation, parental education and children's attainment. Indeed, in an ideal world, we would measure the mechanisms directly rather than rely on the proxy measures of parental education and occupation. For example, we may believe that the correlation between parental and filial education can be explained by how often parents read to their children and might therefore wish to control directly for parental reading in our models. Unfortunately, there are no settled sociological accounts of what the main mechanisms are, and in any event scarcely any of our datasets, apart from that used by van de Werfhorst and van Tubergen in the Netherlands, contain data on relevant mechanisms. Perhaps reassuringly, the Dutch results suggest that the inclusion of direct measures of parental involvement do not greatly change conclusions about ethnic advantage or disadvantage, but more research is needed in order to obtain a more definitive answer.³

Taking, however, our measures of socioeconomic background at face value, which is all we can do at present, we are left with a number of cases where differences in socioeconomic background do not explain all of the ethnic educational disadvantage. There are also several cases where we find educational advantage when comparing young people from similar socioeconomic positions. Assuming that lack of comparability in our measures is not the whole story, how are we to explain these very different cases? We begin this discussion of the results by considering first what kinds of explanation might be useful to explain the gaps that remain after controlling for socioeconomic position. We then turn to consider some possible explanations for the cross-national patterns of findings.

EXPLAINING THE REMAINING ETHNIC DIFFERENCES

In explaining the differences that remain even after controlling for parents' socioeconomic position, it is important to recognize that different explanations may be involved at different stages of the school career. Sociologists of education often make a distinction between the 'primary' and the 'secondary' effects of stratification (Boudon, 1974; Halsey et al., 1980). Basically, this distinction maps on to a distinction between the determinants of attainment (as, for example, measured by test scores) during the period of compulsory schooling and the determinants of continuation rates into upper secondary and tertiary education after the period of compulsory education is concluded and students can choose whether or not to continue or to enter the labour market. There might in general be rather different explanations for these two quite distinct outcomes.⁴ Broadly speaking, three of our articles (those on England and Wales, France, and the Netherlands) examine test scores or their equivalent during the period of compulsory schooling, two (those on Germany and the USA) look at continuation rates up to completion of upper secondary schooling, while the final two (on Belgium and Norway) look at continuation rates right through the educational career up to university.

This distinction is likely to be particularly important in the case of the children of immigrants. Cultural dissonance, such as lack of the requisite cultural capital, and perhaps, particularly, parental lack of fluency in the language of the majority population, may make it difficult for children of some immigrants groups to succeed in their schoolwork and may lead to lower achievements in test scores than would be expected given their parents' socioeconomic position. (We prefer the expression 'cultural dissonance' to 'cultural disadvantage' since we do not wish to privilege western conceptions of culture.) In contrast, many immigrant groups may be 'positively selected' for their drive, ambition and high aspirations, and this may be reflected in rather ambitious choices by their children when there is the option of continuing beyond the minimum period of compulsory schooling. These ambitious plans may be reinforced by expectations of discrimination within the labour market. Discrimination on entry into the labour market in effect means that the 'opportunity cost' of continuing into upper secondary and tertiary education is lower for the children of immigrants than it is for the children of majority groups who do not face discrimination. Other things (such as test scores and parental socioeconomic position) being equal, we would expect the children of visible minority parents (who are the ones most likely to suffer discrimination) to have higher rates of continuing within the educational system. Strictly speaking, this argument requires the additional assumption that the 'returns to education', that is, the marginal benefits of an extra year of education,

are the same for the children of immigrants as they are for the majority population. If returns are lower for the children of immigrants, they will have less incentive to continue within the educational system. However the evidence in Heath and Cheung (2007) shows that, for most groups in most countries, the labour market returns to education are the same for the second-generation as they are for the majority group. Lower returns to education are however often evident for the first, migrant, generation.

These arguments, then, suggest that there may be some additional 'primary' disadvantage for ethnic minorities where the parental generation lacks the relevant cultural capital, especially language fluency, whereas there may be some 'secondary' advantage where minorities have been positively selected and/or anticipate discrimination in the labour market. To be sure, we would not wish to draw too sharp a distinction between these processes: high parental aspirations or anticipated discrimination may also lead to greater achievements during the period of compulsory schooling while cultural dissonance may also affect choices whether or not to stay on in schooling. But we expect the balance between these different processes to be somewhat different when explaining test scores during the compulsory period of education and continuation rates after the compulsory period.

Our authors have some relevant material on these arguments. First, it must be acknowledged that Lutz's paper casts some doubt on our thesis of language as an explanation of ethnic disadvantage. While she shows that there is a strong negative relationship between high-school graduation rates and the dominance of Spanish over English, this relationship becomes non-significant after controls for ethnicity and generation. On the other hand, high school graduation essentially represents a secondary rather than a primary outcome (since it is the obverse of dropping out of school at the minimum leaving age before completion of high school). Moreover, a strict test of our thesis would require measures of parents' linguistic fluency.

Van de Werfhorst and van Tubergen's article, on the other hand, does provide more supportive evidence. They are able to include several relevant measures of parental cultural resources, including usage of the Dutch language, knowledge about the Dutch educational system, and involvement with homework, in their models. These variables all have significant and positive effects on children's test scores on entry into secondary school. Esser (2006) also provides some evidence that language difficulties account for Turkish disadvantage in German schools, while Kristen (2005) has shown the relevance of knowledge of the German educational system for explaining patterns of school choice among parents of Turkish ancestry. However, in general the issue of whether parental language usage (or other cultural dissonances) can account for their children's lower test scores is an under-researched area.

Cultural dissonance is thus a potential explanation for some of the ethnic

disadvantages that are observed in school test scores after controlling for parental socioeconomic position. They are, for example, a potential explanation of the disadvantage that Rothson shows among children of Pakistani and Bangladeshi ancestry, since lack of familiarity with English has been demonstrated among the parental generation, especially among women (Modood and Berthoud, 1997). It should, however, be noted that this kind of explanation might also be applicable to other groups, such as children of Maghrebian ancestry in France, who do not appear to be disadvantaged with respect to test scores once one has controlled for parental socioeconomic background. We must not pick and choose our explanations to explain 'exceptions' and ignore their relevance for groups that are not exceptions. Still, it may well be that there is higher usage of the French language among parents of Maghrebian ancestry and that the dissonance is not as great as in the Pakistani case.

It is also less likely that cultural dissonance of this form can explain the educational disadvantage of children of Black Caribbean ancestry that Rothson finds in England and Wales. English has long been the first language of Black Caribbeans, although among some Caribbean families distinctive dialects are used that may be of some relevance. Instead, researchers in Britain have tended to focus on black resistance to and rejection of schooling, partly in response to racism within the educational system (Mac an Ghail, 1988; Youdell, 2003). These arguments have much in common with those of Ogbu (1997), and could also be regarded as a form of cultural dissonance, although the key difference is that these are not dissonances arising from distinct cultures in the parents' countries of origin but are ones emerging from the experience of the young people themselves in western schooling.

It is, however, rather remarkable that explanations of this latter sort do not appear to be necessary for explaining test scores of young people of Maghrebian ancestry in France or of Moroccan, Turkish or even Caribbean ancestry in the Netherlands. If the argument about racism and resistance is correct, as it may well be, it will be a challenge to researchers to show why it is so specific to young blacks in Britain and not elsewhere. (Possible explanations could of course include factors such as greater racism in British schools or possibly weaker family structures among people of Caribbean ancestry that result in lower levels of parental enforcement of pro-school norms and aspirations.)

Turning next to the 'secondary' effects, Brinbaum and Cebolla-Boado in their article show convincing evidence of the higher aspirations of immigrant families and their children, leading to more ambitious choices for upper secondary education (after the completion of the period of compulsory schooling) than would be expected given their prior test scores (in the *Brevet des colleges*). The same detailed evidence is unfortunately not available in the other datasets used by our contributors, but the 'positive

selection' argument may well be applicable to other groups such as Indians in England and Wales and in Norway, to Greeks in Germany, and so on.

Once again, however, we must be careful not to pick and choose our explanations in an ad hoc way to explain the deviant cases. If the argument for positive selection and higher parental aspirations is correct, why do we not see higher continuation rates on the part of ethnic minority students in Belgium or Norway? There are several possible lines of explanation here. One possibility is that not all immigrant groups were equally 'positively selected'. This has been much debated among economists (see for example Borjas, 1987), and it is certainly possible that some of the classic 'guest worker' groups such as first-generation Turks in Belgium or Germany were recruited specifically for less-skilled jobs and may well not have been positively selected in the same way as some other migrant groups. Second, it is important to recognize that a crucial element of the positive selection argument when applied to the education of the children of immigrants is that parental aspirations are transmitted to the children. We expect this to be the case more so when there are strong family structures (paralleling arguments in the American 'segmented assimilation' debate).

Third, and perhaps most relevantly, the arguments and evidence adduced by Brinbaum and Cebolla-Boado are essentially about continuation rates *conditional on prior test performance*. On standard models of educational decision-making, we expect students' test scores during the period of compulsory schooling to be a major influence on their decisions whether or not to continue their school careers. Other things being equal, students with low test scores are less likely to feel that it makes sense to continue with higher and educationally more demanding levels of schooling, and indeed Brinbaum and Cebolla-Boado show that scores in the *Brevet des collèges* have a powerful effect on the track chosen in upper secondary school. The crucial point then is that the hypothesis about positive selection and higher familial aspiration levels can only be tested properly if we compare minority and majority students with similar levels of test scores. It could well be, therefore, that students of Turkish or Moroccan ancestry in Belgium show low continuation rates into higher education not because they lack high aspirations but because they had obtained low test scores earlier in their school career.

In order to test fully the mechanisms that generate the observed ethnic inequalities in education, we therefore need panel studies of the sort that are currently available only in France and the Netherlands. Qualitative studies might also be helpful in order to study the kinds of consideration that young people themselves take into account. Are they, for example, aware of the likelihood of discrimination on entering the labour market? Does this encourage them to stay on in schooling, or do they believe that they will be no better off, even with higher levels of education?

EXPLAINING PATTERNS OF CROSS-NATIONAL VARIATION

So far we have focused primarily on explaining why we might find differences in educational outcomes between minorities and majorities even after controlling for parental socioeconomic status. But can we also say anything about the cross-national differences in the patterns that we have found? As we emphasized at the beginning of this editorial, we are not in the position to construct international league tables of equality of educational opportunity. However, we cannot ignore the finding that in France and the Netherlands little in the way of ethnic disadvantage was found after controlling for parental socioeconomic position, whereas in Belgium and England and Wales, substantial unexplained inequalities remained.

We must immediately admit that some of the differences in the findings from one country to another will be methodological artefacts, due to differences in the way that our contributors have been able to measure both the educational outcomes and the parental socioeconomic position. Clearly, it will be desirable to move towards more standardized analyses, and we are already working with our contributors on a new project to do exactly this. We might expect socioeconomic background to explain more of the ethnic inequalities if more detailed information about socioeconomic background is available – and the information available to our contributors in the relevant datasets does vary quite considerably. However, we should also note that in Belgium, one of the countries that displays quite large ethnic inequalities after controlling for socioeconomic position, Phalet has some of the fullest and most reliable measures of social background. So while measurement problems are surely part of the story, we very much doubt if they are the whole story. A second important point is that the educational outcomes differ. There might well be different explanations for cross-national variations in test scores and for variations in continuation rates.

Nevertheless, there are some grounds for expecting ethnic inequalities in education to vary cross-nationally. It has frequently been claimed in the sociology of education that early selection will tend to be associated with greater social class inequalities, whereas educational systems that delay selection will be more egalitarian (Breen and Jonsson, 2005). Similar processes might be expected in the case of ethnic inequalities on the grounds that, if minority students have low test scores at the time selection occurs (for example because of language difficulties), these inequalities will be perpetuated throughout their subsequent educational careers.

Within our selection of countries, Belgium, France, the Netherlands and Germany all have relatively early selection and tracking (albeit with ‘bridge years’ and the like), whereas England and Wales, Norway and the USA have predominantly comprehensive systems and delayed selection. While a much more detailed study of standardized measures is clearly essential for a

thorough test of this early selection hypothesis, the results in our articles do not look especially supportive of the hypothesis. To be sure, we find significant ethnic inequalities in Belgium, especially in Flanders, after controlling for parental socioeconomic background, but they are not apparent in Germany, while some of the comprehensive systems also show ethnic disadvantage despite later selection. Moreover, van de Werfhorst and van Tubergen's research (and the other papers on the Netherlands that they cite) suggest that ethnic minorities might even be 'over-advised' and assigned to higher tracks than would be expected given their test scores. We need a better understanding of the precise ways in which selection operates in order to assess its implications for ethnic minority opportunities.

It is also quite possible that neighbourhood comprehensive schools might have some disadvantages for ethnic minority students. Given that ethnic minorities are often concentrated in particular neighbourhoods, typically economically deprived ones, and that deprived neighbourhoods tend to be associated with poorer schooling, higher teacher turnover and possibly adverse 'contextual effects' of the school's social composition on student attainment, comprehensive systems may reduce ethnic minority opportunities. This may be more of a problem in highly unequal societies such as Britain and the USA than in more equal societies such as Norway, where variations in school quality and school contextual effects may also be smaller.

Previous research in the sociology of education has primarily focused on tracking arrangements during secondary schooling, and it should perhaps be noted in passing that during the decades over which these academic and political debates have ranged, a number of notionally 'selective' systems have moved towards more flexible systems, with delayed selection in France, bridging years in the Netherlands and greater possibilities for movement between tracks in Germany. However, it may now also be relevant to consider the nature and availability of tertiary education and the implications for ethnic minorities.

At one extreme we have the American system of 'mass' higher education, which is highly stratified internally but with many opportunities for young people to enter the system and to move within the system between different levels, and relatively loose linkages between school performance and entry (at least to the lower-prestige institutions). To be sure, there is evidence for ethnic minorities to be over-represented in lower prestige tertiary-level institutions in the USA (Karen, 2002) and it should therefore be recognized that high ethnic minority continuation rates into American higher education (as, for example, reported by Rothon and Heath, forthcoming) do not necessarily indicate equality of opportunity.

At the other extreme come some European countries such as Belgium and Germany with notably smaller tertiary sectors, less stratified internally but with much tighter linkages between school performance (for example

in the Abitur) and entry to higher education. This might be associated with greater difficulties for ethnic minorities with relatively high aspirations but lower test performance to convert their high aspirations into tertiary-level qualifications. In short, institutional differences in entry requirements for tertiary education may give ethnic minorities varying opportunity to realize their high aspirations.

At this stage, we do not have the evidence to demonstrate rigorously cross-national differences either in early test scores or in continuation rates into upper secondary school or beyond. In essence, the articles collected in this special issue of *Ethnicities* provide us with the first steps in a cross-national research programme. They also provide some important initial evidence, first on the fundamental importance of socioeconomic background and resources for explaining ethnic as well as social class inequalities, and also for the need in most countries for additional explanations. Second, they provide some important pointers to the other mechanisms that may be involved, especially the role of parental language and aspirations. How much progress we can make in achieving this programme is unclear, given the lack of rich panel datasets in most of our countries, but at the very least, the currently available datasets give us important clues about how we might explain ethnic minority disadvantage – and advantage – within western educational systems.

Notes

- 1 Lutz shows that, after controlling socioeconomic position, the ethnic parameter estimates are no longer significantly different from zero. However, inspection of the parameter estimates shows that in many cases they are still negative and sometimes around half the original estimate before controls. This contrasts with the position in France, for example, where the ethnic parameter estimates actually become positive after inclusion of the controls.
- 2 However, research in Britain has shown that downward mobility is actually quite rare, even among the migrant generation, and is not the typical pattern. For example, one quarter of migrants from India and Pakistan were downwardly mobile but just over one third were upwardly mobile (Heath and McMahon, 2005). The economic evidence also suggests that migrants may initially have rather low incomes on arrival but gradually catch up over their working careers.
- 3 In the Dutch analyses, measures of parental involvement are included after extended meritocracy measures, but some of their effect may, of course, be mediated by factors such as children's performance motivation.
- 4 The distinction between primary and secondary effects should not be made too strongly, as ambitions to continue with education until a higher level may influence children's efforts and attainment at a lower level. However, the crucial point is the empirical one that the kinds of mechanism involved in attainment during the years of compulsory schooling may be rather different from those involved in continuation beyond compulsory schooling.

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