Assimilation into the Literary Mainstream? The Classification of Ethnic Minority Authors in Newspaper Reviews in the United States, the Netherlands and Germany

Pauwke Berkers (berkers@eshcc.eur.nl)

Department of Art and Culture Studies (ESHCC), Erasmus University Rotterdam

Susanne Janssen

Marc Verboord

Abstract

This article addresses to what extent literary critics in the United States, the Netherlands and Germany have drawn ethnic boundaries in their reviews of ethnic minority writers between 1983 and 2009 and to what extent these boundaries have changed in the course of ethnic minority writers' careers and across time? By analyzing newspaper reviews, we find that American reviewers less often mention the ethnic background of Mexican American authors than their Dutch and German colleagues refer to the background of Moroccan and Turkish minority writers. But while these relatively strong ethnic boundaries become weaker over time in the Netherlands (boundary shifting), Turkish German authors encounter particularly strong boundaries in subsequent book publications (ethnicization). In the U.S. the reverse is true: ethnic boundaries weaken after the debut has been reviewed (boundary crossing). The findings are related to (nationally different) chronic accessibility (U.S. and Germany) and specific field dynamics (Netherlands).

Introduction and Research Question

Mass immigration – particularly from non-western countries – has been a relatively recent phenomenon in the Netherlands and Germany when compared to the United States. Over the last sixty years however, the ethnic make-up of both European countries has changed dramatically, resulting in heated debates over the integration of immigrants into mainstream society (Roggeband and Vliegenthart, 2007; Thränhardt, 2002). The role of the arts – and more specifically, literature – in assimilation processes of ethnic immigrant minorities has largely been ignored (Berkers, 2009c), even though inclusion into such a high-status domain of society would indicate the conference of symbolic value on both the concerned individuals and the entire, previously excluded group (DiMaggio and Fernández-Kelly, 2010). Dutch and German ethnic minority authors – similarly to their American counterparts – have recently received some mainstream recognition, being 'discovered' by mainstream publishing houses and the reading public (Adelson, 2005; van der Poel, 2009), receiving state support (Berkers, 2009a), and being included in national literary histories (Berkers, 2009b). Yet, few studies have examined the ways in which ethnic minority writers in different countries are assimilated into the literary mainstream, and what role different – ethnic minority and mainstream – actors play in this process.

To address this understudied topic, we combine two strands of boundary research that have been particularly fruitful in the past decades, but have remained relatively separate domains of sociological research (Levitt, 2005). First, building on the work of Bourdieu (1984 [1979]), sociologists of culture have focused on hierarchical ('highbrow' versus 'lowbrow') boundaries rather than more 'horizontal' classifications (Berghman and van Eijck, 2009; DiMaggio, 1987; Levine, 1988). As

these studies have primarily examined cultural distinctions as the outcome of social class struggles, the role of ethnicity within cultural fields has received relatively little attention (Bennett et al., 2008; Lamont and Lareau, 1988). Second, studies in the sociology of race and ethnicity suggest that actors in all societal domains often rely upon ethnic classifications, because they are readily accessible and in many instances seem fit for understanding a complex social reality (Hale, 2004). Scholars of race and ethnicity have mostly looked at the boundary-work of powerful institutions (as the State) and everyday classifications of ordinary people (Brubaker et al., 2004). However, at the meso-level, boundary personnel such as critics play a crucial role in granting symbolic access into the literary mainstream (Bourdieu, 1993; Hirsch, 1972). Yet, we know little about the extent and ways these gatekeepers draw upon ethnic – instead of aesthetic – classifications (cf. DiMaggio, 1997). Thus, while acknowledging that assimilation – the attenuation of ethnic distinctions – is a two-way process (Alba and Nee, 2003), this study focuses mainly – but not exclusively – on how mainstream literary critics draw ethnic boundaries by acting as symbolic gatekeepers. The central question is therefore twofold:

(i) to what extent have U.S., Dutch and German literary critics drawn ethnic boundaries in their reviews of ethnic minority authors between 1983 and 2009 and (ii) to what extent have such ethnic classifications by critics changed in each country in the course of ethnic minority writers' careers and across time?

We examine the critical reception of ethnic minority fiction authors by following the development of individual literary careers as well as changes in the literary field in general between 1983 and 2009. Through a content analysis of newspaper reviews of these authors' complete oeuvres, we trace how and to what extent literary critics refer to an author's ethnic background (cf. Ekelund and Börjesson, 2002). This design

allows us to distinguish between 'boundary crossing' (individual-level assimilation of ethnic minority authors into the literary mainstream) and 'boundary shifting' (structural change in the position of ethnic boundaries, leading to group-level assimilation of ethnic minority authors into the mainstream) (Zolberg and Long, 1999). Such processes of boundary change will likely differ across time and place (Bail, 2008) – in relation to particularities of the literary field (Berkers, 2009b) and the salience of ethnicity as a classificatory tool within different societies. While a thorough historical comparison of different national literary fields is beyond the scope of this study, we do compare three Western immigration countries over a 25-year period. Whereas the United States – a traditional immigration nation – is largely organized around ethno-racial lines (Foner, 2005), mass labor immigration ('guest workers') – and the ethnicization of society – is a more recent phenomenon in the Netherlands (despite its colonial past) and Germany.

Theory

Sociology of Culture: Literary Fields, Critics and Classifications

A literary field consists of all actors involved the material and symbolic production of literature (Bourdieu, 1993), struggling over the authority to select and classify authors and/or their works (Bourdieu, 1996 [1992]). Literary authorities such as critics function first of all as important gatekeepers by selecting newly published fiction titles that they believe are worthy of consideration (Debenedetti, 2006; Hirsch, 1972). As critics are mandated to determine what is considered 'legitimate' literature, their selections strongly affect the success of future works and as such the author's literary career (Janssen, 1997; van Rees, 1983). Furthermore, these choices have often been found to favor dominant groups (higher social classes, men, whites), resulting in

social boundaries – unequal access to resources and opportunities for particular social groups (Lamont and Molnár, 2002).

In this article however we focus on how literary critics classify those literary works that are deemed worthy of consideration, that is, how they draw symbolic boundaries – 'conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space' (Lamont and Molnár, 2002: 168). In general, the process of classification involves attributing or withholding literary prestige. Literary critics themselves usually maintain that purely aesthetic criteria ('form instead of function') prevail in their classifications of literary writers and their works (Bourdieu, 2008 [1999]; Janssen, 1997). In practice, the content of fiction reviews is also affected by extra-textual information (Craig and Dubois, 2010; Janssen, 1998), mainly by various field-related factors (e.g., the prestige of the publishing house) and certain background characteristics of the author (Corse and Westervelt, 2002).

Here we focus on the (change in the) extent to which critics convey information about the author's ethnic background. Sociologists of culture – focusing mainly on class distinctions and cultural capital (Bennett et al., 2008) – have hardly examined ethnic classifications, even though such categorizations may well be stronger and more stable over time than those based on social class (Lamont, 2000; Levitt, 2005). Furthermore, scarce studies show that critics are likely to mention the ethnic background of an author, particularly when being nonwhite constitutes an unusual feature within a literary field (Chong, 2011; Griswold, 1987). Yet, even these studies do not address if – and under what circumstances – ethnic classifications change, over the course of ethnic minority writers' careers and/or across time. We therefore turn to the sociology of race and ethnicity.

Bringing in Sociology of Race and Ethnicity: Ethnic Boundaries and Change

Building on the work of Barth (1969), most sociologists no longer define ethnicity as a set of shared traits or fixed cultural communalities. Instead, scholars examine how ethnic boundaries – a sense of 'they are not like us because…' (Alba, 2005: 24) – are constructed and changed through social interaction between ethnic minority groups and mainstream society[1] (Nagel, 1994; Wimmer, 2008). This shift from an objectivist to a constructivist approach has led to an increased interest in the symbolic classifications underlying social boundaries, defining ethnicity as a tool to perceive and classify social reality (Brubaker, 2001; Gans, 1979). Strong boundaries imply a sharp, unambiguous distinction between insiders and outsiders, while weak boundaries leave the possibility of belonging to minority as well as majority groups (Alba, 2005). In this study of newspaper reviews we measured ethnic boundary strength by the presence or absence of labels referring to the ethnic minority background of an author (see Data and Methods for more details). Whether given positive or negative value, such ethnic classifications explicitly 'mark' ethnic minority authors as different from 'unmarked' majority authors (Brekhus, 1998), possibly complicating assimilation into the literary mainstream.

Furthermore, the constructivist approach of ethnicity has shown that ethnic boundaries can – and do – change. In this article we examine boundary change as a decrease (or increase) in critics' use of ethnic minority background labels. We speak of assimilation in case of an attenuation of such distinctions based on ethnic origin (Alba and Nee, 2003: 38). While we expect (the symbolic aspects of) ethnic boundaries to weaken over the course of ethnic minority writers' careers and across time, we might find the reverse, that is, a process of ethnicization (Brubaker et al.,

2004). Boundary change occurs when ethnic classifications no longer *fit* the observed reality and/or when the *accessibility* of such classifications becomes more difficult.

Boundaries change when ethnic classifications seize to fit, i.e. do not offer reasonably accurate accounts for similarities and differences among people declines (Hale, 2004). First, as the literary career of an individual ethnic minority author progresses, ethnic classifications may seem less appropriate to describe his or her work. When a particular author has been published previously, and received some form of literary recognition, literary critics may become less inclined to view him or her as ethnically different. This type of boundary change – boundary crossing – refers to the classic version of individual-level assimilation: someone moves from one group to another, without any real change to the boundary itself (Zolberg and Long, 1999). Second, as more ethnic minority authors enter the literary field over time, reviewers may no longer perceive their ethnic background as something unusual, worth mentioning to their readers (cf. Griswold, 1987). In this case, ethnic minority writers as a group − regardless whether they are debutants or established authors − would come to be less often classified in terms of their ethnic background. Such relocation of the boundary itself is referred to as boundary shifting (Alba and Nee, 2003; Zolberg and Long, 1999).

The prevalence of ethnic classifications over other categorizations also depends on the accessibility of that particular category. First, ethnic classifications may be 'situationally accessible' through direct contact, active suggestion, and cues in the environment (Hale, 2004). When a work of fiction covers themes related to the author's ethnic background, critics might react to such cues and address the author's background more elaborately. In addition, publishers may provide critics with active suggestions, e.g. by offering biographical information that make ethnic classifications

directly available. Second, ethnic classifications may also be 'chronically accessible' because they are frequently activated or cognitively linked to other widely used categories (Hale, 2004). In other words, how often ethnicity is used as a classificatory 'tool' depends, amongst other things, on the degree to which it is made available by different institutions, notably the nation-state (Brubaker, 2009; Swidler, 2001). However, it is hard to predict how such national differences play out – or, to use Bourdieu's terms, are refracted – in critical reviews of the works of ethnic minority writers (Griswold, 1987). So while ethnicity is agreed to be an important classificatory tool in the U.S., there is little consensus on how this affects the use of ethnic references in discourse (cf. Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Joppke, 1996). Recent changes in both Dutch and German integration policies and public discourse – declaring the failure of multiculturalism (Entzinger, 2003; Fassmann, 2011) – further complicate doing accurate predictions. We therefore take a more inductive approach to this type of accessibility.

Data and Methods

Ethnic Groups, Authors and Reviews

To ensure sufficient cross-national comparability, we used several databases and overviews to first compile a tentative list of authors belonging to comparable labor-immigrant groups, that is, Mexican American, Moroccan Dutch and Turkish German writers (Latino Literature; Aynan, 2006; Rösch, 2006).[2] Second, we included primarily 1.5-generation (those who arrived before the age of 13), second and third generation immigrant writers. Third, only authors who have primarily published 'fiction' were selected. Fourth, authors writing in the language of the country of origin were not taken into account. Fifth, data collection is confined to authors whose prose

debut was published in 1983 or later. Finally, at least one book in the author's oeuvre had to be reviewed in a newspaper. For each author, we collected data on all fiction books he or she had published during his or her career as well as all newspaper reviews (of more than 100 words) that appeared within six months of each book publication. This procedure yielded 134 American reviews, 127 Dutch reviews and 122 German reviews, published between 1985 and 2009 (see Appendix A).

Dependent Variable

Ethnic minority background labels. These include (a) direct references to the author's ethnic group membership ('türkischen Autor' or 'the cadre of top-flight Chicana writers'), (b) mentions of the author's descent or country of birth ('of Moroccan origin' or 'the child of Mexican immigrants') or (c) explicit linkages of the author's ethnic background to ethnic features of the story ('numerous works written from the perspective of either the second- or third-generation Chicano').[3] In addition, we inductively distinguished five sublabels, allowing for a more detailed analysis of critics' boundary work (see section Accounting for Boundary Change).

Independent Variables

Prose debut and Book number. First, boundary crossing can be a very abrupt process, akin to a conversion (Alba, 2005). In reviews of first book publications, critics may rely more extensively on ethnic background labels than subsequent publications, because other useful 'clues' for crafting a review (such as previous critical classifications) are lacking or less readily available (Janssen, 1997). Therefore we use 'prose debut' as a first indicator of boundary crossing. Second, the number of fiction books an author has published allows us to establish whether ethnic boundaries

change over the course of a literary career. Thus we included 'book number' as an indicator of a more gradual process of boundary crossing.

Year of book publication. The independent variable which measures boundary shifting is a fiction book's 'year of publication' coded as the age of a book in number of years (counting from 2009). This enables us to determine whether ethnic boundaries change over the course of time, regardless the phase of a specific author's literary career.

Control Variables

Background author. We controlled for: 'year of birth' (age); 'foreign born'; 'sex'. The latter variable was included because critics may be more inclined to classify 1.5 generation ethnic minority authors – which are foreign born – in terms of their ethnic background than second generation authors.

Book characteristics. Control variables are: 'ethnic minority background author mentioned on book cover'; 'majority background mentioned on book cover'; 'book discusses ethnic minority themes'; 'book discusses majority themes'; 'literary prestige publishing house'; 'publisher of Hispanic literature' (US). Information on the book cover can also affect reviewers' classifications (Coser et al., 1982). Publishers may typecast an author as 'ethnic' to make it stand out in the crowd of new publications (Young, 2006). Therefore, we controlled for the number of ethnic minority as well as majority[4] background labels (following previously discussed criteria) on the book cover of each first edition of a work. We also used these book covers to determine whether a work addresses ethnic minority and/or majority themes. Again, this may trigger the use of ethnic classifications. The literary prestige of the publisher has also been found to affect reviewers' selections and classifications of authors. To measure

this prestige, while accounting for possible changes in the course of time, we used the number of times that the publisher has won a prestigious literary prize in the five years preceding the work under review (see Verboord, 2003).[5] In the case of publishers who specialize in ethnic minority fiction, critics may more likely to discuss authors through an 'ethnic' lens. This control variable is only used for the US, where several publishers specialize in Hispanic, or more broadly Chicano, literature.

Review characteristics. We controlled for: 'length of review' (number of words); 'national quality newspaper'; 'Hispanic readership' (US); 'Hispanic reviewer' (US). Longer reviews may include more ethnic minority background labels. In contrast to regional, popular and/or niche newspapers, national quality newspapers specifically target (culturally) higher educated readers and, generally include more literature reviews (Szánto et al., 2004) – which are predominantly written by professional in-house reviewers. Particularly, Californian and Texan newspapers may contain different classifications of Mexican minority authors due to a relatively large Hispanic readership. Also, American newspapers employ a considerable number of critics of Hispanic origin, who may classify Mexican minority authors differently.

Results

Construction of Ethnic Boundaries

The first research question addresses to what extent newspaper critics in the United States, the Netherlands and Germany have drawn ethnic boundaries in their reviews of ethnic minority authors. Table 1 indicates that only 20.3% (31) of American newspaper reviews mentions the author's ethnic minority background as opposed to 47.2% (60) of Dutch and 58.2% (71) of German reviews. American reviews differ significantly from both Dutch and German reviews. Furthermore, our findings are

unlikely to be the result of (cross-national) differences in review styles. First, Table 1 shows few significant differences in the review length. Second, based on an analysis of 79 (U.S.), 68 (Netherlands) and 100 (Germany) newspaper reviews of four comparable majority authors (Appendix B), we find no significant cross-national differences in the extent to which reviewers refer to an author's majority background (Table 1). Majority authors remain – as expected – predominantly unmarked.

[Table 1 about here]

Thus, ethnic boundaries – measured by the use of ethnic minority background labels – appear stronger in German and Dutch than in American literary reviews.

Changes in Ethnic Boundaries

To examine if and how the abovementioned boundaries have changed in each country, we performed a series of logistic regression analyses of the usage of ethnic minority background labels, in which we controlled for characteristics of the author, the book under review, and the review itself.

[Table 2 about here]

The baseline model (Model 1 in Table 2) estimates for, each country, the effect of the variables 'prose debut' and 'book number' and 'year of book publication' on the use of ethnic minority background labels. Model 1 shows no significant results in the U.S. For the Netherlands, 'year of book publication' proves to be significant, indicating that older books (and therefore older reviews) are more likely to contain references to an author's ethnic minority background. This suggests a process of boundary shifting:

regardless of how many novels Moroccan Dutch authors have published, ethnic boundaries seem to have weakened over time. In the German case, first book publications – quite surprisingly – are less likely to be discussed in ethnic terms than subsequent publications. However, the independent variables explain only 9.2% of the variance in Model 1.

In Models 2 and 3 we introduce the control variables for characteristics of the author, the book under review and the review itself. In the U.S., both models show that reviews of debuts are far more likely to contain references to the author's ethnic minority background than subsequent publications. As we find no significant effects for 'book number', only the first publication appears to function as an ethnic boundary. Thus, boundary crossing appears not to be a gradual, but an abrupt assimilation of Mexican American authors into the literary mainstream. Additionally, the odds of being labeled an ethnic minority author are higher for female than for male authors. Longer reviews are also more likely to contain references to the ethnic background of Mexican American authors. Finally, the likelihood that an author's ethnic minority background is mentioned is much smaller for reviews appearing in national quality newspapers than those in regional, popular and niche newspapers. These effects remain significant when, in Model 3, we control for whether the book has appeared with a publisher focusing on Hispanic literature and whether the review targets Hispanic readers or is written by a Hispanic reviewer.

Model 2 for the Netherlands yields a very clear result: only the year in which a book was published (and reviewed) continues to have a significant effect on the likelihood that the ethnic minority background of an ethnic minority author is mentioned in a newspaper review. If we compare the pseudo R square of Model 1 (.408) with Model 2 (.528), we see that the explanatory power of Model 1 was already

quite high, particularly compared to the other countries. None of the control variables produce any significant effects.

When we add our control variables in the German model, the effects are similar to Model 1, meaning that reviews of first book publications (still) have a smaller chance of containing ethnic terms than subsequent publications. So instead of an attenuation of ethnic classifications, these results point to a process of ethnicization, in which individual Turkish German authors encounter relatively stronger ethnic boundaries when subsequent works are reviewed. As in the United States, shorter reviews and those published by national quality newspapers are less likely to contain ethnic minority background labels.

To conclude: our findings show assimilation in the United States (boundary crossing) and the Netherlands (boundary shifting), and (individual-level) ethnicization in Germany.

Accounting for Boundary Change

Our content analyses also provide us with more detailed information on how critics – at a sublabel level – use ethnic minority background labels to perform boundary work (see Table 3). As the situational accessibility of ethnic classifications – here: book characteristics – does not affect boundary construction and change (cf. Table 2), we focus on national differences in the chronic accessibility of ethnic classifications and literary field dynamics to provide tentative explanations for our quantitative findings.

[Table 3 about here]

The United States

At a first glance, our findings – weak ethnic boundaries and individual-level assimilation (boundary crossing) – seem in line with the American creed of egalitarianism and individualism, in which organization along ethnic group lines is regarded with suspicion (Alba and Nee, 2003). Alternatively, our results might point to a color-blind or ethnicity evasive manifestation of ethnic boundaries (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Frankenberg, 1993). On the one hand, the (sub)labels American critics draw upon provide us with some evidence that they indeed evade issues of ethnicity (Table 3). They less often label ethnic minority authors directly as ethnic minority *individuals* (e.g., 'Mexican-American writer Helena Maria Viramontes') than their Dutch and German reviewers. On the other hand, American critics demonstrate their cognizance of ethnicity by comparatively often linking Mexican minority authors to the *minority group in general*, both *directly* and through the book's *story* (Table 3). First, they provide contextual information of the minority group as a whole, for example by discussing 'the failings of the Mexican-American community,' or by linking the authors to their Mexican American readership. Second, American critics draw parallels between the author's narrative and the minority experience of the ethnic group as a collective, e.g. 'Cisneros has been lauded for a decade for her passionate and intimate portrayal of the Latina experience' (*The Boston Globe*, September 22, 2002). And: 'This volume as a whole marks Mr. Gilb as an important voice not only for Hispanics in the Southwest' (*The Dallas Morning News*, October 31, 1993). According to these critics, Sandra Cisneros and Dagoberto Gilb do not tell their individual stories. Rather, they articulate the collective Latina or Southwest Hispanic experience, acting as ethno-racial insiders that authentically reflect the experience of the ethnic group (Chong, 2011). While 'authentic ethnicity' might make such authors' work more interesting – and thus results in certain resources and

opportunities, it might also lead to strong ethnic boundaries – being dismissed as inauthentic – for authors who do not meet these ethnic expectations (Griswold, 1992; Kibria, 2000). Possibly, critics view authentic ethnicity as less important in the classification of subsequent publications than debuts, suggesting that boundary crossing in the United States is (at least partly) a change in ethnic expectations.[6]

The Netherlands

In case of the Netherlands, our results – strong ethnic boundaries and group-level assimilation (boundary bridging) – suggest that ethnic labels overtime become less suitable to classify ethnic minority authors. As such, these findings contradict previous studies that have signaled a clear discursive shift – particularly in media and politics – from not discussing ethnic differences to eradicating this taboo and 'stressing how things really are' (Prins, 2004; Scholten and Holzhacker, 2009: 91-93). Examining the ethnic minority background (sub)labels, Dutch critics – compared to their American and German colleagues – often discuss the authors' ethnic background by linking them to *other ethnic minority writers* (Table 3). For example: 'Together with Hafid Bouazza, he [Abdelkader Benali] is the best Dutch author that originated from second generation immigrants' (*De Telegraaf*, March 1, 2002). But whereas these specific labels make up 31% of all ethnic minority background labels in Dutch reviews in the period 1995-2002, this percentage actually declines to 4% after 2002, even though one would expect an increase, since the (multiculturalist) taboo on discussing social problems in relation to ethnic differences waned in public discourse after 2002. A plausible explanation might be that the arrival of many Moroccan minority authors around the same time (1995-2002) resulted in an ethnic minority 'hype' within the Dutch literary field (Anbeek, 1999). These field dynamics seem to

have created 'accentuation effects' (see Hogg and Abrams, 1988), that is, an exaggeration of the similarities between the works of Moroccan minority authors based on their common ethnic background rather than the contents of the works. As Dutch critics (and their readers) over time became more familiar with these authors, the hype wore off and ethnic boundaries became weaker. Indeed, many Moroccan Dutch authors viewed such ethnic classifications ('marking') as ethnic boundaries, complicating assimilation into the literary mainstream. For example, Naima el Bezaz stated: 'I am classified as a second-generation ethnic minority author. I think that is awful. I want to be evaluated by my work (…). Publishing house Contact has put my book on the market, because they consider it to be a good novel, not because I am an ethnic minority author' (*Rijn en Gouwe*, September 8, 1995). As the literary market in Netherlands is probably too small to build a successful career as an 'ethnic minority' author, writers are more inclined to oppose such ethnic typecasting than their American and German counterparts (cf. Zuckerman et al., 2001).

Germany

The strong ethnic boundaries in the German literary field seem in concordance with the classificatory tools made available by the German state, in which citizenship is exclusively based on descent rather than on birth or territory (Brubaker, 1992). As a result, Germany long denied being an immigration country, defining 'German' by what it is not, withholding citizenship from many 'foreigners' – who were actually born in Germany (Joppke, 1996; Labrie, 1994). Indeed, German reviewers classify ethnic minority authors most often directly as *individuals* of Turkish (non-German) *descent*, stressing the author's country of birth and immigration history (Table 3). It appears that such ethnic classifications merely provide the reader factual guidance

instead of performing boundary work (Debenedetti, 2006). However, in the case of majority authors, the country or place of birth was hardly ever mentioned (cf. Table 1). Furthermore, even for the most prestigious Turkish German authors – e.g., Feridun Zaimoglu – references to the authors' foreignness do not decrease over time: 'Zaimoglu, born in Turkey 1964, has been living in Germany for 30 years.' (*Der Tagesspiegel*, October 18, 2000), '[Zaimoglu], born in 1964 in Bolu, Anatolia, has been living in Germany for 35 years (*Frankfurter Rundschau*, March 15, 2006)' and finally 'The author who was born in 1964 in Bolu, Anatolia and has live in Germany for 37 years' (*Die Welt*, February 23, 2008). This persisting focus on the authors' non-German descent not only classifies Turkish German authors as 'essential foreigners', but also obscures the existence of ethnic boundaries under the guise of 'mere' factual information (Kibria, 2000; Moras, 2010). However, the chronic accessibility of ethnic classifications does not help us explain boundary change (ethnicization), that is, why second novels in particular contain relatively many ethnic minority background labels (93.3%). Possibly prestigious publishers choose to market Turkish German authors as "different/foreign" due to field competition (cf. Sapiro, 2010)?

Conclusion and Discussion

This study examined the presence of ethnic boundaries in American, Dutch and German reviews of ethnic minority writers' work between 1983 and 2009 by considering critics' use of ethnic minority background labels. The results first of all show that the strength of ethnic boundaries in literary reviews differs across the three countries. American critics less frequently classify Mexican American writers as ethnic minority authors than Dutch and German reviewers do so in the case of Moroccan and Turkish minority authors, respectively. Thus, Dutch and German critics

seem to draw stronger ethnic boundaries than their American counterparts. However, the relative lack (deliberate avoidance?) of ethnic minority background labels in American – but not in Dutch and German – reviews might also point to a color-blind ideology, emphasizing essential sameness between ethnic groups despite unequal social locations and histories (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). Furthermore, in all three countries we find evidence of boundary change. First time Mexican American authors are far more likely to be classified in terms of their ethnic background than non-debutants. Once Mexican American authors have crossed this (strong) boundary, however, critics classify them as part of the literary mainstream. In the Dutch case, ethnic boundaries have clearly shifted over time. The use of ethnic minority background labels in reviews of Moroccan Dutch authors declines significantly between 1995 and 2009, regardless of how many works individual authors have published. In German reviews, first book publications have a smaller chance of being labeled in ethnic terms than subsequent publications, suggesting a process of ethnicization instead of assimilation.

This study contributes to the sociology of culture as well as the sociology of race and ethnicity in several ways. First, contrary to what one might expect, the situational accessibility of ethnic classifications – here: book characteristics – hardly affects boundary construction and change. As such, ethnic minority authors themselves have few options to facilitate their entry into the literary mainstream since writing about majority themes, having their publisher classify them as mainstream authors, or publishing with a mainstream publisher seem to have little effect. First publications in particular represent a strong ethnic boundary, influencing the possibilities of assimilation into the literary mainstream (or at least, as critical reception). Thus, within the studied literary fields, assimilation is mainly a one-way

process in which critics – as (symbolic) gatekeepers – also draw ethnic boundaries; yet the role of boundary personnel has hardly been studied by sociologists of race and ethnicity. Future research should look more closely under what circumstances ethnic classifications crowd out aesthetic considerations in different artistic genres (cf. Brubaker et al., 2004). Experimental research designs might help tease out some of these effects (cf. Bortolussi et al., 2010).

Second, our findings show how cross-national differences in the chronic accessibility of ethnic classifications are not simply reflected, but 'translated' at the meso-level of the literary field. In the American literary field, ethnic boundaries seem primarily based on authentic ethnicity, where individual authors are regarded as ethno-racial insiders of the ethnic group in general. The simultaneous arrival of many Moroccan minority authors in the Dutch literary field seems to have resulted in 'accentuation effects', where critics focus strongly on these authors' shared ethnic background. Many Moroccan Dutch authors fear that such typecasting – ethnically interesting, but also implicating poor literary quality – complicates a long-term career within the small literary field of the Netherlands. Turkish German authors are granted 'easy' symbolic access into the literary field, but chances of becoming a full 'member' of the literary mainstream are much smaller as references to their foreignness persist during their careers. Sociologists of culture need to examine more closely how aesthetic agents – as critics – draw ethnic boundaries and how this relates to field dynamics. It would be interesting to include the use of majority background labels in future research. What does it mean when critics explicitly classify a Moroccan minority author as Dutch? We have already shown that such labels are hardly ever used when reviewers discuss the work of majority authors. Does this indicate that both ethnic and majority background labels are used to 'mark' ethnic

minority authors as different from the 'unmarked' majority authors (Brekhus, 1998)? Future research might also examine the extent to which different ethnic minority groups (e.g., highly assimilated Asian Americans versus Hispanics), and majority groups (e.g., Jewish Americans or ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe) are (un)marked. Considering these and many related questions, the study of ethnic boundaries in the arts provides a challenging – and highly relevant – domain for future sociological research.

Notes

1. Following Alba and Nee, we use the term 'mainstream' mainly as a heuristic device, which can be defined as "a core set of interrelated institutional structures and organizations regulated by rules and practices that weaken, even undermine, the influence of ethnic origins." (2003: 12) As such, the literary mainstream is not only made up of mainstream literary institutions (literary publishers, policy, criticism etc.). It also includes mainstreaming practices that foster assimilation, that is, backgrounding ethnic origins of 'included' ethnic minority authors. The latter aspect sets the 'literary mainstream' apart from the more excluding term 'literary majority'.

2. As longitudinal data on the ethnic minority author populations are not available, we consider, for each country, one ethnic-immigrant group of a similar type (labor immigration) with a comparable level of language proficiency and schooling (cf. Berkers et al., 2011). The Mexican minority is the largest labor-immigrant group in the U.S., representing almost 10% of the population. On average, Mexican Americans lag behind the (non-Hispanic) white majority, regarding English language proficiency and level of education (Carliner, 2000). In the Netherlands, the language skills and educational attainment of the Moroccan minority – about 2% of the population – are far behind the Dutch majority (Tesser et al., 1999). The Turkish minority group was not selected in the Dutch case, because very few Turkish minority authors have published in Dutch (Nap-Kolhoff, 2002). In Germany, the Turkish minority is the largest labor-immigrant group, rising from about 1.5 million in 1980 (2.5 % of the West-German population) to 2.5 million in 2005 (3 % of the unified German population). Compared to the majority population, the

Turkish minority is generally far less proficient in German and has a lower level of education (Dustmann, 1994; Worbs, 2003).

3. Not included are more general terms which are also used to address non-ethnic minorities (e.g., foreigners, guest workers), references to language (since Berber is not a written language and Spanish is not as exclusively linked to Mexican Americans as Turkish to Turkish Germans), and ethnic genres which not only refer to the ethnic background of an author, but also literary style.

4. Labels referring to ethnic minority authors as part of the majority population. Again, these terms may (a) refer directly to the author's majority background ('deutsche Schriftstellerin'), (b) stress author's descent or country of birth or residence ('the Netherlands, his native country' or 'lives in the United States') or (c) explicitly link author's fiction and reality ('writes about his American experience').

5. The *Pulitzer Prize fiction* and the *National Book Award fiction* (U.S.), the *AKO literatuurprijs* and *Libris literatuurprijs* (Netherlands) and the *Bremer Literaturpreis* and the German-language *Ingeborg-Bachmann-Preis* (Germany).

6. If we compare reviews of debut and subsequent publications that contain ethnic minority labels, the relative share of reviews linking the author's ethnic background to a story about a collective groups experience declines from 57.1% (4) for debuts to 37.5% (9) for subsequent publications. However, our reviews included not enough ethnic labels to draw any definite conclusions.

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Tables

Table 1. Ethnic minority (and majority) background labels in literary reviews in American, Dutch and German newspapers

	United States	Netherlands	Germany
Ethnic minority authors			
Reviews w/ ethnic minority background labels	20.3% (31)[a]	47.2% (60)	58.2% (71)
Mean review length (words)	632.2	647.3	632.3
Ethnic majority authors			
Reviews w/ majority background labels	3.8% (3)	2.9% (2)	4.0% (4)
Mean review length (words)	646.1[b]	648.8	719.1

a Difference between both American and Dutch as well as American and German reviews is statistically significant ($p<0.001$).
b Difference between American and German reviews is statistically significant ($p<0.05$).

Table 2. Logistic regression analyses for the effects of year of publication and book number on the likelihood that the ethnic background of an ethnic minority author is mentioned in a review in American, Dutch and German newspapers

	Model 1 United States	Model 2 United States	Model 3 United States	Model 1 Netherlands	Model 2 Netherlands	Model 1 Germany	Model 2 Germany
Boundary crossing							
Prose debut	2.735 (0.647)	9.186* (0.997)	8.751* (1.046)	0.924 (0.733)	0.208 (1.021)	0.230* (0.630)	0.118* (0.876)
Book number	1.260 (0.178)	1.623 (0.304)	1.801 (0.318)	0.979 (0.309)	1.961 (0.529)	0.908 (0.105)	0.852 (0.177)
Boundary shifting							
Year of book publication (age)	0.983 (0.044)	1.049 (0.083)	1.099 (0.090)	1.435*** (0.085)	1.790*** (0.162)	1.053 (0.053)	1.082 (0.093)
Background author							
Year of birth		1.076 (0.050)	1.098 (0.057)		1.039 (0.151)		1.088 (0.080)
Foreign born		-	-		0.230 (0.992)		1.637 (0.870)
Sex (male)		0.233* (0.663)	0.220* (0.705)		0.429 (0.884)		0.234 (1.176)
Book characteristics							
Ethnic background on book cover		2.204 (0.574)	2.195 (0.575)		3.885 (0.720)		1.080 (0.695)
Majority background on book cover		3.579 (0.655)	3.393 (0.686)		0.650 (0.762)		1.201 (0.743)
Book discusses ethnic themes		0.969 (0.210)	0.945 (0.212)		1.249 (0.502)		0.892 (0.209)
Book discusses majority themes		0.753 (0.426)	0.812 (0.433)		1.222 (0.930)		1.027 (0.248)
Literary prestige publishing house		0.083 (1.306)	0.091 (1.301)		0.502 (0.373)		2.422 (0.542)
Publisher of Hispanic literature (US)			1.771 (0.702)				
Review characteristics							
Length of review		1.004** (0.001)	1.004** (0.001)		1.002 (0.001)		1.002** (0.001)
National quality newspaper		0.059*** (0.878)	0.039** (1.084)		0.337 (0.572)		0.372* (0.487)
Hispanic readership (US)			0.517 (0.737)				
Hispanic reviewer (US)			2.090 (0.634)				
χ^2	3.7	47.9	50.7	46.3	64.0	8.6	29.2
Nagelkerke R^2	.041	.455	.476	.408	.528	.092	.289
N	134	134	134	127	127	122	122

Odds-ratios with standard errors in parentheses.

* = $p<0.05$; ** = $p<0.01$; *** = $p<0.001$

Table 3. Ethnic minority background labels and sublabels

Ethnic minority background labels	United States	Netherlands	Germany	US-NL	US-G	NL-G
Direct link to author ethnic background	63.6% (42)	51.1% (71)	35.8% (48)	n.s.	***	*
Individual	33.3% (14)	52.1% (37)	81.3% (39)	***	**	**
Link to other ethnic minority authors	26.2% (11)	40.8% (29)	0.0% (0)	n.s.	***	***
Link to minority group in general	40.5% (17)	7.0% (5)	18.8% (9)	***	*	n.s.
Descent of the author	9.1% (6)[a]	27.3% (38)	40.3% (54)	-	-	*
Link ethnic background author and story	27.3% (18)	21.6% (30)	23.9% (32)	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Story of individual	11.1% (2)	30.4% (7)	73.3% (22)	n.s.	***	**
Story of minority group in general	88.9% (16)	69.6% (16)	26.7% (8)	n.s.	***	**
Total	100% (66)	100% (139)	100% (134)			

$* = p<0.05$; $** p<0.01$; $*** = p<0.001$

a Since we included no first or 1.5. generation Mexican American authors, descent (e.g., country of birth) was hardly ever referred to in American reviews.

Appendix

Appendix A. Background characteristics and number of reviews of the selected Mexican American, Moroccan Dutch and Turkish German authors

Ethnic minority authors	Year of birth	Year prose debut	Sex	Gene-ration	Educational level	Total number reviews
United States						N=134
Sandra Cisneros	1954	1984	F	2	University	11
Helena M. Viramontes	1954	1985	F	2	University	7
Mary Helen Ponce	1938	1983	F	2	PhD	2
Ana Castillo	1953	1986	F	2	PhD	18
Dagoberto Gilb	1950	1985	M	2	University	10
Ronald L. Ruiz	1946	1994	M	2	University	5
Guy Garcia	1955	1989	M	2	University	4
Alfredo Vea	1946	1993	M	2	University	7
Cecile Pineda	1942	1985	F	2	University	8
Graciela Limon	1938	1993	F	2	PhD	8
Benjamin Alire Saenz	1954	1992	M	2	University	12
Sergio Troncoso	1961	1999	M	2	University	3
Luis J. Rodriguez	1954	2002	M	2	University	7
Kathleen Alcala	1954	1992	F	2	University	7
Rigoberto Gonzalez	1970	2003	M	2	University	2
Alma Luz Villanueva	1944	1988	F	2	University	2
Rene Saldana	1968	2001	M	2	PhD	1
Daniel Olivas	1959	2001	M	3	University	3
Manuel Ramos	1948	1993	M	2	University	10
Manuel Munoz	1972	2003	M	2 or 3	University	4
Felicia Luna Lemus	1975	2003	F	2 or 3	University	1
Arturo Islas	1938	1984	M	2 or 3	PhD	2
Netherlands						N=127
Hafid Bouazza	1970	1996	M	1.5	University	35
Abdelkader Benali	1975	1996	M	1.5	Vocational	33
Naima El Bezaz	1974	1995	F	1.5	University	13
Hans Sahar	1974	1995	M	1.5	High school	11
Khalid Boudou	1974	2001	M	1.5	High school	15
Said El Haji	1976	2000	M	1.5	University	7
Rashid Novaire	1979	1999	M	2	High school	7
Hasan Bahara	1978	2006	M	2	Vocational	3
Najoua Bijjir	1976	2001	F	2	Community	3
Germany						N=122
Emine Sevgi Özdamar	1946	1992	F	1	Theater	24
Feridun Zaimoglu	1964	1995	M	1.5	University	56
Yade Kara	1965	2003	F	1.5	University	6
Renan Demirkan	1955	1991	F	1.5	University	8
Hilal Sezgin	1970	2000	F	2	University	1
Dilek Güngör	1972	2004	F	2	University	2
Selim Özdogan	1971	1995	M	1.5	University	11
Hatice Akyün	1969	2005	F	2	University	3
Imran Ayata	1969	2005	M	1.5	University	6
Dilek Zaptcioglu	1960	1998	F	1.5	University	3
Hülya Özkan	1956	2006	F	1.5	University	2

Appendix B. Background characteristics and number of reviews of the selected majority authors

	Majority authors	Year of birth	Year prose debut	Sex	Educational level	Total number reviews
	United States					N=79
1	Wendy Brenner	1966	1997	F	University	7
2	Rachel Kadish	1969	1998	F	University	6
3	Jonathan Lethem	1964	1994	M	University	56
4	James McManus	1951	1984	M	University	10
	Netherlands					N=68
1	Thomas van Aalten	1978	2000	M	Vocational	16
2	Miquel Bulnes	1976	2003	M	University	7
3	Sanneke van Hassel	1971	2005	V	University	15
4	Tommy Wieringa	1967	1995	M	University	30
	Germany					N=100
1	Dietmar Dath	1970	1995	M	University	22
2	Annette Pehnt	1967	2001	F	University	30
3	Judith Kuckart	1959	1990	F	University	27
4	André Kubiczek	1969	2002	M	University	21