

Laura Gilliam and Eva Gulløv (2017) *Children of the Welfare State: Civilising practices in schools, childcare and families*. London: Pluto Press  
ISBN 9780745336046, 272 pages; price (hardback 99USD and paperback 35 USD)

In their beautifully written book, Laura Gilliam and Eva Gulløv describe the everyday practices of childrearing as a window to understand the fine-tuned societal order and psycho-social mechanisms of the Danish welfare state. Drawing on Norbert Elias' concept of 'civilising' in their anthropological analysis, they inquisitively portray how violence in society has been and is being recoded in to the ritualization of everyday life and the psychologisation of emotions, morals and needs through the civilising project. While keeping their analytical gaze on the phenomenon of childrearing, that is the deliberate project of moulding the child, Gilliam and Gulløv argue that ideas and practices of 'civilised conduct' and the cultivation of those in children reflect what "dominant social grouping regard as respectable, cultivated manners and behaviour, in contrast to what is locally perceived as the tacky, barbaric, vulgar or uncultivated" (p. 18). They illuminate the ways in which Danish children are taught these norms through childrearing, how "to live closely integrated and peaceably together in a kind of mutual interdependence[,] ... to take responsibility for the common good and democratic decisions regarding shared societal issues" and to relinquish significant part of one's salary to the community (p. 135).

Zooming on to the fine grained civilising practices in contemporary institutions of kindergarten, school and the family, enables them to lay bare the processes through which children are made social in Denmark, including the development of peaceful relations, control of bodily reactions, correct ways of behaviour, mastery of feelings, emphasis on language and the ideal of a well-balanced person. Children's resistance to this civilising project is also discussed as forms of maladjustment or protest that objects this project and attracts pedagogical concern and more intense efforts to correct those, but that which efforts must remain also civilised, since civilised adults perform those. Therefore, the actions of 'not-yet-civilised' children and civilised adults compose the choreography, limitations and affordances of the mutual negotiations of the civilising project in the authors' rich ethnographic accounts.

Gilliam and Gulløv also extend their exploration to the differences in the civilising project that are related to class, gender and ethnicity. They illuminate the consequences of the civilising project to the construction of categories, relations between social groups and children's ways of understanding themselves in the broader hierarchies of society. Their rarely used perspective connects in myriad novel ways the micro-processes of childrearing to large social processes and hierarchies in society and vice versa. In this way, they open new vistas for understanding how dynamics of power relations, social distinctions, inclusions and exclusions in society are learned and are being negotiated between adults and children through childrearing, and they insightfully recount how in turn existing hierarchies and power relations are re/produced.

They also discuss the consequences of passing on Danish cultural norms, for example, they explore in details the possibilities of managing difference in a society where the equality of fellow human beings is an ideal. For me this is one of the most revealing aspect of their book. They explain that due to the ideal of equality, in Danish preschools and schools similarity and mutuality are

emphasized between children and difference is often practiced implicitly by labelling people according to well-established categorical distinctions that do not undermine the ideal of an integrative community. Dealing with difference this way, however, often lead to exclusion that is legitimated on long standing distinctions in Danish society, thus the threat that diversity assumedly brings to social cohesion is mitigated.

This highly incisive and carefully written book supposed “to contribute to educational research and to anthropological studies on childhood, socialisation and welfare societies in general” (p. 235) according to the authors. I am, however, on the view that this book should be an essential reading to every professional engaged with children, including nursery nurses, early childhood educators, teachers, inclusion service professionals, policy makers and so on. This book does not only make explicit the silent norms and values that govern taken-for-granted civilising projects in Danish institutions to which people living in other context can also relate well, but also provide invaluable insights into the everyday dynamics of distinction and the legitimation of exclusion even in those integrative societies that strive for and prize themselves in the creation of democratic and harmonious communities. The authors of this book have created for readers an elegantly and accessibly written and highly thought provoking work that places the bar high for any ethnographic study that aims to illuminate important relations between the micro-practices of institutions for children and macro-processes in societies.

Zsuzsa Millei  
Senior Research Fellow  
Institute for Advanced Social Research  
University of Tampere, Finland  
[Zsuzsa.Millei@uta.fi](mailto:Zsuzsa.Millei@uta.fi)