Open Forum

Ethnic Options: Self-Identifications of Higher-Educated Second-Generation Minorities as Situated Ways to Negotiate Belonging*

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Abstract

Individuals with ethnic-minority backgrounds are persistently labelled as ethnic minorities, as outsiders, and encounter negative stereotyping. Research argues that they lack power to identify as they want, and that their 'ethnic options' are limited. This paper explores the ethnic options of higher-educated second-generation Moroccan and Turkish Dutch, focusing on articulated self-identifications in social interactions. In resonance with other literature, qualitative interviews show that mechanisms of exclusion, such as imposing minority labels, do not leave individuals powerless. Furthermore, the assumption that individuals have 'a' manner of self-identification appears too simplistic. Minority individuals have various identification strategies at their disposal, ranging from rejection to transformation and adoption of the ascribed label. Which strategy they choose depends on the situation and the audience. This focus on the articulated self-identifications highlights individual agency as used to negotiate belonging in various ways, while acknowledging the coercive power of the social context, revealing the interactive and situational nature of identification and boundary making.

Keywords: Ethnicity, identity, ethnic options, belonging, minorities, second generation.

Introduction

In the Netherlands, like in many other countries, the integration discourse has become increasingly polarized and assimilationist (Duyvendak 2011; Rydgren 2007). The current dominant discourse asks immigrants and their children to internalize 'Dutch culture' and to identify as Dutch (Slootman & Duyvendak 2015). When they identify as 'Moroccan' or 'Turkish' this is assumed to inhibit their identification as Dutch, and their self-articulation of these identities are interpreted as expressions of 'disloyalty' to Dutch society. Hence they are regarded with distrust. Paradoxically, in the Dutch debate, these same immigrants, and even their Dutch-born offspring who have Dutch nationality, are consistently labelled as 'Moroccan' or 'Turkish', which bears the connotation that they are not Dutch and do not fully belong in the Netherlands. Ethnic minorities are placed in the position of outsider and are subsequently blamed for occupying this position.

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Because such exclusionary labels are persistently imposed on (visible) ethnic-minority individuals, these minorities are assumed to lack 'ethnic options', to use the words of American sociologist Mary Waters (1996). This means that visible minorities do not have any freedom to choose when and how to identify because minority identities, associated with certain stereotypes, are imposed upon them. This view, which reduces minorities to powerless victims, has been nuanced and countered, for example by sociologists Nazli Kibria (2000) and Miri Song (2001), who elaborate on the ethnic options of minorities. They urge scholars to pay attention to the agency of minorities and to develop a more complex understanding of the abilities of minorities to assert their desired ethnic identities.

Adding to a growing body of literature about ethnic identifications of subordinated minorities – in other words, about ethnic options and boundary work – this article makes a contribution to our understanding of ethnic self-identifications among ethnic minorities. Its focus on the articulation of self-identification is unique and leads to fresh insights. By conducting in-depth interviews with higher-educated Dutch with Moroccan and Turkish backgrounds, a variety of self-identifications emerged – even within single interviews – in response to imposed labels and widespread negative stereotypes. These responses varied in the level of 'compliance' with the imposed ethnic minority label. While individuals sometimes downright refused the imposed label, on other occasions they adopted the label, or they tried to transform its meaning. These identity expressions do not necessarily reflect the individual's self-image (the cognitive component), but are interactional and have a strategic component. They seem to be part of ongoing negotiations of belonging on both the individual and group level. This focus directs the attention to the interaction, bringing into view the (subtle) mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, the power of the other person (the 'audience'), in relation to the options and the agency of the minority individual. It shows how options and choices are shaped by the context and the moment.

The focus on social climbers, which resulted from the research focus of the broader study (see Slootman 2018a), reveals that the range of options is limited for higher-educated individuals. Although the interviews suggest that the belonging that results from their social mobility can facilitate the usage of certain ethnic options, this does not automatically facilitate their choice. This nuances the claim that having an advanced socioeconomic position increases one's ethnic options, as stated by Kibria (2000) and challenged by Song (2001).

In the following sections, I explain the identity framework I use, discuss literature on ethnic options, and present the societal and methodological context of this study. I subsequently explain the exclusionary effect of imposed ethnic identities, also called external labelling or categorization. Based on the empirical data, I then present the various responses I encountered, ranging from rejection to adoption of the labels. The article concludes with a reflection on the role of social mobility and belonging and on the relevance of the findings.

Identity and Identification

Both in academia and in everyday life, 'identity' is an oft-used concept. However, its versatility makes the concept too vague for analytic purposes (Brubaker and Cooper 2000). At the same time, its use often (unwillingly) triggers an essentialist perspective in which identities are presumed fixed and singular, and categories of people are imagined homogeneous, particularly when ethnic background is taken as the analytic lens or the basis for selection. Elsewhere, I refer to this as the trap of ambiguity and the trap of essentialism (Slootman 2018a).

To avoid these traps, I composed an analytical toolkit, derived from various scholars (Slootman 2018a). Here, I mention four of these tools. Firstly, following scholars such as Giddens (1991), Hall (1991), Baumann (1999) and Jenkins

(2008b), I focus on *processes of identification* instead of some pre-existing 'identity'. Wimmer makes a similar turn when he shifts the focus from boundaries to boundary making (2008). In this article, I focus on individuals' expressions of self-identification, such as 'I really am Dutch' and '…then I say I am a Moroccan'. Interviewees often expressed different self-identifications within one interview, in different tones and with varying emphases, which puzzled me at first but piqued my interest.

The second tool is the *separation of label and content* (see for example Verkuyten 2004 and Jenkins 2008a). Contrary to many other studies on identification, I do not focus on cultural or social practices, such as language, social networks and cultural traditions as is often the case (Phinney 1990: 505). I study self-identification in terms of identity labels (the use of the labels 'Moroccan', 'Turkish', and 'Dutch'), without assuming that this automatically reflects certain cultural practices or social orientations. Research has demonstrated that expressed self-identifications often do not reflect some coherent sociocultural content (Modood et al. 1997, Slootman 2016, Van Heelsum and Koomen 2016), but this has not yet altered the importance attached to self-identification. Both in everyday contexts as well as in research, expressions of self-identification are often regarded as something substantive that is indicative of a broader state of 'assimilation' or 'loyalty' to society.

Thirdly, following others, like Song (2003), Verkuyten (2004), and Jenkins (2008a and 2008b), I consistently *distinguish between self-identification and external identification*, which is identity ascription by others. I call the latter ascription, categorization, or labelling. Lastly, an *intersectional perspective* allows the researcher to bring into view that categories are not homogeneous, and that one particular demographic characteristic does not fully shape individuals' experiences. Considering dimensions beyond ethnic background, such as education level, reveals how power and agency are affected by an interplay of these elements.

Ethnic Options in the Literature

The introduction of the term 'symbolic ethnicity' by sociologist Herbert Gans laid the basis for the idea of 'ethnic options' (1979). Building on Barth's idea that ethnic boundaries are social constructions instead of inevitable products of distinguishable sets of cultural practices (1959), Gans argues that ethnic self-identification can be 'symbolic'; this means that it is not anchored in practiced cultures and social networks (or 'cultural content'). How such symbolic ethnicity works is illustrated by the empirical material presented by Mary Waters in her book *Ethnic Options* (1990), which focuses on descendants of white European Catholic immigrants in the United States. For these descendants, their ethnic identification is voluntary, costless, subjective, and primarily expressive. These 'white ethnics' are not labelled by others in ethnic terms and they self-identify as ethnic only when they want to. In other words, they have a symbolic ethnicity. In later work, Waters (1996) reflected more on the power aspect, and argued that this 'optional ethnicity' is not available for minorities with an imposed identity and who are confined to a minority status by others. For them, ethnicity is not voluntary, costless and individual; they lack 'ethnic options'.

Over time, this argument has been nuanced, for example by Miri Song (2001, 2003). Without contesting the idea that the ethnic identity of visible ethnic minorities is (partially) imposed, she encourages scholars to recognize the ethnic options of minorities and 'to remember that ethnic minorities' interactions with others are not wholly determined by the dominant images held of them. (…) We must not overlook the ways in which minority people contest and assert their desired ethnic identities' (2001:74). Song urges us to acknowledge the agency of minority individuals, as they 'are not simply the passive recipients of unwanted stereotypes and images', and 'are not powerless in asserting their ethnic identities – even in the face of multiple forms and shades of racist practice and ideology' (2001:74).

Multiple studies have been published that describe how minorities negotiate their ethnic and racial identities (see e.g. Ogbu and Simons 1998; Song 2003; Chhuon and Hudley 2010; Khanna 2011; De Jong 2012; Diehl, Fisher-Neumann, and Mühlau 2016; Kassaye, Ashur, and Van Heelsum 2016; Çelik 2018). However, most of these empirical studies reveal only one or two strategies, and these strategies are allocated to certain groups or certain people. From the perspective of self-articulation, based on my empirical data, I argue that individuals have a range of ethnic options at their disposal. I present these options in relation to the imposed singular ethic-minority label: as ranging from rejection to adoption of the ethnic minority label, and can take various forms. My focus on the articulated self-identifications discloses that responses do not vary per group or person, but are more dynamic and vary between contexts and moments. It draws attention to the strategic and performative aspects of self-identification. Of course, the study's insights raise new questions, such as why individuals apply certain strategies at certain moments, which require follow-up research.

The Case of Second-Generation Moroccan and Turkish Dutch

People of Moroccan and Turkish descent comprise the largest ethnic minority groups in the Netherlands. 5% of the Dutch population comes from Morocco or Turkey, or has parents who were born there (Statistics Netherlands 2014). In some neighbourhoods, for example in Amsterdam, this share is over 60%.[1] These two ethnic-minority groups have been most negatively targeted in the integration debates in the last decades. One of the saddest moments was in 2014, when the chairman of the populist Freedom Party (PVV), Geert Wilders, made an entire room of supporters chant that they want 'LESS, LESS, LESS MOROCCANS'. Wilders responded with: 'Then we will take care of this'.

The similarities between these two groups warrant a joint discussion in this paper. Turkish and Moroccan Dutch have very similar migration histories and societal positions. In the 1970s, many immigrants from Morocco and Turkey arrived in the Netherlands to work in lower skilled jobs (Vermeulen and Penninx 2000). Nearly all of these young males came from rural areas and had little formal schooling. Most were Muslim. Later, their families came over. While most of the first-generation immigrants remained in the lower socioeconomic strata, the second generation shows considerable mobility, and a substantial portion has obtained high education levels and has advanced into the middle class. Nevertheless, on average, second-generation Moroccan and Turkish Dutch still lag behind ethnic Dutch (Statistics Netherlands 2014).

For decades – first because of this expectation of return and later for reasons of group emancipation – Dutch policy supported the cultivation of Moroccan and Turkish identities, group structures and languages (Scholten 2011). This has changed since 2000. Cultural assimilation has been increasingly presented as a remedy for a gamut of social problems, for which cultural diversity was blamed. This call, which still resounds, particularly centres on citizens of Turkish and Moroccan descent. Moroccan and Turkish Dutch are commonly portrayed as traditional, conservative, orthodox, unengaged, and unwilling to integrate into Dutch society. Apart from their relatively low socioeconomic position, this is partly due to the negative image of 'Islam'. Islam has been increasingly considered a threat to Dutch society and to the presumed uniform 'Dutch culture' (Ghorashi 2010; Uitermark, Mepschen and Duyvendak 2014). Moroccan, Turkish and Muslim identities are seen as incompatible with being Dutch. As mentioned before, immigrants and their offspring face the paradoxical situation that they are required to identify as Dutch, while at the same time they are accused of being essentially different and are consistently labelled

[1] **https://www.ois.amsterdam.nl/feiten-en-cijfers/buurten/?30100**, Tabel 1.4 Bevolking buurten naar leeftijdsgroepen, January 1st, 2018 (accessed October 6, 2019).

as 'Moroccan', 'Turk', 'Muslim' and foreigner – all labels with the connotation of being 'non-Dutch'.

Methodology

This paper focuses on Dutch citizens of Moroccan and Turkish descent with university degrees, who are of the 'early second generation' (born around the moment of their parents' migration). The conducted interviews were part of another, broader research project, a mixed-methods study that aimed to research processes of social mobility among second-generation Moroccan and Turkish Dutch (for details see Slootman 2018a). In the context of that study, statistical analyses were complemented with fifteen in-depth interviews with university-educated Moroccan and Turkish Dutch men and women. I use pseudonyms to maintain my interviewees' anonymity.

I used snowball-sampling which started from my own (primarily ethnic-Dutch) network, which covered multiple industries in various parts of the Netherlands. It was required that my interviewees were born in the Netherlands or had arrived at young age, before enrolment in primary school. All interviewees were in their thirties or early forties at the time of the interview. They went to university and had jobs that corresponded to their education levels. Included were, amongst others, a consultant, an international entrepreneur, an engineer, a teacher (in higher education) and a medical professional. Although the level of religiosity varied, all participants called themselves 'Muslim'.

The interviews lasted between one and four hours and were all conducted in Dutch. They were recorded and transcribed verbatim into nearly two hundred pages of transcript. The interviews primarily focused on the educational trajectory and the details of the various social contexts (including family, school, peers, neighbourhood, work) in which the interviewees had manoeuvred throughout their lives. Their stories contained many different expressions of identification, positioning and belonging, which often, at first glance, seemed contradictory to me. A major underlying theme which emerged from their narratives was the negotiation between individual desires (to be and behave as one wants) and social belonging; negotiations that took place both in co-ethnic and inter-ethnic settings. For example, interviewees had often balanced their personal needs and the desire to please their parents. At other moments, when they were labelled 'Moroccan' in majority-dominated settings, they had to choose between self-assertion and maintaining a good atmosphere. This inspired me to look at identifications and ethnic options through the lens of belonging.

My analytical memos, which I wrote during the coding of the data, were central to my analysis. In total, I wrote 521 memos, all of which were connected to a code or text segment, or both. I followed Juliet Corbin's approach, in which she analyses her memos rather than her code structure (Corbin and Strauss 2008), because it is in the process of memo writing where the process of analytical thinking lies (see also Charmaz 2006: Chapter 4). In these memos, I reflected on my moments of surprise or confusion, which were for example triggered by expressions that seemed contradictory. I used a narrative approach inspired by Charmaz (2006), which brought these contradictions between interview segments into view. I identified and disentangled four 'paradoxes', which underlie my findings about ethnic options and the relation with belonging. These were: (1) the self-articulation of being different, but reluctance to be singled out as 'different', (2) ethnic self-identification, but aversion to ethnic ascription, (3) no recollection of instances of 'discrimination' but mentioning, in an annoyed way, many examples of being singled out, and (4) critical awareness of essentialist language, but nevertheless employment of essentialist categories.

Labelling as Exclusion

This article focuses on the ethnic options of individuals with ethnic-minority backgrounds in the face of imposed, exclusionary minority identities. These exclusionary processes can be flagrant but also relatively subtle.

Without exception, the interviewees were extremely critical about the general discourse. Although the participants clearly felt they did not fit the descriptions in media of 'Moroccans' and 'Turks' as unwilling to integrate, and as backward and conservative, they nevertheless felt personally addressed by this rhetoric. The generalizing rhetoric made them feel that these labels, with the associated stereotypes, were applied to themselves as well. Hence, for them, the exclusionary labelling and stereotyping not only felt as a rejection of the entire ethnic category but also as a frustrating and painful denial of their personal belonging in the Netherlands. Furthermore, the interviewees experienced an imposition of a singular identity, or – what one of them called – a 'mono-identity'. They felt forced to decide on what they 'really' are (*either* Dutch *or* Moroccan/Turkish), which failed to do justice to how they viewed themselves (as *both* Dutch *and* Moroccan/Turkish). Such dual self-identification is very common among the Turkish and Moroccan Dutch second generation, as I have shown elsewhere based on quantitative survey data of 1,000 Turkish and Moroccan Dutch respondents (Slootman 2016).

The interviewees' accounts of everyday social interactions with ethnic-majority individuals, such as colleagues, are more ambiguous. Many interviewees articulated feelings of belonging and mentioned that they did not feel different from their colleagues and that they had not experienced discrimination in their professional careers. (However, in their childhood many interviewees had felt like an outsider.) This does not mean, however, that they experienced seamless belonging. The participants' stories were spotted with instances in which they stood out as the Other; moments when they were labelled as 'Moroccan', 'Turkish' or 'Muslim'. They recalled these moments with annoyance, as the following quotes illustrate:

> Then I was asked – just because I happen to be a Muslim and a Moroccan – for my opinion on the murder of Theo van Gogh [a Dutch film maker, murdered in 2004 by a terrorist Muslim]. Of course, as a rational human being I think this murder is a disgrace. (…) Why ask me?? (…) Being addressed this way is simply ridiculous. Ridiculous. This totally lacks any respect for fellow human beings. (Bouchra)

> Do I feel different? Well, no. I don't feel different at all, no. But sometimes…. Verrrry occasionally, you can feel it. But that was in 2001, with those attacks. When people asked you: what do *you* think about these bombings? Which made me think: well, what do I think about these bombings? Yes, then you're suddenly labelled differently, because then, suddenly, you are this Muslim. Then you find out – on such occasions, then you find yourself thinking: Wait, I *might* think that I'm just a regular – well – just a regular consultant. But others obviously just see you as that woman. Or that girl. Or… that Moroccan for that matter. (Said)

Although they themselves did not explicitly label these instances as discrimination or exclusion, the annoyance suggests they did experience the imposition of the ethnic-minority label by ethnic majority members as acts of exclusion. This ethnic ascription is a mechanism through with 'invisible boundaries' are created (Abutbul-Selinger 2018). It is an act of exclusion, regardless of how the individual self-identifies, not because the interviewees see the label Moroccan or Turk (or Muslim) as inappropriate for themselves, but because such labelling denies them their individuality, their agency and their belonging (Ellemers, Spears and Doosje 2002:170-171). Being labelled by ethnic-majority individuals as Moroccan or Turk reduces the individual's identity to one-dimensional – one that is often not even relevant in the given context and is accompanied by a negative stereotype – and denies one's individual uniqueness. Karim said: "when we are labelled as 'good Moroccans', we are still not being seen as 'people' ". The categorization furthermore deprives one from the freedom to present oneself as one wants. Finally, in majority-dominated settings, the ascribed ethnic label is a classification as 'not-one-of-us', placing the individual in the uncomfortable position of outsider, denying one's belonging – for example, as a 'regular consultant.' Clearly, the imposition of ethnic-minority labels by ethnic-majority indi-

viduals is an exclusionary practice, irrespective of the intention.

Ethnic Options: Ranging from Rejection to Adoption

Although practices of exclusion such as ethnic labelling can be very coercive and persistent, they do not leave minority individuals entirely devoid of agency. From the interviews, various identification strategies emerged that the participants employed in response to being labelled as 'Moroccan', 'Turkish' or 'Muslim' in ethnic-majority contexts. These responses resembled the identity strategies from other studies and range from rejecting to adopting the ethnic minority label.

Rejection: Reject the External Categorization as (solely or primarily) Ethnic.

One response to ethnic labelling is to explicitly deny or challenge the categorization as Moroccan/Turkish, and therefore as non-Dutch. From the participants' accounts, various ways emerged that were used to contest the singular labelling. The first was to explicitly articulate the Dutch identity, to claim that an ethnic-minority background does not stand in the way of being Dutch. This is exemplified by the following quote of Adem, who firmly underlines the indisputability of his Dutchness. His sudden emphasis and emotion gave me the impression that he reacted to the (implicit) suggestion that he is not seen as Dutch:

> I feel I do *more* than enough for this country, more than the average Dutch person. And I would defend this country *more* than enough. And I *do*. So, when this is the condition for being Dutch, I am Dutch one thousand percent. (Adem)

Another way to challenge the singular ethnic categorization is to assert one's bi-culturality. The double identification 'de-essentializes' (a term borrowed from Lamont and Mizrachi 2012:374) the singular categorization and counters the idea that identities are mutually exclusive. Interviewees repeatedly stressed they feel both Moroccan/Turkish and Dutch and emphasized the benefits of this bi-culturality to counter the imposed mono-identity:

> Well… I'm not like a standard employee or anything. I somewhat divert from the standard. But that's fine. They have to take me as I am (…). I am Moroccan and Dutch. I am who I am, I cannot separate these things. (Imane)

> Before, I struggled because I felt I had to choose. Now I feel: I don't have to choose. I have already chosen for both sides (….) I really think I actually have the best of two worlds. (Berkant)

Interviewees furthermore rejected the external categorization by designating the ethnic label as irrelevant and articulated other identity dimensions that seemed more relevant to the situation at hand and that were less implied with negative stereotypes. This is why, for example, Cambodian-American students embrace pan-Asian identities (Chhuon and Hudley 2010). Ahmed countered the singular view on his identity in the following way:

> (…) because my identity not only consists of being-Moroccan or being-Dutch or Muslim. It also contains other aspects. I am also a brother, I am also a friend, I am also a colleague. I am also an administrator. (Ahmed)

Said nuances the emphasis on ethnicity by pointing to the fact that an individual is 'man, husband, woman, wife, foreigner, Moroccan, higher educated, societally involved and politically active'. Adem explains that local region matters more than ethnic background, as social codes in the eastern and western part of the Netherlands are worlds apart. Others also articulate their regional or city identity to describe themselves. Aysel dismisses the relevance of her ethnic background in the context of her work by asserting her professional identity. Ethnic-minority professionals studied by Waldring, Crul and Ghorashi articulate their professional identity to emphasize sameness based on profession, while they avoid giving up their ethnic-minority identity (2014).

Another way to deny the ethnic label is to challenge the entire practice of categorization by pointing out the futility of categorizing people.

This can be done by stressing the heterogeneity of the category or highlighting one's personal uniqueness. In the context of his study of Turkish-German youth – some of whom also tone down the relevance of ethnicity by referring to individual characteristics – Çelik calls this a 'universalizing' approach (2018; based on Lamont 2009). Karim tells how he (sometimes) refuses to self-identify in these categorical terms by stressing his personal uniqueness:

> Well… you just switch somewhat, you know. You want – At some moments you really strive to belong. Then you want to be either Dutch or really Moroccan. At other moments, you feel extremely rebellious and you think: "You know what? Never mind! I am who I am." I just don't care. (Karim)

The quotes in this section illustrate that these rejection-strategies require some assertiveness. After all, this strategy explicitly challenges the view expressed by the other person, which can possibly harm one's rapport and sense of belonging within the social setting, and lead to friction in that social context. These strategies of 'speaking out' were more on the confrontational end of the spectrum (Fleming, Lamont and Welburn 2012). Also, most of these strategies involved that the individuals educate their audience, or 'teaching the ignorant', (ibid.) to make the audience understand why a singular ethnic identification does not do justice to the reality of these individuals. Most of these expressions in the interviews were not descriptions but assertions; they sounded as if they were meant to convince and, as tools in a dialogue, were components of a contextual relationship. It was a response to a felt ascription of a (singular) ethnic minority label. To me, this dialogue did not seem to be (mainly) conducted with me, the interviewer, but instead seemed to be either explicitly or implicitly directed at another audience.

This assertiveness is not required for another, less explicit form of rejection of the ethnic label: disidentification or passing. In his book *Stigma*, Erving Goffman describes how people try to hide their minority identity (or other stigmas) and use 'disidentifying' strategies, such as certain speech patterns or clothing, to pass for a member of another category (1963:44, 73). That some of the Somali-Dutch studied by Kassaye, Ashur, and Van Heelsum (2016) downplay their minority background in order to emphasize their belonging in the Netherlands can be seen as this strategy of disidentification. This is a strategy that aims to reduce friction and protects personal belonging in a majority context. Likewise, many of the interviewees in my study, in order to be seen as 'normal', had once wanted to downplay, or even conceal, their ethnic identities. They mostly mentioned this response in the context of their childhood, when nearly all of them felt like an outsider. Some were severely bullied, others just felt they stood out, for example because of their clothes, or by the fact that they had eight siblings or that they were not allowed to join in after-school activities. Although the impact differed between the interviewees, nearly all emphasized 'standing out' as a negative experience. Some felt lonely, or like they were misfits. For many, it affected their feelings of self-confidence. They described that they wanted to be seen as 'normal', to be accepted by their classmates and neighbours, and this sometimes led them to conceal or de-emphasize their ethnic identity; a strategy that interviewees, on some occasions, still employed.

> At primary school, you are just busy trying to fit in. Trying to avoid standing out in a negative way, or in a positive way. That really hurt… Yes, actually, you have always learned about your cultural background – to actually hide it somehow. This is still the case: I mean – I avoid to explicitly show the outside world that I have a Moroccan background (…) Yes, it should not be too visible: I am Moroccan and I have a Moroccan background. (Mustapha)

Adoption: Adopt the Ascribed Label.

Minority individuals also sometimes adopt the imposed label. While, as mentioned, nearly all of the interviewees felt they were both Moroccan/Turkish and Dutch, they sometimes chose to primarily articulate the ethnic label. Conforming to the ascribed label can be a way to protect one's self-esteem (Ellemers, Spears and Doosje 2002).

Various levels and forms emerged in the interviews, with varying underlying motivations.

Sometimes, this singular ethnic self-identification is the result of weariness. As we have seen in many of the previous quotes, strategies of challenging external labels and stereotypes requires fierceness and energy. After all, opposing someone else's views does not always increase one's popularity, and makes one vulnerable to rejection. The audience might openly question the claimed identity or deny the belonging in any other way (Barreto et al. 2003). Individuals do not always have the energy to take up the fight and challenge the obtrusive ethnic categorization. Sometimes, they take up a more conflict-deflating strategy (Fleming, Lamont and Welburn 2012). They want to avoid certain sanctions or other consequences, such as spoiling the atmosphere, placing themselves in the spotlights in a negative way or causing conflict. Or they feel that any effort to challenge the imposed label is futile. Some interviewees responded to the persistent categorisation by adopting the ascribed label. This response is also found in other studies, which show that many Dutch of Moroccan and Turkish descent feel discouraged to use any other label than Moroccan or Turkish (De Jong 2012; Eijberts 2013; Omlo 2011; Van der Welle 2011). In spite of their ideas about themselves, these individuals present themselves solely in terms of the ethnic minority label, like Ahmed:

> Actually, now I think about it… Nine out of ten times I am not addressed as Dutch, but as Moroccan [by ethnic Dutch], whereas inside I feel like a Dutch Moroccan, both. (…) Look, I actually do not call myself Dutch because you are not seen as Dutch. (Ahmed)

Contrary to Ahmed, for some interviewees the persistent emphasis on their ethnic identity strengthened their ethnic identification on a deeper level. The salience of ethnicity in society makes some strengthen their ethnic-minority identification (although this does not necessarily mean that this identification with the ethnic reflects cultural retention – it often contains some sort of reinvention; see Slootman 2014). This strengthening of the ethnic-minority identity in the face of persistent ethnic labelling is what Rubén Rumbaut called 'reactive ethnicity' (2008). Also Martijn de Koning (2008) and Susan Ketner (2009, 2010) observed these processes among the Moroccan Dutch youth they studied, and Kassaye, Ashur, and Van Heelsum encountered this among Somali-Dutch (2016). Based on by his personal experiences, Hicham describes how such reactive identity develops:

> Before, people were much less aware of their being Moroccan or Muslim, they possessed multiple identities. It was more dynamic. It was just how you felt at a particular moment. In the afternoon, at the snack bar with your peers, you use slang, while in the evening with your mom, you speak Berber. Currently, it happens that one identity becomes more and more prominent. That you are Moroccan or Muslim becomes imprinted as the most prominent identity. I feel pushed into this identity, by people questioning me about it, or who write about it in the papers, or those who study the second and third generation, whatever. That makes me think about my identity and wonder: "What actually *is* my identity?" Then I suddenly have to make decisions, whereas, before, my identity was like: it all fits together. (…) Now it seems like some sort of a make-or-breakpoint. It is almost like: "Take it or leave it, it belongs with me and it's important to me." Things that you were not aware of, previously, become more and more important. (Hicham)

This is an alternative strategy to Ahmed's weary adoption. Even though ethnic minority individuals take up the imposed identity (they primarily identify as Moroccan or Turkish), they present this identification in an assertive way. Others can take it or leave it. Evidently, adoption of the imposed label is not only an act of compliance, is not only conflict-deflation. Particularly in the face of the societal demand that people with immigrant backgrounds 'integrate' and identify as Dutch, the articulation of the ethnic-minority label can, in some cases, be understood as an assertive form of identification.

The articulation of the ethnic-minority label can even be rebellious. This is the case in what Ogbu and Simons (1998) call an 'oppositional

identity'; when minorities themselves define the minority-label in opposition to the mainstream, and reject success in school and fluency in the mainstream language. They reverse the hierarchical order, by rejecting the norms and values that are dominant in society. Wimmer calls this strategy of normative inversion 'transvaluation' (2013); Lamont 'particularization' (2009). Another example of such oppositional identity (or rebellious adoption) is the radicalization of young Muslims, whose radical identity is presented as superior and diametrically opposes the rest of society (see Slootman and Tillie 2006). Among the Turkish-German youth studied by Çelik (2018), imposing negative stereotypes upon the ethnic majority group is a commonly applied strategy.

Just like the rejection-strategies, which often contained some 'educational' element, adoption strategies are sometimes used to challenge stereotypical ideas and change the audience's viewpoint. After all, the threat emanating from external labelling partly results from the negative stereotype. Interviewees mentioned that they published in newspapers, became politically active, started social initiatives and became members of societal organisations. The interviews demonstrated a strong inclination to challenge negative stereotypes by showing 'good' behaviour in everyday life. This parallels other studies, which show that many second-generation Moroccan Dutch continuously try to display socially desirable behaviour to change negative stereotypes, which makes them relatively reticent in the presence of ethnic Dutch people (De Jong 2012; Ketner 2010). That this is a broader phenomenon is illustrated by the Cambodian-American students that choose to articulate the Cambodian identity to defy the negative stereotypes and to 'prove haters wrong' (Chhuon and Hudley 2010).

Of course, when one wants to challenge ethnic stereotypes, this requires the self-articulation of the ethnic label. Said's quote clearly illustrates this:

> I actually highlight it [the fact that I am Moroccan] all the [time] – I am just PROUD of it (laughs apologetically but affirmatively). I find it important to – I want to show that you can be both Moroccan and successful. I want to, very deliberately, show that these two can be combined. (…) And whenever I can I say that I – whatever – that I visit Morocco every year, for example. So, you know, I just try to make people realize: "Wait, there's something wrong in that picture…" To show the right picture and to show that in your mind you are too black-and-white. (Said)

Discussion: Negotiating Belonging

How the interviewees articulated their self-identifications clearly demonstrates an interactional aspect. In some instances, this was explicitly mentioned ('I actually do not call myself Dutch, because you are not seen as Dutch [by others]') 'They have to take me as I am'. In other instances, the rhetoric and emphasis they used suggested that the interviewee spoke to a specific audience and discourse: 'You know what? Never mind! I am who I am. I just don't care'. 'Take it or leave it, it [my Moroccan identity] belongs with me and it's important to me', 'I felt I had to choose', '[I highlight the fact that I am Moroccan, because] I want to show that you can be both Moroccan and successful', 'I feel I do *more* than enough for this country'

This relational aspect shows that the articulated self-identifications are not solely descriptive reflections of some autonomous self-image, but are part of an interaction with a specific audience. I interpret these expressions, which are frequently presented as assertions, as part of a negotiation of belonging, as ways to carve out a space to be accepted as a full-fledged person or even to improve the belonging of the entire ethnic group by proving negative stereotypes wrong. These negotiations vary in the level of confrontation and effect. While the weary adoption of the ethnic label or a silent disidentification avoids social friction at that particular moment, it is also unlikely that these strategies lead to a more structural change of social hierarchies on the long run. On the other hand, a strong denial of the relevance of ethnicity might finally contribute to less bright, or blurred, boundaries (Wimmer 2008, 2013) and enhanced belonging, but

it can be confrontational and disturb the atmosphere at that particular moment.

This relational aspect is in line with the findings of Barreto et al. (2003), who observe that in making statements of self-identification, ethnic minority members take into account the external categorization by that particular audience and 'its power of sanction'. They show that these statements not only have a 'cognitive component' but also a 'strategic component'. Although my findings imply that this is indeed the case for the participants in my study, a next step is to further investigate when the various strategies are employed by whom; to study how the choice for a certain strategy is not only influenced by the national discourse, cultural repertoires and migration history, but also by individual characteristics and the everyday context. My small-scale study has not revealed noticeable differences based on gender.

My study does, however, uncover a mechanism in relation to social mobility that is relevant here (for a more elaborate argument, see Slootman 2018b). Some of the interviews showed that the achieved socioeconomic status made the interviewees feel that they could more justifiably claim a full-fledged position in society. After all, what more could they do to belong as a Dutch citizen? This confidence lowers the barrier to claim Dutch identity ('I am Dutch!'). In addition, the confidence that nobody can deny them their belonging in the Netherlands facilitates the assertion of their minority identity ('Yes, I am also Moroccan, and I am proud of it!'). This can be read as a substantiation of Kibria's claim that socioeconomic advancement affords minorities 'some latitude in how to organize and express their ethnic identity' (2000: 80). At the same time, my study shows that these ethnic-minority social climbers felt a strong social responsibility to sometimes assert the ethnic label. Achieving success, according to dominant standards, placed them in the ultimate position to counter negative stereotypes, which required them to highlight their ethnic identity ('See, I am a medical specialist *and* a Moroccan'). Furthermore, for some, their advanced status and their relatively white social network made them vulnerable to critique from co-ethnics who accused them of 'acting too white'. This suggests that higher-educated individuals might have easier access to the options of articulating the Dutch identity and dual identities than the less-educated, though this does not necessarily make self-identification easier.

Conclusion

Imposing ethnic-minority labels on individuals has exclusionary effects, particularly when negative stereotypes are attached. Such labelling reduces individuals to their minority identity and places them in the position of the inferior 'Other'. Based on in-depth interviews with university-educated Moroccan and Turkish Dutch, I examined how ethnic-minority individuals deal with the imposed categorization as (solely) 'Moroccan' or 'Turkish', and what ethnic options they have at their disposal. I analysed their articulated self-identifications. Although this focus excludes some important aspects of identification (such as cultural practices and social relations), it is clearly demarcated and concrete, and has large societal relevance.

The range of strategies that emerged from the interviews substantiate and illustrate Song's argument (2003) that minority individuals are not powerless and do possess a range of ethnic options. The ethnic options in this study parallel the identifications and 'boundary work' described in other studies. The value of the article is in the concrete focus on articulated self-identifications, which reveals the situational and relational context of self-identifications in everyday contexts. Depending on the moment and context, minority individuals respond in various ways to the ascription of ethnic-minority labels. Sometimes, they *reject* the imposed label and present the audience with alternative labels or challenge the act of categorizing people altogether. In other moments, individuals *adopt* the imposed label, out of weariness, internalization or rebellion, or because they want to challenge the cor-

responding stereotypes. The variety of responses to ethnic ascription might explain why Van Heelsum and Koomen do not find a significant relation between 'ethnic ascription' and ethnic self-identification among Moroccan Dutch in their quantitative study (2016). This is not because their respondents are not affected by the ethnic ascription, but because their responses vary between rejection and adoption of the label. How one identifies at a particular moment in the face of unwanted labelling seems to be the result of a balance between various motivations in relation to possible consequences. Individuals balance a need for self-expression, the desire to be seen as 'one of us', the wish to protect the good atmosphere and one's image as a nice, rational, easy-going person, and the intent to counter stigmatization and exclusion. This is a situated trade-off between one's self-expression, one's feelings of personal belonging at a particular moment, and the belonging at the level of the minority-group in society. At any given moment, individuals may stress their bi-culturality, later present themselves as Moroccan, and then emphasize the futility of ethnic and national labels. The situational character of articulated self-identities warns us to be cautious when researching identities in quantitative ways. While identity expressions are often taken as substantive indicators of some absolute cultural orientation or loyalty to a certain country or group, identity expressions are dynamic, interactional and situational.

The focus on the interaction between self-identification and external labelling simultaneously brings out both individual agency and the coercive power of social structures. It shows that thinking about ethnic options in binaries (presence or absence) is too simplistic. Even the adoption of an imposed label, or a 'reactive identity, often is much more than passive compliance and conflict deflation. Although external forces are strong, conforming to the ascribed label is still the result of a (mostly unconscious) trade-off between various motives, and can even have a rebellious component.

While it is important to acknowledge that minority individuals possess agency and are not entirely pinned down by imposed labels, it is equally important to acknowledge the coercive power of external categorization. When external labelling happens, 'ethnicity' is put on the table by the other person and the labelled individual is placed in a reactive position. External labelling can be overwhelming, and attempts to challenge these might simply seem futile. When we regard individuals solely as 'resilient actors' we overlook this coercive power and shift the responsibility for social oppression from society to the individual (Meyer 2003:23). A recent statement of the Dutch prime minister is a good case in point. Reacting to a study that (again) proved the presence of discrimination in the Dutch labour market, he stated that it is 'up to Mohammed to stand up for himself' (in Dutch *Mohammed moet zich 'invechten'*) (NRC 2015). From this perspective, minority individuals are held responsible for their outsider position, and the influence of ethnic ascription and other exclusionary societal mechanisms is ignored. In the Netherlands, the reverse (or perverse) effects of the assimilationist integration discourse are disregarded (Slootman and Duyvendak 2018). The demand placed on ethnic minorities to self-identify as Dutch and not as Moroccan/Turkish leads to a societal preoccupation with ethnicity and imposed ethnic labels, which, in turn, enhances ethnic self-identification, for which the minorities are then blamed. In our use of ethnic options, we should acknowledge – but not overestimate – individual agency. It is important to realize how social others limit and shape the individual's options.

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