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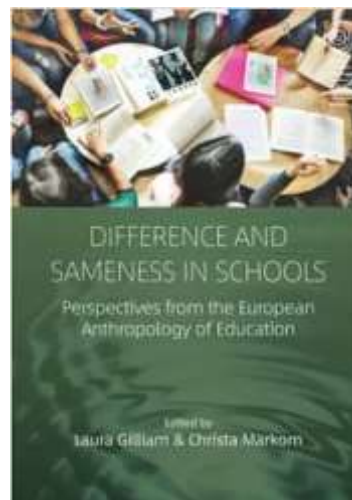
Gilliam, L., & Markom, C. (Eds.). (2024). *Difference and sameness in schools: Perspectives from the European anthropology of education*. Berghahn Books.

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Difference and Sameness in Schools is a meaty, tightly edited collection of ethnographic work in and around schools carried out by anthropologists from England to Russia. It will be of interest to anthropologists of education studying equity, diversity, and civic education, comparative education scholars who want to know how policies translate to classroom practice, and any social scientist who wants to understand the unique contribution of ethnographic research.



As the title suggests, the authors analyze how pupils and teachers in particular classrooms manage religious, ethnic and other difference while also trying to build a sense of common identity and shared citizenship—that is, sameness.

As the subtitle indicates, the volume—principally in its Introduction and in Spyros Spyrou’s Afterword—also reviews the current state of anthropology of education in European countries. Explicitly building on the volume *Anthropologies of Education* (Anderson-Levitt, 2011), the Introduction provides rich details on the institutional and scholarly state of the field in 17 countries. Editors Laura Gilliam (from Denmark) and Christa Markom (from Austria) cite scores of European scholars who publish in English and in other languages. Many citations address differences, as in this volume, but some address other topics such as Scandinavia’s extensive body of ethnographic work on childhood.

Wisely, the editors use the rest of the volume not for country-based literature reviews but rather for specific ethnographic studies of particular schools and classrooms, each asking how local actors construct difference and sameness. Nine chapters present ethnographic case studies while two final chapters review prior ethnographic research from additional countries.

The concept of “sameness” refers here to explicit civil enculturation or civic education, but also to teachers’ and pupils’ tacit work to communicate that “we are all the same here” despite our differences.

And what differences do the authors address? In a classic anthropological move, Patrick Alexander reports on the social construction of *age* differences, analyzing an aspect of school organization in two secondary schools in England so implicit that many social scientists ignore it. Differences in gender and social class also appear in a few chapters; but in contrast to most US anthropology of education, there is no allusion to race or skin color and only brief references to languages spoken at home. Rather, six chapters focus on pupils “with a migration history,” as the authors phrase it; and because they refer to fairly recent migrations from predominantly Muslim countries, they simultaneously examine religious differences between Muslims and Christians.

Thus, in her chapter on a kindergarten class in what she calls a “stigmatized” suburb of Zurich, Switzerland, Ursina Jaeger shows how teachers try unsuccessfully to ignore knowledge about children’s lives at home as they attempt to make the classroom a neutral zone where all children are the same. Given actual differences among families that, for example, do and do not observe Islamic law, screening out family differences requires complex strategies such as serving only vegetarian meals. In the Danish 8th grade classroom studied by Laura Gilliam, it was Muslim pupils rather than the teachers who did the work of screening out difference by projecting themselves while at school as what pupil Karim called a “relaxed Muslim” as opposed to an “exaggerated Muslim.” In Austria as well, Christa Markom encountered children in two primary and two secondary schools who silenced themselves about the ways they differed from what the teachers implicitly identified as normal in terms of religion, gender, and social class.

However, Ingrid Smette’s ethnography of two contrasting secondary schools in Oslo, Norway, reminds readers that teacher and pupil cultures can differ dramatically from one school to another even within the same country. Policies can also vary across countries. Notably, in the Netherlands, instead of emphasizing sameness, about 70% of state-supported schools are confessional schools for Protestants, Catholics, Jews, Hindus and Muslims. In their ethnography of a Dutch Islamic school, Jamal Ahajjaj, Martijn de Koning and Thijl Sunier show how students developed strategies for being what the authors, following Beaman (2017), call “citizen outsiders” in the larger society. The chapter by Sabine Mannitz and Thijl Sunier further develops this notion of civil enculturation by reviewing an important multi-sited ethnography on the experiences of Turkish guest workers’ children in Germany, the Netherlands, Britain and France (Schiffauer et al., 2004).

Two chapters address religious differences in the context not of migration but rather of national identity. Ionnis Manos examines sixth-grade history instruction in Greece, which contrasted a Christian and so-called “civilized” Greek national identity with a Muslim and allegedly “barbaric” Turkish national identity, leaving classroom pupils from Albanian Muslim immigrant families caught in the middle. In contrast, Dilyara Müller-Suleymanova describes how teachers and pupils in two

provincial schools in Tatarstan (a republic within the European part of the Russian Federation) maintain a dual identity as both Muslim Tatars and patriotic citizens of Russia, even as Russia under Putin reverses a movement to teach Tatar language and history.

Of course, recent migrations are only the latest version of differences in Europe. Markéta Levínská, David Doubek, and Dana Bittnerová remind readers of the social exclusion of Roma, who have been part of Europe for more than a millennium, in a study using cognitive anthropology to contrast how psychologists on the one hand and Roma parents on the other understand Roma children in Czechoslovakia. Francesca Gobbo, in her review of Italian anthropology of education, also highlights ethnographic research with Sinti Roma people as well as longstanding regional and linguistic differences within Italy.

The individual chapters in this volume are rich. Having chapters addressed to the same issue from so many countries adds an important dimension by enabling readers to track different policy responses to similar challenges. For instance, running state-supported religious schools in the Netherlands differs radically from offering uniform but Christian-oriented schools in Denmark or rigorously secular schools in France. More valuable yet, because the studies reported here are all ethnographic research that describes actors' actual behaviors and interpretations in specific settings, readers can see how the nationally distinctive policy responses played out in the lives of particular schools, pupils, and teachers. Although the editors did not aim to compare, comparison by readers can nonetheless raise questions for further research. Thus, for example, Ahajjaj, de Koning, and Sunier show how Muslim pupils in the Dutch Islamic school learned to formulate and defend their own reasoned opinions on volatile topics like homosexuality and headscarves. A reader could ask whether this was better preparation for citizenship than the Danish pressure described by Gilliam to present oneself as a relaxed Muslim.

Again, I recommend this volume for anthropologists of education who want to broaden their understanding of civic education and the construction of social differences, for scholars who want to track how national policies play out locally, and for anyone who wants examples of how ethnography makes visible the social realities that even interviews do not reveal. Instructors should know that Berghahn Books also makes this book available through JSTOR, so readers from some universities may find they can access the web.pdf version at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/jj.9891598>.

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About the Reviewer

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