

BOOK REVIEW

„Educație și frontiere sociale. Franța, România, Brazilia, Suedia.” coord. Mihai Dinu Gheorghiu and Monique de Saint Martin, in collaboration with Benedicte de Montvalon. Polirom, Iași, 2011

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The original French title of this book is “*Education et frontieres sociales. Un grand bricolage.*”, different from the Romanian title, either one inviting the readership to create its own specific expectations. As the Romanian title points out, the main purpose of this book is to analyse the relation between education and social boundaries, and the Romanian reader’s expectations are that the enquiries carried out in France, Romania, Brazil and Sweden will probably help the researchers-authors to validate their hypotheses, by offering support for their theories. Moreover, according to the title, the readership might expect that the amount of research undertaken in the already mentioned four countries will be well-balanced and that a general perspective on the topic will be provided in order to get a useful insight.

Being published by Polirom¹, in a collection named *Sociology. Anthropology*, this volume has a well-targeted readership. What is more, as the description (whose author cannot be exactly pinpointed – it may be the editor or Mihai Dinu Gheorghiu) on the back cover of the volume emphasises, the targeted readership is made up of university teaching staff and students belonging to social sciences departments, as well as those persons interested in “the relation between education and more or less visible social boundaries”. Thus, it is intended to go beyond informed readership interested in the researched field, and, probably, to include parents in this complex process of becoming aware of the links that are created by juxtaposing the two key concepts in the study.

The book was first published in French in 2010, and the 2011 Romanian version is, to some extent, distinct from the original, as two more chapters have been added, considering that both a general perspective on constructing past and present social boundaries in Romania, as well as examples of the inquiry undertaken in Romania are necessary. The presence of these two extra

chapters in the Romanian edition could be easily explained if, once again, one considers the readership, who is certainly eager to find out the general context in which the problem of Romanian educational experiences stemming from social boundaries is set, and who is also keen on having full access to three of the biographical interviews taken in Romania. Thus, by being given supplementaryⁱⁱ information (however partial information – 3 interviews out of 137) on the research data, the Romanian readership is offered the possibility to make its own value judgments with respect to the researched topic, taking into consideration the current situation in Romania.

In point of structure, the work under review complies with the writing guidelines quasiunanimously accepted within the social sciences field. Accordingly, the research topic and the inquiry strategy are shortly described in the introduction, Part One (i.e. Chapters I and II) deals with the theoretical framework, Part Two (i.e. Chapters III, IV, V and VI) underpins the methodology used to carry out the French survey research and presents the French case studies significant for the study, and Part Three (i.e. Chapters VII, VIII, IX and X) points out to the diversity provided by boundary games, by means of a discussion that offers the conclusions derived from the French survey research and by rendering case studies and conclusions drawn from the survey research performed in Brazil, Sweden and Romania.

This volume portrays the results of the research carried out by a large number of specialists (14), be them researchers and/or academics, some of them getting involved both in its conceptual construction and in the specific field work. The domain these specialists belong to could be loosely labelled as social and human sciences, but to be more accurate, one could confine it to sociology and education. Thus, they have attempted to conduct a study in which interdisciplinarity is used in order to get a transdisciplinary scientific discourse.

As far as the general research methodology is concerned, the study „*Educație și frontiere sociale. Franța, România, Brazilia, Suedia.*” (Education and Social Boundaries. France, Romania, Brazil, Sweden) can be effortlessly pigeonholed within the tradition prescribed by the qualitative field research, being a good example for the use of the grounded theory paradigm. The theory emerges from the field research data, and Chapter I and II illustrates it extensively. Therefore, in the first part of the study, it is noticeable that generating the theory and conducting research are two stages of the same process, which implies both critical and creative thinking (Patton, 1990:434-435, apud Chelcea, 2007:87-89). The concept of boundary is delineated by reviewing the literature and is reconstructed in relation with the concept of education and, in particular, from the perspective offered by the interpretation of the survey research results from France. The terms *discriminatory boundaries*, *transgressed boundaries* and *desired boundaries* (p.52) are coined and one witnesses the construction of a theoretical framework which is to be put into practice in the survey research, by means of variables. The theoretical contribution of the study is thus emphasised as it is able to generate new concepts in order to cover a less investigated domain: “Social boundaries play (...) a double role. On the one hand, they represent means of dominating, disciplining or segregating, keeping off. [...] On the other hand, they represent means of social protection, of defending a territory, of maintaining a common identity” (p.15); “A historical and biographical approach to boundaries allows them to be represented in motion. In biographical interviews one can compare

individual and family tracks, 'ascending' or 'descending' trajectories, as well as possible scenarios for future trajectories – the children's and the youth's" (p.47).

As for methods, one notices the use of the survey research, conducted by means of the semi-directive interview (p.20), based on an interview guide, and by means of participative observation (p.21). The research carried out was transversal, taking place in the four participating countries, at the same time, between 2005 and 2007. The sampling manner is unitary, the selection of the families being made considering three main criteria: social class, the stability or instability of the position occupied by them and the presence in the family of at least one child aged between 12 and 21 (p.20). The topic of the interviews is circumscribed to the theoretical framework, but, as it has already been pointed out, the possibility of deriving new theories is present throughout the survey research. The interviews focused on education and daily family experiences (p.20), paying close attention to: the position occupied in the social and geographical space, the concept of boundary in terms of time and space and intergenerational relations (p.63-64). The relation interviewer – interviewee is also approached, different especially in case of the latter's social class, highlighting that, in general, "the consent for the interviews, as well as their conditions depended on previous recommendations to a great extent" (p.21). Consequently, one remarks the use of the snowball nonprobability sampling, which is completely justifiable in this case, when one attempts to get highly intimate information, depicting the life story and the family history of the persons participating in the survey research.

The second part of the study is designed to analyse results of the survey research carried out in France, and the participating families were divided into four categoriesⁱⁱⁱ: immigrant family, popular class, middle class and bourgeoisie in transition. The four chapters (III, IV, V and VI) that make up this part illustrate these categories in turn, in the already specified order. After briefly introducing the family (composition, age, education, occupation, family history) and its specific living conditions, each biography is assembled and interview selections are used in order to exemplify or give support for various aspects under investigation. In this way, the concept of social boundary in relation with the interviewees' educational and professional experiences is reconstructed for each and every category, underlining the particularities, resulted from the values acquired by the variables of the study. Thus, the immigrant family is continuously experimenting boundaries, "the education they get being recomposed, reinvented from the perspective the migration and immigration experience" (p.86), the popular class have "to permanently strive to cope with the boundaries of a society which is extremely beaconed, fragmented and divided, but also destabilized by social dynamics that have destroyed landmarks built for generations" (p.112), the middle class is in between transgressing boundaries and social seclusion, being "a boundary-class that participates in settling social relations" (p.113), and, as for the bourgeoisie in transition, even if "the expatriation experience entices them to be open and, to some extent, to diminish the importance of class boundaries, nevertheless, these boundaries are not suppressed" (p.138), the conscience of "us" remaining strong. By using extensive family descriptions for each social category, the researchers-authors try to illustrate the three types of boundaries, previously theorised, *discriminatory boundaries*, *transgressed boundaries* and *desired boundaries*.

The third part of the study depicts the diversity of the boundary games in Brazil, Sweden, France and Romania. Thus, the reader's initial expectations, derived from the Romanian edition title, that the descriptions of the survey researches would be proportionally equal, are not met. One of the reasons could be the fact that this study is not intended to comparatively present the situations in the four given countries, but to detail the situation in France and to trace similar or different models in the countries being inquired, without making explicit analogies: "The comparison aims at Romania, Brazil, Sweden and France, caught in the economic globalisation, in accordance with fairly different dimensions, political experiences and preconceptions" (p.155). As a consequence, the change of title in the Romanian edition seems to be an error, which may be due to the publishing house, probably eager to emphasise the contribution of the survey research performed in Romania and considering that the two extra chapters could offer the necessary support to the new title.

The manner in which the situation from the other three countries is presented is different, their survey research field not being analogous with the one in France, where the space under investigation was more varied (various places around Paris and other towns/cities in France vs the town of Iasi and its surroundings in Romania; the outskirts of Stockholm, in Sweden; *distrito* Barão Geraldo, in the town of Campinas in Brazil). Consequently, in the chapters about Brazil, Sweden and Romania, three interviews are included, selected in order to illustrate qualities specific to social classes in each country: *Brazil. The dynamics of the boundaries in a context of powerful and lasting inequalities* (Chapter VII), *Sweden. The modulation of the boundaries in a context of competition and free choice* (Chapter VIII), *Educational experiences of social boundaries in Romania* (Chapter X). The existence of Chapter IX – *France. A perturbed reproduction* in the third part of the study is, to some extent, difficult to justify. Because Chapter IX puts forth the conclusions of the survey research conducted in France, I consider that it would have been appropriate to place it at the end of the second part of the study, thus avoiding the fragmentation between the presentation of the survey research results and the final considerations, especially that, with the other investigated countries, one does not find this model.

The family portraits included in the third part of the study are preceded by an outline that introduces the general social and educational framework of the country being analysed so that the readership would be given the possibility to make its own inferences. For the case studies in Brazil and Sweden, there is the same type of presentation as the one used for France, only that the type and the number of the social categories differ and there are fewer examples. As for the three case studies selected from the Romanian survey research, which have been added to the Romanian edition of the study, I noticed a different pattern: the interviews are given in their extensive form (p.196), without being fragmented by comments, explanations or conclusions, as it happens with the case studies in France, Brazil or Sweden. Although, they are probably based on the same interview guide, each of these three interviews has its own particularities, which can be identified if one considers the interviewee's social class (the interview with Mrs. Elena R. – in the introduction there is a short family history and details about the context of the interview and there are no interviewer comments or conclusions; the interview with Mr. Grigore G. – in the introduction there is a short family history and details about the context of the interview, and in the end there is an analytical outline that points out

to the relation between the purpose of the interview and the amount and content of the information obtained during the interview; the interview with Mrs. S, her husband and her daughter – in the introduction there is a short presentation of the context of the interview, its complexity, with no family history, and in the end there are some observations related to the interview and to the way the social boundaries are represented in it) and the relationship between the interviewee and the interviewer.^{iv}

By means of this study, the Romanian readership has been given some useful insight into the complex issue of social boundaries characteristic of a changing society and, at the same time, it was given the possibility locate its own position, be it superior or inferior, on the basis of the coordinates that have been indicated. By unifying the entire evidence presented in the study, especially that describing the success of those involved, this volume has the necessary qualities to create a *story telling*, addressed to the current members of the Romanian society.

References:

Chelcea, Septimiu. [2001] (2007). *Metodologia cercetării sociologice. Metode cantitative și calitative* (ediția a III-a). București: Editura Economică

ⁱ one of the leading Romanian Publishing Houses

ⁱⁱ as compared to the French readership

ⁱⁱⁱ taking into consideration the conditions specific to France

^{iv} there is a different interviewer for each of the interviews chosen to exemplify the Romanian situation