

# BRIDGING THE GAP

How ethnic boundary dynamics  
shape socio-cultural incorporation.  
A case study among Turkish Belgians

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## PREFACE

When I was a teenager, my mum used to always tell me to stick up for the kids who were left out, the ones who did not quite belong because they were different. At that time, I disregarded what she said because hanging out with the excluded is the last thing your insecure teenager personality needs. But apparently her words did make a lasting impression. As I grew older, I became more concerned about social inequality and wanted to help better the fate of those on the margins of society: people in poverty, stigmatized minority groups or those individuals who are excluded because they are too different from what the mainstream considers normal.

Already as an adolescent, I began to develop a specific concern for discrimination and exclusion based on skin color and ethnicity - a concern that eventually inspired me to undertake a six-year long study into the dynamics of ethnic boundary making, and into the impact those boundaries have on the lives of second and third generation Turkish Belgians. What lies in front of you is the product of these six years (to be honest: six and a half at this point – seems I just can't stop writing) of hard but rewarding work. I won't lie: it wasn't always easy, but positive feelings predominate, thanks to the support and help of many many amazing people.

I would first of all like to thank my supervisors Bart Van de Putte and Peter Stevens for their support and rock-solid belief in my work and capacities. Bart, thank you for hiring me as your teaching assistant. I can't remember there ever was a thing I wanted more (not even a particular pair of shoes) and am very grateful that you gave me the opportunity to pursue my academic dream. I wasn't the most easygoing teaching assistant and PhD student, but hey, it even counts for a supervisor: if you are thrown in the water, you'll learn how to swim 😊. Thank you for giving me the freedom to do it my way, and for challenging my point of view. The fact that we saw things differently sometimes, helped me strengthen my arguments for a particular claim, and I believe it has made me a better researcher. Thank you also for being understanding and providing emotional support when it got tough. I will never forget the note and the Nutcracker CD on my desk when it was all too much for me. And thank you for ensuring me I was doing good research whenever I was insecure because of another rejection, unsuccessful grant application or harsh comments of an aggressive Scandinavian feminist.

Peter, many many thanks for your constructive feedback in all stages of my research. When I started, qualitative research was completely new to me, so I was pretty insecure about the do's and don'ts, and I am really grateful that I had you by my side as some sort of mirror. Even though I had a pretty

good feeling about what I was doing in a methodological sense, it was reassuring and empowering to be able to “use” you to see if my gut feeling and qualitative instincts were right. Thank you also for the fast and thorough feedback you gave me on whatever I sent you. Your critical yet constructive remarks were extremely valuable and have definitely improved my writing. But most of all: Thank you for the friendship and the support. Thank you for caring about my love life – I’m pretty sure very few PhD students can also rely on their supervisor for relationship advice. Thank you for all the supportive conversations over Skype, in Ratz or in Manteca. And thank you for every “Ladyyy, don’t worry, you’re doing a good job.” I really needed that sometimes. You told me every PhD student tends to have a good cop and a bad cop, and I always thought that didn’t apply for me: I had two good ones. But I now realize I was probably my own bad cop, and I’m grateful for two supervisors who played the good ones. You both helped me to stay motivated and keep going, which is very much appreciated!

Piet Bracke, thank you for a special relationship that is hard to define. I am happy that you were not my supervisor, because it would never have worked out given my stubbornness and your style as a supervisor. But that gave us the chance to build some other kind of relationship. One that was grounded in a similar passion for life. Thank you for the many entertaining lunches, checking up on me when I was in New York and sharing your life wisdom. Just like you, I’m going to miss our conversations, but I hope that despite my departure, we will still have many chances to meet up, and talk about running, food, relationships and life.

To all my colleagues in the Sociology department: Thank you for contributing to a great work atmosphere. The value of being in a work environment where those around you are friends rather than competitors can hardly be overestimated. As friends, we celebrated each other’s successes and eased each other’s pains, which, at least for me, has been a big source of support and motivation. Coffee breaks and after work drinks helped me to wind down, release my stress, and voice my frustrations. And your amazing work and expertise have helped me to improve my own. Being a prototypical case of *circular migration*, I need to thank the whole second floor of KM5 for being terrific *floor mates*. You all thought it was a bit pathetic I was sitting by myself in the corridor, but I was happy there, not in the least because I felt I was among all of you rather than alone. There are two colleague-friends in particular I want to thank. First, the big friendly giant: Koen, thank you for working with me on the IMR article. I will always remember you as the guy who helped me publish my first A1 article and am really grateful for that! Second, Orhan, çok çok teşekkür ederim for all the discussions, talks, support and help. We definitely did not always agree, but your controversial opinions and style have helped me to sharpen my own thinking and given me new ideas. Also, the fact that you reassured me

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everything you have given me, from the candy at your childhood birthday parties to the joy of seeing *little monster* smile. Sarah, we are living proof that love at first sight is not necessary for a strong friendship. Thank you for being an endless source of support, advice and fun in all domains of life. Being the most versatile person I know, you will never stop to surprise me. It is truly inspiring to see how you combine being a successful academic with being a loving and caring mother for Irene and Robert, and not even complaining when it gets difficult. And I will never stop loving how you can turn in a second from being a critical, intellectual, and even intimidating academic into a screaming teenager with a peculiar flirting style. Claudia, my platonic husband, you might not realize it but you helped me understand what it means to be a migrant and what it is like to live in a country that is not your own. Thanks to you, I experienced from up close how people end up staying even if it was not intended, and what it takes to “negotiate cultural differences” in a relationship. But of course you are so much more than that. Above all, you are an amazing friend. Thank you for making me laugh and drying my tears. Thank you for comforting me during my worst crises, and for being the amazing, silly, passionate person that you are. To everyone: If I am full of energy, positive and motivated, it is mainly because I feel lucky to be surrounded by so many amazing people. Thanks guys for being my friends and making me a better and stronger person that way.

Evidently, I would not stand here without the support of my loving, encouraging family. Mum and dad, I often did not understand why you pushed me so hard to get the best possible results, but now I recognize that your high expectations have helped me to undertake this project. If you wouldn't have pushed me that hard, I might not have been the persevering perfectionist that I am now. Thank you for supporting me throughout my loooooong and sometimes unexpected school career, both financially and emotionally. But most of all, thank you for providing me with a warm nest, lots of cuddles and love, and for making me care about those who are not as privileged as I am. Lien, thank you for being such a joyful and caring sister. Thank you for being there when I felt bad, and helping me forget the bad stuff with one of your silly jokes or a big pack of fries. I hope I won't disappoint as the godmother of your baby and will make sure (s)he will get as much love, joy and support from me as you have given me. Tante, thank you for raising me as a person that dares to think out of the box and is not afraid to walk the unbeaten paths. Also, thank you for your continuing interest in whatever it was I was studying, even though it was not always easy to understand. But again: thank you most of all for loving me and help me to become a strong, independent woman.

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# CHAPTER 1

# BEING TURKISH &

# MUSLIM IN EUROPE

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## *Introduction*



*Picture by Bas Bogaerts*



**DRIE GENERATIES**

*By Fatih*

Waar is mijn thuis?

Waar ligt mijn toekomst?

Waar krijg ik recht op respect, recht op wat mij toekomt?

Gevangen tussen werelden die niet hetzelfde zijn

Drie generaties, drie evoluties

Waar ligt mijn toekomst?

Waar krijg ik recht op respect, recht op wat mij toekomt?

Gevangen tussen werelden die niet hetzelfde zijn

Drie generaties...

Waar is ons thuis?

Aan welke kant van d' oceaan?

Buitenstaander aan elke kant van d'ocean

In Gent zijde ne vrende, in Emirdag yabancı

Migri in Tunis, in Tanger étranger

Je weet niet hoe het voelt - te leven tussen alles

De weg kwijt gelijk ne GPS die in de war is

(see Appendix 1 for all translations)





## INTRODUCTION

The year 2014 marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Turkish migration to Belgium, Belgium celebrates fifty years of Turkish migration. But after half a century and three generations, Turkish Belgians are still often regarded as second-class citizens who self-segregate and are not fully integrated into mainstream society. In public and political discourse, they are often portrayed as the essential other who fails or even refuses to integrate, they are regularly confronted with anti-Islamic sentiments and discrimination, and as a group, they occupy one of the lowest rungs of the social ladder in terms of occupational prestige, income or educational attainment. Based on qualitative research with second and third generation Turkish Belgians, this dissertation focuses on dynamics that can explain the enduring relevance of this boundary, and on how these mechanisms shape Turkish Belgians' socio-cultural incorporation.

Unlike most research on immigrant incorporation<sup>1</sup> in Europe, then, this dissertation does not focus on immigrant *integration*, but on what can be regarded as the polar opposite: *ethnic boundaries*. Whereas *integration* generally refers to a situation in which ethnic groups or individuals are included in mainstream society, the concept of *ethnic boundaries* denotes a situation in which ethnic groups remain clearly distinct. Following Weber (1968, p. 389), I define *ethnic groups* as those “human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration.”

Generally speaking, ethnic boundaries have both a symbolic and a social dimension (Lamont & Molnar, 2002). The symbolic dimension is reflected in the idea that members of various ethnic groups are essentially different from each other: notions of “us” versus “them” are created, lumping individuals into “objectively” differentiated groups. The social dimension refers to groupings of people on an aggregate level, and reveals itself in stable behavioral patterns of association – people marry, befriend and share a neighborhood with co-ethnics – as well as in inequalities in different domains of life, such as unequal access to the mainstream labor market. The basic tenet of *ethnic boundary theory* (Barth, [1969] 1998) is that the enduring relevance of this boundary is not dependent on continuing cultural differences, but rather on the maintenance of the boundary by members of both groups.

The boundary in question in this dissertation is the one between the Turkish population and what I will call *ethnic Belgians* – or Belgians that have no recent migration history – in Flanders, Belgium.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this dissertation, I will use the term *immigrant incorporation* to refer to the incorporation or position of immigrants as well as their descendants into the larger society's social structures.

I have selected the Turkish population because they are a theoretically relevant case to study the continuing relevance and impact of ethnic boundaries: they are the largest immigrant group in Europe, and represent a case of *bright boundaries*, both in symbolic and social terms (Alba, 2005). In many European countries, the Turkish population is regarded as essentially different from the mainstream, mainly based on their religion, Islam. In social terms, there is a high degree of inequality, with members of the Turkish population often occupying the lowest rung of the social ladder, as well as a high degree of social differentiation.

In this context of a bright ethnic boundary between the Turkish population and the mainstream, I wanted to study why these boundaries remain so bright, or significant, and how they shape Turkish Belgians' socio-cultural incorporation. The goal of this dissertation is twofold. First of all it sets out to study the *ethnic boundary dynamics* – the dynamic processes of marking, maintaining, negotiating and changing the boundary. A focus on boundary *dynamics* recognizes that boundaries are not reified and fixed phenomena, but that they result from an active construction process. They can, therefore, be reproduced, as well as challenged, redefined and changed. Second, I explore how these dynamics influence individual-level aspects of *socio-cultural incorporation* such as (ethnic and national) self-identification, cultural incorporation and partner choice.

The main theoretical proposition of this dissertation is that *individual socio-cultural incorporation* – including individuals' social connections, subjective aspects of incorporation such as sense of belonging and identification, and their self-positioning in terms of culture – is largely shaped by ethnic boundary dynamics. It is my aim to demonstrate that Barth's ethnic boundary approach is a useful theoretical starting point for studying differences in socio-cultural incorporation, both between and within ethnic groups. Or, to put it differently: I argue that ethnic boundary dynamics are central in understanding the divergent paths individuals take: while some draw the ethnic card, others actively try to assimilate and still others simultaneously do both. Recognizing the importance of boundary dynamics in the process of incorporation does not mean that immigrants and their descendants are powerless regarding ethnic boundaries and external sources of constraint. Rather, they are active agents who (depending on their position in the social hierarchies) negotiate the symbolic and social boundaries they confront.

While a focus on *integration* mainly describes the outcome of the process of incorporation, as well as factors that explain differences in various outcomes, the study of ethnic boundary dynamics focuses on the underlying mechanisms that explain in detail *how* and *why* people become incorporated the way they do. Focusing on ethnic boundary dynamics rather than on who is "integrated" and who is not, gives a more accurate indication of the structural and symbolic factors

that shape individuals' path towards a particular pattern of socio-cultural incorporation. Furthermore, a focus on ethnic boundary allows us to understand how these forces and boundaries are negotiated and changed or maintained over time. Consequently, it better grasps the interaction between structure and agency in the incorporation process.

The remainder of this chapter starts with a discussion of public and academic discourses on integration in Europe, followed by a section on ethnic boundaries in Europe. After this outline of the context of my research, I present my research agenda, which includes a section on *research aims* as well as a discussion of my *intellectual genealogy* – the premises which underlie my research – namely a focus on boundaries, attention to both structure and agency and a constructionist approach to ethnicity. I end the chapter with an overview of the theoretical and empirical chapters that make up this dissertation.

## EUROPEAN INTEGRATION DISCOURSES

In public, policy and academic discourse in Europe, *integration* is the dominant concept when it comes to describing processes of immigrant incorporation, unlike in the United States, where *assimilation* is more common (Alba, Reitz, & Simon, 2012; Morawska, 2008; Schneider & Crul, 2010). Both in public and academic discourse in Europe, the word integration generally refers to what Esser has labeled *social integration* – the inclusion of an individual or a group into a social structure (2004, p. 1130).

In European public and policy discourse, the term *integration* has a decidedly normative connotation: it is considered the preferred situation – especially when compared to segregation or parallel societies. Unlike in the United States, cohesive co-ethnic communities and retention of premigration cultural patterns are frowned upon, and considered as the antithesis of successful incorporation into mainstream society. Precisely because integration is regarded as preferable, many European governments have developed integration policies to enhance the immigrants' integration. Officially, many European countries define integration as a two-way process that leaves room for the retention of ethno-cultural diversity, but in reality, integration is increasingly seen as the responsibility of the immigrants and their children (Blommaert, 2011; Blommaert & Verschueren, 1992). The controversy over the headscarf, and the restrictions imposed on transnational marriages demonstrate that immigrant groups are not only held responsible for their own structural incorporation, but that they are in addition increasingly expected to shed their premigration cultural practices, norms and values as well. It seems then that “the liberal mantra of two-way integration, according to which not just the migrants but also the receiving societies must change” is hardly ever

realized (Joppke, 2007, p. 248): the burden to change mainly rests on the shoulders of immigrants and their descendants – who are expected to give up on their identity, culture and religion – while the task of the host society seems merely to develop antidiscrimination policies.

While in public discourse, *integration* generally denotes a process or situation of becoming *culturally* similar to members of the mainstream society, in academic studies it mainly refers to immigrants' *structural* incorporation into the core institutions of the host society (Crul & Mollenkopf, 2012). According to Alba, Reitz and Simon (2012), integration or incorporation may include successful participation in labor markets, housing markets, schools, politics, and in informal social relations in local communities. But the concept of *integration* is far less used in the context of socio-cultural incorporation: “[The integration perspective] considers the cultural characteristics of immigrants, such as their identity, their ethnic social and community attachments, their religion, and their retention of ethnic culture over time, to be distinct topics, separate from the question of structural integration” (Alba et al., 2012). Consequently, there is no well-developed theoretical framework that studies and explains individual- and group level differences in socio-cultural aspects of incorporation (including identification, feelings of belonging and ethno-cultural change). My focus on how ethnic boundary dynamics shape socio-cultural incorporation is an effort towards developing a theoretical model that helps to explain differences in this process.

## **SOCIETAL INTEGRATION AND ETHNIC BOUNDARIES IN EUROPE AND BELGIUM**

Both in academic and policy discourse, *integration* rarely means *societal integration*, in reference to structural cleavages and boundaries within a society (Esser, 2004). In this sense, it is not people or groups who are integrated, but society itself. A completely integrated society is one with no social boundaries and no conflicts between ethnic groups. Conversely, a society that is not integrated is one that has strong boundaries between different groups and cannot be considered “a whole.” I reserve the term *integration* to refer to societal integration (as opposed to a situation of ethnic boundaries) and use *incorporation* to refer to individuals' position within particular social structures. *The center* and *the mainstream* refer to dominant aspects of or groups in a society which have more power to define their own norms, values and beliefs as the default, and use them as legitimate bases for social organization<sup>2</sup>. Those who do not belong to the mainstream will be referred to on the basis of their

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<sup>2</sup> I prefer these terms over the term majority, because as more and more cities are increasingly characterized by so-called super-diversity, the dominant group is no longer necessarily the numerical majority (Vertovec, 2007). I also do not want to characterize the mainstream in ethnic terms - by referring to the ethnicity of the dominant “ethnic group”

shared experience of immigrating to Belgium or having parents/grandparents who immigrated to Belgium. For example, I refer to all people of Turkish ancestry in Belgium as part of the *Turkish population*, regardless of their nationality, and use the label *Turkish Belgians* for Belgian citizens of Turkish ancestry.

Returning to the idea of societal integration, we see that in ethnic terms, Belgium – like other Western and Northern European countries – is far from an integrated society: there are clear ethnic boundaries between the Muslim population – many of whom are of Turkish origin – and the mainstream, both in symbolic and social terms (Zolberg & Woon, 1999). *Symbolic boundaries* between Muslims and those belonging to the center, manifest themselves in the idea that Muslims are quintessentially different from other Europeans, and hence difficult to incorporate. In contrast with the “modern,” “equality-minded,” and “individualist” European, the prototypical Muslim is seen as “pre-modern,” “tribal,” and “misogynist” (Razack, 2004). The tendency to depict Muslims as the ultimate others and regard them as a threat to national safety and the social fabric has increased with events such as the attack on the World Trade Center in New York in 2001 and subsequent bombings in London and Madrid. These dramatic events have raised concerns about “deracinated” young Muslims that seek refuge in radicalized Islam (Sunier, 2009) and intensified the idea that Muslims are the essential others that “refuse to integrate.”

In Belgium and many other European countries, these symbolic boundaries and anti-Muslim sentiments are often translated into social exclusion and discrimination. In 1994, Roosens reported that “thousands of flyers have been sent to sons and daughters of Muslim migrants, telling them in friendly terms that if they are ever accepted they will always remain second class citizens, and that their chances to become fully-fledged human beings are much higher in their country of origin, where they really belong” (Roosens, 1994). These sentiments have changed little since: in December 2011, members of the anti-immigrant right-wing party *Vlaams Belang* handed out flyers in Sleepstraat in Ghent – a street famous for its large number of Turkish shops and restaurants – to incite young people to “go back” to Turkey (Van Pee, 2011), ignoring the fact that most young Turks technically cannot “go back,” as they have never lived there. These events might seem trivial but are indicative of the prominence of anti-immigrant sentiments and discrimination in Belgium – a “leader” in these respects in Europe (Billiet & De Witte, 2008; Strabac & Listhaug, 2008). In

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(whatever that may be in a country as linguistically diverse and politically complex as Belgium), because as ethnic boundaries shift or blur, several ethnic groups can become incorporated into the mainstream and change it in the process (Alba & Nee, 2003). In the 1950s for instance, Italians in Belgium were considered outsiders, but nowadays they are regarded as fully integrated and part of the mainstream (Roosens, 1994).



October 2013, the Flemish newspaper *De Standaard* delved into the issue of racism and discrimination in Belgium. The image that emerged from the testimonies of people with a migration background (most of whom were Turkish and Moroccan) and other related studies, was that of an intolerant, racist country. The title of the first part of the series of articles, “Well-integrated yet discriminated,” accurately described ethnic minorities’ experiences in Belgium (Eckert, 2013). Belgians, apparently, *discriminate without discrimination*: they are not selective in who they target, and discriminate regardless of people’s degree of integration, educational level, language proficiency or gender<sup>3</sup>. Because Turks are the largest (Muslim) immigrant group in Europe, and a sizeable Turkish population is present in most of the Western and Northern European countries, Turkish Europeans are seen in many parts of Europe as the *essential other* and are often the main targets of these anti-Muslim sentiments and discriminatory practices.

Partly because of the first-generation Turkish immigrants’ low human capital (most received very little education in Turkey) and tendencies to self-segregate (often because of exclusion), there is not only a symbolic boundary, but also a strong and persistent *social boundary* between Turkish Europeans and the center. This social boundary manifests itself in persistent ethnic inequalities, most notably in the labor market. In Belgium, members of the Turkish population are often at the bottom of the ethnic hierarchy when it comes to labor market position (Phalet & Heath, 2011). This *Turkish disadvantage* is not only attributable to their low educational level, but also to discrimination in hiring. For long, evidence of labor market discrimination has been anecdotal.<sup>4</sup> Recently, however, a study showed that discrimination impedes the transition from school to work for those with a foreign sounding name (Baert, Cockx, Gheyle, & Vandamme, 2013). Results revealed that applicants with a (fictive) Turkish name had to send out twice as many applications as those with Flemish names to obtain a similar number of positive reactions (For a similar study with Arabic names in the Netherlands, see Blommaert, Coenders, & van Tubergen, 2013).

The social boundary between the Turkish population and the center not only manifests itself in ethnic inequality but also in *ethnic differentiation* – a term referring to differences with regard to the various social systems within a broader societal context, for instance labor subsystems, parallel communities and regional subsocieties (Esser, 2004). In many European cities, the Turkish population appears to form a parallel society, characterized by high residential concentration,

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<sup>3</sup> The reported data are based on a study among second and third generation Turks and Moroccans in Antwerp (Vandezande, Fleischmann, Baysu, Swyngedouw, & Phalet, 2009)

<sup>4</sup> Think for instance about the recruitment agency Adecco’s practice of assigning the label BBB (officially referring to *Blue Blanc Belge* – a cattle breed that produces high quality meat) to those companies who prefer ethnic Belgians over members of an ethnic minority.

institutional completeness (many communities have their own associations, stores, labor market, and in some cases even schools), strong group cohesion and an outspoken preference for endogamy (Crul & Mollenkopf, 2012). Although this high degree of segregation is related to processes of exclusion by the mainstream society, this is only one side of the story. Processes of self-segregation have not been studied in-depth among Turkish Europeans, but it seems plausible that boundaries between them and the mainstream are not only imposed from the outside, but also from within. The existence of transplanted communities (Reniers, 2000), high institutional completeness, taboo regarding interethnic marriages, and pressure to avoid assimilation (De Vries, 1995; Lindo, 1996) all suggest that social boundaries are also partly constructed by the ethnic minority itself.

In mainstream public and political discourse, social boundaries and Muslims' "lack of integration" tend to be attributed to their unwillingness to fit in and give up premigration cultural patterns. By the late 1980s, right-wing populist parties such as *Vlaams Blok* (now *Vlaams Belang*) in Flanders, *Front National* in France and the Austrian Freedom Party started portraying Muslim immigrants as an unwanted group of people that take advantage of social welfare, partake in criminal activities and hold on to "oppressive" and "backward" cultures. Today, however, the tendency to hold Muslim immigrants and their descendants accountable for many societal problems and the failure of multiculturalism is no longer only the populist parties' mantra. In 2010, German Chancellor Angela Merkel – member of the Christian Democratic Union – claimed that "multiculturalism had failed," and that it was the immigrants' task to do more to integrate in German society. Merkel said that in the past, "too little had been required of immigrants" and added that they should learn German in order to cope in school and take advantage of opportunities in the labor market (Weaver, 2010). Thilo Sarrazin, a member of the German social-democratic party SPD and former member of the German Central Bank board went even further, arguing that Muslim immigrants "did not want to integrate and were happy to rely on criminality and welfare instead" (Crul & Mollenkopf, 2012, p. 5).

## RESEARCH AGENDA

In this context of bright ethnic boundaries – a context in which Turkish immigrants and their descendants are increasingly held responsible for the failure of their own integration – I wanted to study how Turkish Belgians of the second and third generation themselves experience these boundaries, and how this shapes their socio-cultural incorporation. Considering the extent to which Turks in Europe are othered and discriminated against, I suspected a strong impact of such processes on feelings of belonging, self-identification, acculturation and social incorporation.

When reading through European integration and American assimilation literature however, looking for theoretical propositions or models that could help to explain differences in socio-cultural incorporation, I was left unsatisfied (For a similar experience, see Hesters, 2011). At the start of my research (in 2007), European integration research was theoretically under-developed (Martiniello & Rath, 2010; Morawska, 2008), and the American assimilation theories were heavily US-centered and mainly focused on educational and economic outcomes (Stepick & Stepick, 2010). Eventually, I discovered that Fredrik Barth's ethnic boundary approach offered the ideas and concepts I needed in order to explain how ethnic boundary dynamics shape processes of socio-cultural incorporation.

## **RESEARCH AIMS**

My PhD is dedicated to demonstrating the relevance of the ethnic boundary approach for studies of immigrant incorporation. By integrating Barth's ethnic boundary approach (and by extension the more recent agency-centered boundary theories) into European and American theories of incorporation, I want to build on research that focuses on socio-cultural incorporation of immigrant groups. My main claim is that a focus on ethnic boundary dynamics can help to explain differences in socio-cultural integration such as self-identification in ethnic, national, local and religious terms, feelings of home and belonging, retention or shedding of premigration cultural practices and patterns of association such as friendships and partner choice.

Empirically, the aim of this dissertation is twofold. First, I want to come to an in-depth understanding about how both the mainstream and the Turkish population in Belgium contribute to the construction and maintenance of ethnic boundaries. Using in-depth interviews with Turkish Belgians, I try to grasp how they are confronted with ethnic boundary construction in their day-to-day lives through contacts with people and institutions within both mainstream society and the Turkish population, and how they negotiate it.

Second, I focus on how these ethnic boundary dynamics shape individual-level aspects of second and third generation Turkish Belgians' socio-cultural incorporation, including the retention of premigration cultural patterns, self-identification and partner choice. By focusing on how ethnic boundary dynamics shape individual socio-cultural incorporation, I contest the idea, present in both public and particular strands of academic integration discourse, that integration is a matter of goodwill on the part of the immigrants. Unlike many European integration studies however, I do not let the pendulum swing to the other extreme – focusing only on the impact of structural constraints – and also pay attention to how members of the second and third generation respond to these constraints and negotiate ethnic boundaries.

I take a qualitative approach to address these questions, including in-depth interviews and focus groups with second- and third-generation Turkish Belgians, and ethnographic fieldwork. The data have mainly been collected in Ghent and Limburg, two regions in Flanders that have sizeable populations of Turkish labor migrants, but which also differ considerably in terms of their migration history and social structure.

### **FOCUS ON BOUNDARIES, AGAINST A HERDERIAN ONTOLOGY**

The first premise that underlies this dissertation is that ethnic groups should not be seen as self-evident units of analysis, endowed with a unique culture, shared identity and communitarian solidarity. Such a view of ethnic groups relies on a Herderian social ontology that sees each people as the representation of “a distinctive manifestation of a shared human capacity for cultivation” (Herder, 1968, cited in Wimmer, 2013, p. 16). According to Herder, each *people* is defined by three characteristics: the formation of a community held together by strong ties among its members, a shared group identity based on a sense of shared historical destiny and a common culture and language.

According to Wimmer (2013), much of Herder’s social ontology has survived and shaped empirical research on immigrant ethnicity. He demonstrates that various strands of assimilation theory, cultural pluralism and ethnic studies rely on Herderian ontology in the sense that they try to understand immigrant incorporation by focusing on how different ethnic groups incorporate in different ways (For a similar claim, see also Crul & Schneider, 2010; Stepick & Stepick, 2010). Taking ethnic groups as singular analytical categories not only ignores heterogeneity *within* ethnic groups, but also potentially obscures underlying social processes that *produce* diversification within and between ethnic groups (Crul & Schneider, 2010; Vermeulen, 2010).

Moving to the other side of the spectrum, Wimmer (2013) also warns against *radical constructivism*, pointing out that the anti-Herderian view does not imply that ethnic categories *necessarily* cut across zones of shared culture, and that they sometimes *do* exhibit communitarian solidarity and shared identification. What matters most is not to take communitarian closure, a shared identity and cultural distinctiveness for granted, but to demonstrate empirically that the groups in question do or do not display these features.

In this dissertation, I am moving beyond the Herderian approach in two ways. First, my research is built on the Barthian idea that the persistence of a common culture and identity is the *consequence* of ethnic boundary maintenance, rather than the defining characteristic of an ethnic group. In line with Barth and Wimmer, I believe that the Herderian view of ethnic groups needs to be replaced with the boundary-making approach, which sees enduring ethnic distinctions as resulting from marking

and maintaining a boundary, rather than from actual cultural differences. In this worldview, social boundaries between Turks and the mainstream are not explained as following from cultural differences or a cultural distance between the two groups, but as a result of the ethnic boundary maintenance.

Second, I try to avoid Herderian pitfalls by examining within-group differences, rather than comparing several ethnic groups. Wimmer has argued that in order to truly move beyond the Herderian approach, it is necessary to de-ethnicize research designs by selecting “non-ethnic units of observation,” such as individuals, localities, classes or institutional fields. Although this dissertation focuses only on people with Turkish ancestry, it follows the anti-Herderian approach in the sense that it focuses on *intragroup variation* in community cohesion, identification and other aspects of socio-cultural incorporation.

## **STRUCTURE VERSUS AGENCY**

My approach to the role of ethnic boundary dynamics in explaining socio-cultural incorporation is not deterministic but rather an approach that sees socio-cultural incorporation as an ongoing process of negotiating one’s own preferences while being part of certain social structures that create boundaries and opportunities. I use the notion of *structure* here in the broad sense of *social context*, or the factors that present themselves as external realities to individuals. In line with relational sociology, I see these external realities as the consequences of social interactions and transactions, and as dynamic and ongoing processes, rather than as static ties and entities (Emirbayer, 1997). Agency, then, entails the “engagement by actors of different structural environments [which] both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations” (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). Such a view of agency corresponds to classical pragmatist thought: “The subject is that which suffers, is subjected and which endures resistance and frustration; it is also that which attempts subjection of hostile conditions; that which takes the immediate initiative in remaking the situation as it stands” (Dewey, cited in Emirbayer, 1997, p. 294). I do not have a deterministic conception of social structure, nor am I an advocate of voluntarism, but stress the interconnectedness of social structure and individual agency, and see individuals as agents that negotiate alternative forms of behavior within the bounds of structural constraint (Bourdieu, 1995), and have the power to transform those structures in the process.

In accounting for context, individual agency and meaning-giving, I am following the lead of many contemporary ethnicity scholars. Esser (2004) for instance argues that any study of intergenerational integration has to explore both the logic of the situation – the objective societal

structures – and the logic of selection, thereby connecting the selection of certain behavior with these societal structures. The same idea can be found in Alba & Nee’s neo-assimilation theory (2003), which asserts the notion of *context-bound rationality*. Context-bound rationality (or *bounded rationality* in Esser’s terms) focuses analytic attention on integrating accounts of choices made by individuals with an analysis of the institutional context. It views agency as stemming from choices made by actors according to perceptions of costs and benefits embedded in the institutional environment. Finally, focusing on ethnicity and identity, Cornell and Hartmann (2007) highlight that understanding ethnicity requires an understanding of how individuals interpret and negotiate their lives in ethnic ways, as well as how this is affected by larger historical and social forces. Both self-understanding and external factors matter, they argue, as well as how people react to these externalities.

### **CONSTRUCTIONIST APPROACH TO ETHNICITY**

In this dissertation, I follow Cornell and Hartmann’s *constructionist approach* to the study of ethnicity – an approach which is grounded in *circumstantialism* combined with key insights of *primordialism* and, as already explained above, a large dose of *activism*: a focus on the contributions the groups themselves make to creating and shaping their own and others’ identities.

The constructivist approach is rooted in Weber’s definition of ethnicity (1968: 389), in which ethnic groups are “human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration.” Constructivism denies the idea that ethnicity is given and fixed, and stresses its fluidity and context-dependence. What matters in this view of ethnicity is not a set of common cultural practices or blood ties, but rather a *subjective belief* or *social construction* of common descent. Constructivism aligns with the anti-Herderian approach, in the sense that identities and cultural practices are seen as related, yet independent. Just like the existence of an ethnic group, the *sense* of ethnic distinctiveness does not depend on actual distinctive cultural practices. It is perfectly possible for people to proudly proclaim their ethnic identities while at the same time displaying very few culturally distinct practices (See for instance Alba, 1990; Bakalian, 1993; Gans, 1979; Waters, 1990). Within a constructivist vision, ethnicity is often seen as a response to certain circumstances and contexts – hence the term *circumstantialism*. By the circumstantialist account, individuals or groups emphasize their own ethnic identity in response to particular circumstances, when it is to their advantage. Following the same logic, individuals or groups can also label others with an ethnic identifier, and hence draw boundaries that help to secure certain goods.



*Constructivism* is often juxtaposed with *primordialism*, which stands for “the idea that ethnic and racial identities are fixed, fundamental, and rooted in the unchangeable circumstances at birth” (Cornell & Hartmann, 2007). This view on ethnicity has been criticized extensively (See for instance Cornell & Hartmann, 2007; McKay, 1982) and most contemporary scholars agree that ethnicity is not fixed and unchangeable but rather constructed and, therefore flexible. Some scholars, however, still see merits in the primordialist approach (Bayar, 2009; Roosens, 1994). Those who do, do not see ethnicity as anchored in blood ties, given by birth, fixed and unchanging, but draw attention to the idea of *constructed primordialities*. This refers to the idea that ethnicity is often *felt* or *constructed* as being something primordial:

Whatever [the] actual origins, [it is] experienced by many people as touching something deeper and more profound than labels or interests or contingency. This felt power (...) seems to be rooted in intimately shared experiences and interactions, in the sense of connection to the past, and in the quasi-mystical significance often attributed to blood ties” (Cornell & Hartmann, 2007, p. 93).

The power of these *primordial attachments* (Geertz, 1963) lies in the human need to belong to communities of interaction and meaning, based on something more meaningful than mere rational or utilitarian interests (Shils, 1957). Even in increasingly individualized industrial and post-industrial societies, individuals need relationships that give them a feeling of deep and lasting connectedness, and ethnic and racial ties often satisfy this need (Cornell & Hartmann, 2007, p. 58).

Cornell and Hartmann’s *constructionist approach* combines elements of both perspectives, focusing on the fluidity of ethnicity as well as on the power of primordial attachments. Their approach “focuses on the ways ethnic and racial identities are built, rebuilt and sometimes dismantled over time, [and] places interactions between circumstances and groups at the heart of these processes” (Cornell & Hartmann, 2007, p. 75). Cornell and Hartmann follow Barth in his claim that both self-ascription and ascription by others are critical in the making of ethnic groups and identities, and, hence, underscore the importance of structure as well as agency. Ethnicity and race, they argue, are not simply labels forced upon people; they are also identities that people accept, resist, choose, specify, invent, redefine, reject, actively defend and so forth. They involve not only circumstances, but also active responses to circumstances by individuals and groups, guided by their own preconceptions, dispositions and agendas.

## OVERVIEW

In chapter two, I introduce the ethnic boundary approach as first developed by Barth and subsequently refined and elaborated by scholars such as Andreas Wimmer and Michèle Lamont. I

discuss the different building blocks of an in-depth study of ethnic boundaries and ethnic boundary dynamics in any given context, and present a conceptual model of the different aspects of *ethnic boundary maintenance*. Chapter three gives an overview of the most influential theories of incorporation, focusing specifically on what they address regarding socio-cultural aspects of incorporation. Both American and European perspectives are discussed, as well as their strengths and limitations. At the end of the chapter, I present a theoretical framework that can guide the study of socio-cultural incorporation, and integrate elements of several of the discussed perspectives, as well as provide an overview of my research questions. Chapter four is dedicated to a sketch of the migration history and societal position of Turkish immigrants and their descendants in Belgium and chapter five is a discussion of this study's methodology, with a strong focus on reflexivity.

Chapters six to eleven make up the empirical part of this dissertation and I group them based on the research questions and whether the focus of the article is on boundary construction by the Turkish population or by the mainstream. The first three chapters focus on how boundaries are constructed and negotiated by members of the Turkish community. Chapter six focuses on the *boundary markers* that Turkish Belgians use to draw a boundary between themselves and the mainstream. Many studies have described how Turkish Belgians (or, by extension, Muslims) are seen by the center, but much less is known about how members of Muslim populations see themselves vis-à-vis the others. In this chapter, I describe how Turkish Belgians construct *Turkishness* in opposition to *Belgianness* and explore how their boundary markers relate to those constructed by members of and institutions in the dominant group. Chapter seven is dedicated to the phenomenon of *ethnic conformity pressure* by the co-ethnic community, which I conceptualize as an internally-oriented mechanism of ethnic boundary maintenance. This chapter explains variability within co-ethnic groups regarding pressure to conform, and the impact on socio-cultural incorporation through a comparative study of how macro-structural characteristics of cities (in this case Ghent and the mining towns in Limburg) shape ethnic community-level conformity pressure. Chapter eight builds on chapter seven in the sense that it explores how individuals deal with the pressure to conform. I present a typology of different reactions to ethnic conformity pressure and discuss the different factors that shape which strategy is used and the link between each strategy and processes of ethno-cultural change.

*Chapter nine* integrates both research aims into one study: it focuses on how boundaries are constructed by the mainstream (albeit from the perspective of Turkish Belgians), as well as how the dynamics of boundary construction and negotiation impact individual self-identification. I first explore how practices of exclusion, othering and discrimination are experienced by members of the

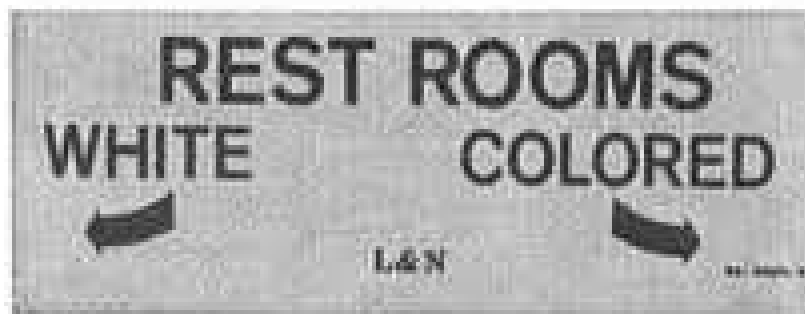
Turkish population in Belgium. Then I examine Turkish Belgians' identity narratives, focusing not only on the impact of othering and exclusion but also on how they try to create a positive identity despite negative experiences.

Finally, chapters ten and eleven focus on partner choice in a context of ethnic boundaries. Since intermarriage is often seen as the indicator of assimilation and the decline of ethnic boundaries (Hidalgo & Bankston, 2010; Kulczycki & Lobo, 2002; Qian & Lichter, 2007; Song, 2010; Wildsmith, Gutmann, & Gratton, 2003), partner choice can be a measure of the strength of ethnic boundaries. In chapter ten, I explore recent trends in partner choice, and demonstrate that while transnational marriages are on the decline, this does not correspond with a large increase in interethnic marriages. The analysis explains why transnational marriages have declined, and why there is still a considerably large percentage of people who marries a partner from the country of origin. The results indicate that although Turkish Belgians are increasingly oriented towards the Belgian society, it does not correspond with a reduction in the significance of ethnic boundaries. In chapter eleven, I explore the relevance of ethnic boundary dynamics for understanding why some people are open to an interethnic relationship, while others are not. I analyze partner choice narratives of second- and third-generation Turkish Belgians, focusing on differences that can help explain different attitudes towards interethnic relationships.

## CHAPTER 2

# DIVIDE ET EXCLUDE

*Ethnic boundary features and dynamics*





**CONTRADICTION IN TERMINIS (1)**

*by Fatih*

De Belgen zien mij als een Turk, behandelen mij als een  
Turk

Maakten mijn vader kapot, want ja hij was een Turk  
Stukske bekrompen kortzichtig k\*tvolk

Leer ons eerst accepteren, spreek dan over ons

T'is onbegonnen werk, toch ze willen da'k mij aanpas

Menace to society, omda'k erIN geen plaats had

Als kind schreef ik verzen met bloed toen ik verdwaald  
was

Nu bloed ik verzen en veeg ze aan uw kaak af

Regelrechte aanslag, meedogenloze aanpak

voor al wie per sé op alles zowiezo een naam plakt

Noem mij dit, noem mij dat

Noem mij si, noem mij la

Wat gade mij noemen op de dag dat g'aan mijn voeten  
ligt?



## THE FOUNDATIONS: BARTH'S ETHNIC BOUNDARY THEORY

Before Barth wrote *Ethnic groups and boundaries*, most anthropologists had a Herderian perspective on the world, seeing it as “a discontinuous array of entities called societies, each with its internally shared culture” (Barth, [1969] 1998, p. 5). They assumed that there were aggregates of people who share a common culture, that differences between these discrete cultures distinguish them from each other and that, correspondingly, there are discrete groups of people, or ethnic units, which correspond to each of these cultures.

Barth objects to this idea that society is made up of discontinuous groups each with their own culture, as well as to “the simplistic idea that geographical and social isolation have been the critical factors in sustaining cultural diversity” (Barth, [1969] 1998, p. 9). The persistence of ethnic groups, he argues, does not depend on enduring ethno-cultural differences or an absence of interethnic contact, but rather on the maintenance of ethnic boundaries by one or both groups. From Barth's perspective, the observation that the Turkish population has not (yet) *melted* into the mainstream but remains a distinctive group is not a consequence of the retention of cultural practices but rather of the process of *boundary maintenance*. Consequently, his central point – and famed dictum – is that the critical focus of investigation should be “the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses” (Barth, [1969] 1998, p. 15). The way to study ethnic phenomena, he argues, is to focus on those processes whereby ethnic groups and boundaries are formed, maintained and made relevant. As such, Barth replaces the then-dominant structural-functional view with a postmodernist, constructivist point of view, which conceptualizes social organization as emergent and contested, and culture as characterized by variation and flux.

For Barth, an ethnic group is a form of social organization, above and beyond questions of empirical cultural differences. The continuity of an ethnic group depends on the maintenance of a boundary through (1) continuous *dichotomization* between insiders and “others” and (2) through the *structuring of interaction*, which in turn allows for the persistence of cultural differences. The active construction of a boundary is always jointly done by members of groups on either side of the boundary, although one of the two often has more power than the other in its ability “to impose and transform the relevant idioms” (Barth, 1994, p. 16). *Dichotomization* implies identifying fellow members as persons who share similar criteria for evaluation and judgment, and categorizing others as strangers, recognizing that there are limitations on shared understandings, differences in criteria for judgment and a restriction of interaction. In the case of the Turkish-Belgian boundary, this process is reflected in the observation that Turks are often seen as “the essential other,” “traditional,”



“patriarchal,” and “oppressive,” and, hence, completely different from ethnic Belgians, who see themselves as modern, liberal and enlightened.

Although this ethnic dichotomization is often based on existing cultural differences (overall, Turks indeed have a more collectivistic and patriarchal culture compared to Belgians), it is important to recognize that boundaries between two groups are not marked by the sum of all “objective differences.” The features that mark the boundary between ethnic groups are those deemed significant by the actors themselves. Some of the cultural differences are used as *contrasting diacritica* (Barth, 1994, p. 16) or *boundary markers* – cultural characteristics that mark the boundary between two groups – while others are ignored, played down or denied. Ethnic Belgians, for instance, use oppressiveness as a boundary marker, while ignoring the solidarity and social support that is inherent in strong family systems common in Turkish culture. The criteria of difference that are chosen are not random: boundaries tend to be constructed “from cultural, legal and institutional materials that are already at hand, and thus they depend in a path-dependent way on the prior histories of the societies and groups involved” (Alba, 2005). For example, when Muslims in Europe are defined as the essential other based on their religion and supposed gender inequality, this is undoubtedly related to Europe’s own historical struggles with religion and gender-equality. Also, boundary markers change: cultural features that mark a boundary at one particular time in history might become less relevant and replaced by others, as a result of social processes or specific historical circumstances.

In situations of social contact, the persistence of ethnic groups not only depends on establishing criteria of difference and signaling one’s identity, but also on the *structuring of interaction*. In this case, boundaries are maintained through the organization of social relations via “a systematic set of rules governing interethnic social encounters” (Barth, [1969] 1998, p. 16). For example, the Turkish-Belgian boundary is to a large extent maintained because of a strong disapproval of interethnic marriages in both groups. This, in turn, leads to the persistence of cultural differences: when people mainly interact with co-ethnics, this reduces the potential for acculturation, not in the least because of pressures to conform within one’s own ethnic group.

For Barth, cultural differences between two groups are not the cause but the *consequence* of group formation. When ethnic groups come into contact with each other – as is the case when one group migrates to an entirely different region or country – historical differences in culture persist despite intergroup contact, because each group has its own value standards and sees to it that members live up to them. According to Barth, the greater the differences between the value orientations of the two groups, the more constraints on interethnic interaction they do entail.

Behavior that opposes one's own ethnic values is negatively sanctioned, producing adherence to group-specific norms. This is especially the case in situations where security outside of one's own group is low, and people depend on the support of their community. When there is a threat of violence and lack of security outside of one's own community, explicit self-identification of membership and overt conformity become essential to avoid internal sanctions and ensure community support. In the case of the Turkish population – a population that has little support outside their ethnic community due to religious and ethnic discrimination – conformity to group norms is important; they are dependent largely on the Turkish community for social support. In such a context, Barth argues, “historical differences in culture between different communities will tend to perpetuate themselves” (Barth, [1969] 1998, p. 37).

In a review of his own work twenty five years after the publication of *Ethnic groups and boundaries*, Barth recommended that students of ethnicity model processes of boundary construction separately on a micro, meso and macro level, and to look for interconnections between the three (Barth, 1994). By studying boundary-related processes at a micro-level, one sheds light on how individuals mark and contest boundaries in interaction with others, as well as on how they form their identities in opposition to the other group. An example is Duemmler et al.'s study on boundary work in a Swiss classroom, in which they analyze how both Swiss and Albanian students use gender (in)equality to mark the boundaries between their respective ethnic groups, and how the latter – who are in a less powerful position – engage in various counter strategies in the face of this exclusionary boundary. The constraints and parameters that shape these micro-processes tend to derive from other levels, but are nevertheless experienced by actors as real and consequential in their everyday lives. The meso level is necessary to model “the processes that create collectivities, and mobilize groups for diverse purposes” (Barth, 1994, p. 21). Processes on a meso level are often about creating dichotomies and boundaries that constrain people's actions and experiences on a micro level. Barth urges students of ethnicity to study this level of contexts and constraints in depth, something that has not sufficiently been done. Finally, he identifies the macro level as the level of state policies, including both “legal creations of bureaucracies allocating rights and impediments according to formal criteria” and “the arbitrary uses of force and compulsion that underpin many regimes.” Examples of how the state can draw boundaries include policies targeted at improving the socio-economic position of immigrants (such as policies that encourage positive discrimination in the labor market) as well as the legalized racial segregation such as the Jim Crow laws in the United States or the Apartheid regime in South Africa.

## **ADVANCING AND DYNAMIZING THE ETHNIC BOUNDARY APPROACH**

Forty years after Barth's seminal work, sociological scholarship is showing renewed interest in the boundary paradigm for studying ethnic change and inequalities (Alba, 2005; Chai, 2005; Jimenez, 2004; Korteweg & Yurdakul, 2009; Nave, 2000; Nukaga, 2008; Sanders, 2002; Shamai & Ilatov, 2001; Wimmer, 2013). I identify two important developments that characterize the studies that follow in Barth's footsteps. First, in contrast to Barth's rather static approach, the newer research on ethnic boundaries is more agency-centered, and focuses particularly on the making and unmaking of ethnic boundaries in everyday interactions (Wimmer, 2008). Different authors – including Barth ([1969] 1998, p. 34) himself – have pointed out that Barth's analysis – which focuses primarily on properties of boundaries and boundary maintenance – needs to be dynamized (Lamont & Molnar, 2002; Wimmer, 2013). In response to this call for more attention to agency, different studies now focus on how symbolic boundaries are made, maintained, negotiated and contested in everyday interactions between members of ethnic minority and the mainstream (Davis & Nencel, 2011; Duemmler, Dahinden, & Moret, 2010; Espiritu, 2001; Nukaga, 2008).

A second development is the considerable conceptual and analytical advancement of the ethnic boundary paradigm. In the forty years that followed Barth's influential publication, different authors have refined his conceptualization and developed new analytical tools and even entire theories (see, for instance, Chai, 2005; Wimmer, 2013) that help to advance the study of ethnic boundaries. In the remainder of this chapter, I synthesize the existing literature by laying out the different building blocks of an in-depth study of ethnic boundaries and ethnic boundary dynamics in any given context, introducing important concepts, analytical frameworks and empirical findings along the way. I start with the discussion of types and dimensions of ethnic boundaries, and features of ethnic boundaries. Subsequently, I move on to the study of different ethnic boundary dynamics, including the construction and maintenance of ethnic boundaries and individual-level ethnic boundary negotiation.

### **TYPES AND DIMENSIONS OF (ETHNIC) BOUNDARIES**

The all-encompassing term *ethnic boundary* obscures different dimensions and social constellations on various analytical levels. The boundaries that are implied in Huntington's (1993) *clash of civilizations* and the ethnic boundary between black and white inhabitants of Johannesburg, are of a very different order than the discursive ethnic boundary that is constructed in classroom discussions between Swiss and Albanian students in a Swiss classroom. It is therefore important to recognize and

outline the different dimensions and types of boundaries, and to link these to different levels of analysis to understand whether they are primarily found, acted out, constructed, maintained or contested on a micro-, meso- or macro-level.

A first important distinction we have to make is the one between *symbolic* and *social boundaries* (Lamont & Molnar, 2002). *Symbolic boundaries* are the “conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people and practices.” They are essentially about the construction of notions of “we” versus “them,” and about linking specific cultural traits – or boundary markers – to each group. *Social boundaries* are “the objectified forms of social differences, manifested in unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources and social opportunities” (Lamont & Molnar, 2002, p. 168). Whereas symbolic boundaries are *cognitive*, and usually manifest themselves in discourse (such as the myriad examples of speech and text that assert the idea that Muslims are essentially different from “Westerners” in the media, political propaganda and interpersonal conversations), social boundaries refer to *groupings of people* on an aggregate level, and are revealed in stable behavioral patterns of association (marriage, friendship and spatial concentration) as well as in inequalities in different domains of life (educational attainment, distribution of wealth, access to the labor market or political power). Hence, symbolic boundaries are most typically (but not necessarily) situated and articulated on a micro-level, whereas social boundaries manifest themselves on the aggregate level of different locations or institutions, including schools, neighborhoods, cities, nation-states or supra-national institutions or regions.

Regarding the relationship between the two, Lamont and Molnar (2002) claim that symbolic boundaries are a necessary but insufficient condition for the persistence of social boundaries. Only when they are widely agreed upon, can symbolic boundaries take on a constraining character and result in social boundaries. Therefore, if one wants to study the persistence of patterns of ethnic inequality and segregation<sup>1</sup>, it is important to focus on how symbolic boundaries are drawn on an intersubjective level, and how these symbolic boundaries contribute to patterned inequalities and social interaction. If we want to understand, for example, why second- and third-generation Turkish Belgians still experience a strong disadvantage in the labor market compared to ethnic Belgians, a

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<sup>1</sup> Ethnic inequality, stratification and segregation are of course not only the result of ethnic boundary dynamics but also related to the group’s access to different forms of capital and its migration history. Low-skilled migrant groups are often initially at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder, because they do not have the human, economic or social capital it requires to be upwardly mobile. Also, members of a particular ethnic group tend to concentrate in specific regions as a result of migratory paths and their need for security. If these inequalities and segregative patterns persist over the course of generations however, the lens should be turned towards mechanisms of ethnic boundary maintenance, which, according to Lamont and Molnar, includes symbolic boundary drawing.

first step is to study stereotypes that exist about them among ethnic Belgians, as well as to examine how these stereotypes lead to this “Turkish disadvantage” (Phalet & Heath, 2011).

A second distinction that helps to describe boundary processes more accurately is the one between the *categorical* and the *behavioral dimension* of an ethnic boundary (Wimmer, 2013). In defining the categorical dimension of ethnic boundaries as “acts of social classification and collective representation,” and the behavioral dimension as “everyday networks of relationships that result from individual acts of connecting and distancing,” Wimmer comes close to Lamont and Molnar’s distinction between symbolic and social boundaries. What differs, however, is that he recognizes – although rather implicitly – that the two dimensions act out on different analytical levels, whereas Lamont and Molnar seem to link symbolic boundaries to the micro-level, and social boundaries to aggregate levels of analysis. In addition to his general description of categorical and behavioral boundaries, Wimmer also describes how they appear as two cognitive schemes on an individual level: the categorical dimension divides the social world into “us” and “them,” and the behavioral dimension offers so-called *scripts of action* that tell an individual actor how to relate to members of the in- and out-group under given circumstances (Wimmer, 2013, p. 9).

I argue that Wimmer’s behavioral dimension is the missing link between how symbolic boundaries translate into social boundaries. In order to maintain a social boundary, actors not only need to construct symbolic boundaries (Wimmer’s categorical dimension), but they also need to act upon these boundaries (Wimmer’s behavioral dimension), for instance by treating out-group members differently from in-group members, engineering and enforcing rules governing interethnic encounters, or by expecting conformity from in-group members. Own-group conformity pressures, taboos on intermarriage, and different forms of discrimination can all be regarded as such behavioral dimensions of ethnic boundary maintenance.

To summarize, based on the conceptualization of ethnic and social boundaries as presented by Wimmer and Lamont and Molnar, I distinguish between symbolic boundaries (cognitive notions of “we” versus “them”) and social boundaries (groupings of people on an aggregate level), and argue that the persistence (maintenance) of the latter depends on the continuous construction of symbolic boundaries, as well as upon the creation of barriers that prevent an easy “flow” of resources, services and people across group boundaries. Put differently, ethnic boundary maintenance consists of both a symbolic and a behavioral dimension: ethnic boundaries between groups persist because dichotomous notions of “we” versus “them” are continually created and recreated, and because members of both group act upon these notions, such as by privileging members of their own group

over out-group members, or enforcing normative expectations upon in-group members in an attempt to maintain ethnic distinctiveness and group cohesion.

## BOUNDARY FEATURES

Based on a review of hundreds of ethnographic studies, case comparisons and historiographies of ethnic groups and boundaries, Wimmer (2008) identifies four dimensions of variation along which all individual cases can be situated. First, cases might differ in terms of the *political salience* of the ethnic boundaries between groups. When boundaries are politically salient, then political alliances will more likely be formed between co-ethnics than between individuals on opposite sides of the boundary. Wimmer gives the example of Northern-Ireland, where political loyalties rarely cross the ethno-religious divide between Catholics and Protestants.

Second, cases differ from each other in terms of *social closure*, or how firmly groups have closed themselves off, making their resources unavailable to outsiders. High degrees of closure imply that a boundary cannot easily be crossed, and that it has consequences for everyday life. (It can, for instance, give rise to discrimination, or prevent interethnic marriages.)

Third, there is variation in the degree of *cultural differentiation* between two groups. In cases where ethnic boundaries coincide with important cultural differences – which is often, but not necessarily always, the case – the two mutually reinforce each other: the cultural differences make the boundary appear natural and self-evident, while the boundary in its turn reinforces differences “through the invention of new cultural diacritics” (Wimmer, 2008, p. 983).

A final dimension of variation is the extent of the *stability* of ethnic groups and boundaries. Some groups and boundaries change only very slowly, while in other contexts, they can shift or blur in the course of only one generation. The degree of stability is linked to a large number of factors: the higher the degree of political salience, cultural differentiation<sup>2</sup> and social closure, the more stable a boundary becomes. This link is reinforced through processes of identification: high degrees of political salience, cultural differentiation and exclusion/social closure tend to create *thick identities* among members of ethnic groups (Wimmer, 2013). People who have a thick ethnic identity are more likely to defend the culture and honor of their community, to respond to group pressure from their ethnic peers, and to define their interests in terms of those of the entire ethnic community. In doing

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<sup>2</sup> Regarding the degree of cultural differentiation, stability is enhanced by “overlay or congruence of difference” (Wallman, 1978, p. 208): the more cultural diacritica mark a boundary, the better its differentiating potential and the higher its stability.

so, they stabilize an already strong boundary even more, even if this comes at a high cost and keeps them in an inferior position.

## **ETHNIC BOUNDARY MAINTENANCE**

A social boundary between ethnic groups persist as a result of mechanisms that maintain this boundary. Following Wimmer's claim (2013) that a social boundary consists of both a categorical and a behavioral dimension, I subdivide the process of ethnic boundary maintenance into two separate, but equally important mechanisms: (1) marking the boundary – the symbolic dimension of ethnic boundary maintenance; and (2) creating barriers that structure intergroup relations and access to resources – the behavioral component of ethnic boundary maintenance.

### **MARKING THE BOUNDARY – THE SYMBOLIC DIMENSION OF ETHNIC BOUNDARY MAINTENANCE**

Most students of social and ethnic boundaries agree that a first step towards the construction and maintenance of a boundary is the continuous *dichotomization* and *marking* of a symbolic boundary between insiders and outsiders (Barth, [1969] 1998; Lamont & Molnar, 2002; Wimmer, 2013). This process of *boundary marking* consists of the categorization of others as members of another group, as well as the identification of particular contrasting *cultural diacritica* – a careful selection of those cultural differences that help to define one's group identity in opposition to that of the other group. It is through these carefully chosen contrasting diacritica that dichotomous notions of “us” versus “them” are created, lumping individuals together in “objectively” differentiated groups.

Symbolic boundaries are essentially cognitive, but they tend to manifest themselves through *discourse* – language in use, both in spoken and written form. There are many different discursive ways in which symbolic boundaries manifest themselves to in-group or out-group members. First of all, all micro-level practices of *social categorization*, *othering* and *labeling* – regardless of the intentions – count as mechanisms of boundary marking. The practice of *othering*, for instance, serves to mark and name those thought to be different from oneself, and magnifies and enforces the idea that “the other” is essentially different (Weis, 1995). In essence, othering is a type of discursive *everyday racism* – a term coined by Essed (1991), to refer to “practices that infiltrate everyday life and become part of what is seen as ‘normal’ by the dominant group.” Ethnic jokes (Davies, 1982) are another example of everyday racism: they are a way of marking a boundary between ethnic groups in contexts where blatantly racist remarks are unacceptable. Taken individually, the effect of each utterance might seem trivial – especially to the person who is othering – but the cumulative impact

can be far less trivial: “Each racist joke, each racist assumption, occurs in the context of a personal and collective history of such trivial incidents, in the context of one's own past experiences of racism and the experiences of friends and loved ones” (Beagan, 2003, p. 853). Othering practices can serve to reinforce and reproduce positions of domination and subordination, even when it is not intended (Fine, 1994). Davis and Nencel (2011) offer a good autobiographical example of how practices of othering – such as comments about their foreign accent or the question of where they come from – can feel very exclusionary by those who are othered, especially when it still happens after having lived in a country for over two decades, while not being perceived as such by those who are doing the othering.

An example of a symbolic boundary on a meso or macro level is the presentation of a nation as an *imagined community* that invents cultural traditions and asserts commonness (Anderson, 2006). A nation is *imagined* because members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members; it is *a community* because “it is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship,” despite actual inequality and exploitation *within* the imagined community. The term *imagined community* does not need to be restricted to nations however: it is equally applicable to other groups sharing these two basic characteristics. Other examples include the idea of a religious community such as the Islamic *Ummah*, or those communities based on common ethnic origins. In all of these cases, the sense of community is based on the construction of a boundary and the imagination of cultural difference (Schneider, 2001).

In the past decade, several empirical studies have examined how members of dominant as well as ethnic minority groups engage in *boundary work* – a term coined by Lamont (1995, p. 351) to refer to “the process of defining oneself by opposition to others and to traits associated with others.” The study of boundary work basically involves the identification of the cultural diacritica (differences) that are used to construct notions of “us” and “them.” When Barth argued that “the cultural stuff does not matter”, he meant that there is no direct relationship between ethnic boundaries and cultural differences, not that boundaries are not related to existing cultural differences whatsoever. Even Barth himself declared that his initial stance on the irrelevance of the “cultural stuff” was exaggerated, and that boundaries are based, at least to some extent, on existing cultural differences (Barth, 1994). Any analysis of boundary drawing should not take these criteria of difference for granted, but rather make them the object of research.

Although boundary work is most typically performed by individual people in everyday interaction, it is not necessarily restricted to the micro-level: symbolic boundaries can also be marked on a meso or macro-level, outside of direct interaction (think for instance about political pamphlets



of anti-immigrant parties, policy documents that focus on integration of immigrants/ethnic minorities, or representations of Muslims in print media). Consequently, a thorough analysis of boundary marking does not only include the study of everyday discursive practices between individuals, but also requires a focus on how boundaries are marked in public discourse, including both public speech and publicly available texts. The study of public discourse is all the more important, because it reaches a larger portion of the population and can, as a result, be considered more powerful in its effects (Schneider, 2001).

Considering that public discourse is typically transmitted through the media, media play a very important role in shaping and reproducing interethnic relations, ethnic boundaries and identities. Consequently, the media have to be a major target in the analysis of identity politics and boundary work (Schneider, 2001). Korteweg and Yurdakul (2009) for example, treat newspaper discussions on honor killing as sites that enable them to analyze which cultural elements are mobilized to draw boundaries between Muslim immigrants and the majority population – in this case the Dutch and German.

Both dominant and subordinate groups actively take part in the construction of ethnic difference to achieve particular ends and preserve themselves in opposition to the other (Wallman, 1978). The observation that ethnic minority groups also engage in boundary work is compelling, given that they seemingly have more to gain from being incorporated into the mainstream. However, they often have something to gain from marking boundaries, most particularly the preservation of their own ethnic distinctiveness and a sense of moral superiority in the context of exclusion and stigmatization. Members of several East Asian groups in the United States, for instance, draw bright symbolic boundaries between themselves and Anglo-Americans, and claim moral superiority based on that difference. In defining their ethnic identity, second-generation Korean Americans appropriate a set of “core traditional Korean Confucian values” and contrast them with American culture and values, most notably individualism and liberal sexual morality (Chong, 1998). A similar pattern is observed among Filipino Americans, who stress what they see as the moral flaws of Anglo-Americans – again most notably their individualism and sexually immoral women – contrasting them with their own “morally superior” strong family ties and female chastity (Espiritu, 2001). In both cases, these identity constructions help immigrants and their children challenge the negative stereotypes imposed on them by the larger society. By constructing “American” culture as deviant and their own “ethnic” culture as principled, members of racialized and excluded immigrant groups present themselves as culturally and morally superior, redefining their status in relation to the dominant group.

The fact that groups on both sides of the boundary engage in boundary drawing does not mean that they necessarily agree on these boundaries. Sometimes, the majority group boxes non-whites into *categories of otherness* that bear no relation to the minorities' own sense of identity (Wallman, 1978). In other cases, members of the minority do agree on the cultural diacritica that mark the boundary, but not on the meaning or evaluation that majority members attach to it. During classroom discussions in Swiss schools for instance, both the Swiss (majority) and Albanian (minority) students actively take part in the social construction of Swiss people as supporters of gender equality and Albanian people as defenders of hierarchical gender relations. In these discussions, however, gender equality is established as a moral imperative, which produces a hierarchical order between the two ethnic groups. Albanian students can and do develop counterstrategies to face these exclusionary boundaries, but the power imbalance between themselves and the majority students limits their capacity to impose their definitions and interpretations upon the others. Studies like this one show that boundary work is essentially relational and bound up with power relations. In order to uncover the power dynamics at work in the marking of boundaries, it is important to study discourse in interaction, because it is in discourse that individuals, groups and institutions struggle for self-positioning and symbolic power (Foucault, 2012).

Finally, I want to draw attention to the importance of gender in marking ethnic boundaries and shaping national and collective identities. In many societies, women are seen as both cultural transmitters and cultural signifiers of national or ethnic collectivities (Yuval-Davis, 1997). Consequently, they play an important symbolic role in the construction of national and ethnic identity. They often come to symbolize national and collective honor, and their behavior is of specific relevance for marking and maintaining ethnic boundaries. Several ethnic groups – most particularly those who tend to be identified as family- and group-oriented, such as South-East Asians or those of Mediterranean origin – draw the boundaries between themselves and other ethnic groups based on the sexual behavior of women (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1989; Dasgupta & Dasgupta, 1996; Espiritu, 2001). Because the behavior of women is so central for the identity and honor of an ethnic group or nation, their behavior is more closely monitored and often restricted. Any study of gendered power imbalances or gender inequalities should therefore take into account women's symbolic role in the construction of boundaries and collective identities, and treat it as an important factor in the production and reproduction of gender inequalities in practically all domains of life.

## CREATING BARRIERS – THE BEHAVIORAL DIMENSION OF ETHNIC BOUNDARY MAINTENANCE

Merely marking symbolic boundaries is not sufficient for the creation of a social boundary between an immigrant or ethnic minority population and the mainstream population. In order to truly create and maintain a social boundary, the dichotomization also needs to be coupled with boundary-maintaining *behavior*. The behavioral dimension of ethnic boundary maintenance includes both an externally-oriented component – processes related to out-group exclusion – and an internally-oriented component – processes that lead to in-group cohesion.

### *Externally-oriented dimension*

The externally-oriented dimension of ethnic boundary maintenance is essentially about the maintenance of *social closure*. In other words, externally-oriented processes of boundary maintenance are directed at creating barriers that make valued resources within the group unavailable to outsiders. The degree of social closure – or how firmly a group closes itself off from others – that a group is able to maintain shapes how successful that group is in maintaining a social boundary (Wimmer, 2008). High degrees of closure imply that a boundary cannot easily be crossed. Such closure is also consequential for everyday life because it denies access to resources available within that particular group.

Social closure happens most typically through various forms of discrimination. Wimmer (2013) distinguishes three *modes of discrimination*, depending on the degree of formalization. *Legalized discrimination* is formal and involves the institutionalization of ethnic boundaries by differentiating between the rights of members of different ethnic categories. Extreme examples include South Africa's Apartheid regime in the mid-1900s and American Jim Crow Laws of the late 19th and early 20th century. Both served to segregate the Black population from the dominant group of Whites, not only socially and residentially, but also in terms of political and economic participation. *Institutional discrimination* refers to discrimination that is part of the day-to-day workings of the state administration that lacks a legal basis. Wimmer gives the example of preference and quota policies as a soft form of institutionalized ethnic discrimination. *Everyday discrimination*<sup>3</sup>, finally, happens in interactions outside the domains of state control. Examples here include discrimination by employers in the labor market or by property owners in the housing market.

In present-day Europe, social closure and social exclusion of ethnic minority groups is often subtle but nevertheless omnipresent. Several studies point out that discrimination – especially against

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<sup>3</sup>“Everyday discrimination” should not be mistaken with Essed's “everyday racism”, which I have categorized as a subtle form of symbolic boundary drawing.

Muslims – is pervasive in many countries and different domains of life, including the labor market, the educational system, the housing market and social relations (Kalter & Kogan, 2006; Klink & Wagner, 1999; Lindert, Korzilius, Van de Vijver, Kroon, & Arends-Toth, 2008; Pettigrew, 1998; Safi, 2010; Silberman, Alba, & Fournier, 2006; Skrobanek & Jobst, 2010; Van der Bracht & Van de Putte, 2013; Van Laer & Janssens, 2011; Vandezande, Fleischmann, Baysu, Swyngedouw, & Phalet, 2009; Vourc'h, De Rudder, & Tripier, 1999; Zick, Pettigrew, & Wagner, 2008).

### *Internally-oriented dimension*

The behavioral dimension of boundary maintenance also comprises internally-oriented processes that are essentially directed at preserving group cohesion and cultural distinctiveness. The internally-oriented dimension of ethnic boundary maintenance typically arises when ethnic minority groups experience pressure to assimilate by the majority group. In such contexts, the group might be interested in preserving its distinctiveness and perpetuate its distinctive features through several “internal-segregative” mechanisms (Katzir, 1982).

The internally-oriented dimension of ethnic boundary maintenance includes (1) *scripts of action* – rules and expectations regarding how to relate to out-group members and behave appropriately as a group member – as well as (2) mechanisms directed at enforcing these rules. Rules governing interethnic contact are directed towards maintaining cultural distinctiveness by warding off cultural change from the outside. Barth first argued that the maintenance of an ethnic boundary is partly based on the structuring of interaction. In cases of interethnic contact, boundaries and cultural distinctiveness are maintained through a set of *proscriptions* that prevent interethnic interaction in certain sectors, as well as through a set of *prescriptions* that regulate interethnic interaction in those sectors or domains of activity where contact *is* allowed. It is through this combination of prescriptions and proscriptions that ethnic groups try to insulate parts of their cultures from confrontation and modification.

One of the most common proscriptions is the disapproval of interethnic marriages (Dasgupta & Dasgupta, 1996; Katzir, 1982; Nave, 2000). A study of different ethnic groups in Mauritius showed that a preference for endogamous marriages is less a personal choice than a consequence of strong disapproval of exogamous marriages (Nave, 2000). Several interviewees reported a pressure, including emotional blackmail, physical threatening, repudiation, kidnapping and physical violence, not to marry an out-group member. Different studies show that taboos on interethnic marriages are particularly strong if marriages are also interreligious. Among Yemeni Jews for instance, exogamy with a Yemeni Muslim leads to excommunication and being pronounced dead by the community (Katzir, 1982). The same taboo on interreligious marriages holds for Muslim women, both those in

Islamic countries and Muslim communities elsewhere in the world. Islam does not allow interreligious marriages between a Muslim woman and a non-Muslim man, because in such a case, Islam is not passed on to the children (Al-Ati, 1977). The taboo is much less strong for Muslim men, given that in such as case, children will not be lost to another religion<sup>4</sup>.

Scripts of action not only concern the structuring of interethnic encounters, they also provide rules about how to act appropriately as an in-group member. The idea that ethnic groups pressure their members to conform to what is considered typical for the group is at the core of Barth's ethnic boundary theory. According to Barth, self-identification and categorization as a fellow member of an ethnic group implies that one will be evaluated and judged based on what the group considers to be appropriate conduct. In a context where different ethnic groups with different value orientations come into contact with each other, "statuses and situations (...) involving behavior which is discrepant with a person's value orientations must be avoided" (Barth, 1969).

A significant number of studies (Espiritu, 2001; Gibson, 1989; Lindo, 1996; Zontini, 2010) have documented the phenomenon of what I call *ethnic conformity pressure*. Recently, Zontini (2010) illustrated how social control and pressure to conform to strict norms emerged as "the flip side" of family and ethnic solidarity. Based on an in-depth analysis of the everyday experiences of young people in Italian families in the UK and Italy, she concluded that "strong ethnic groups can preserve community cohesion and shared norms at the expense of the individuals in them" (Zontini, 2010, p 829). Lindo (1996) observed the same phenomenon of strong social control in Turkish communities in the Netherlands, defining social control as "the contribution that the public opinion inside a social group makes to the maintenance of important rules of conduct within the social group."

In many cases, the pressure to conform to the norms and values of the ethnic minority group implies a pressure to resist assimilation. Usually, "appropriate conduct" is defined in opposition to the cultural traits of "the ethnic other": how to behave as a Filipino, Korean, or Turk is defined in contrast to the in-group's definition of what it means to be American, Western or Belgian. Empirical examples abound: in the United States, pressure to avoid *Americanization* has been reported among Vietnamese (Kibria, 2003; Zhou & Bankston, 1994), Latino (Chavez & French, 2007), Indian (Dasgupta & Dasgupta, 1996), Filipino (Espiritu & Wolf, 2001; Wolf, 1997), and Punjabi adolescents (Gibson, 1989).

The task of protecting the community's culture mainly rests on the shoulders of women, who are often regarded as the designated *keepers of culture* (Billson, 1995). Women are the ones who are

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<sup>4</sup> Note, however, that this gender difference is not universal: among Jews, the taboo tends to be stronger for men, considering that Jewishness is passed on via the mother (Katzir, 1982).

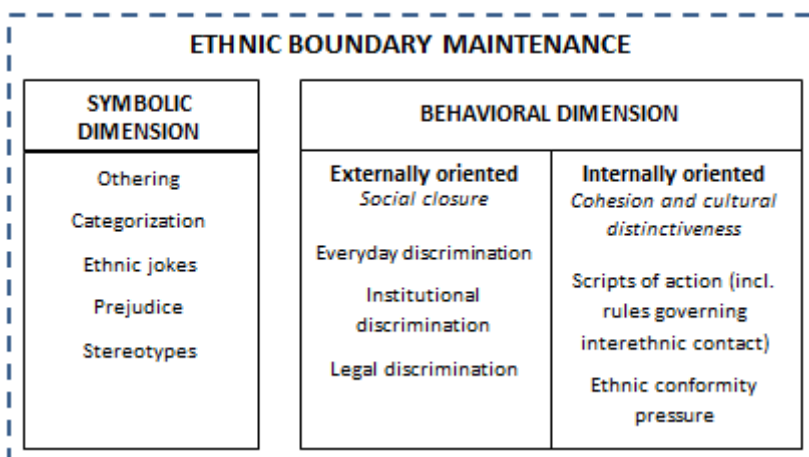
given the role of transmitting cultural traditions, maintaining racial boundaries and marking cultural difference (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1989, 1993; Espiritu, 2001). Consequently, social control and pressure to conform are stronger for women, and family restrictions are often “blatantly gender biased” (Dasgupta & Dasgupta, 1994, p 229), with daughters facing far more parental restrictions on their autonomy and mobility than sons.

Conformity pressures are often studied within the boundaries of a (nuclear) family but can also be exerted by peers, the wider ethnic community or specific institutions within that community. Ethnic churches, for example, can play an important role, as they are “hubs of social organization” (Sanders, 2002). Ethnic churches construct and maintain an ethnic boundary and identity because they tend to promote a sense of community and ethnic awareness (for examples, see Chong, 1998; Min, 1992; Wardak, 2002), particularly in a context of social exclusion by . In addition, they play an important role in socializing the second generation according to traditional roles, through the transmission of a variety of unwritten norms, rules and codes of conduct at the level of every day social interaction and the “strong, unspoken expectation that everyone conforms to these rules” (Chong, 1998).

### SUMMARY: MODEL OF ETHNIC BOUNDARY MAINTENANCE

Figure 1 summarizes the above described dimensions of ethnic boundary maintenance and gives a non-exhaustive list of boundary maintaining mechanisms for each. As already discussed, ethnic boundary maintenance has a symbolic as well as a behavioral dimension. The symbolic dimension of ethnic boundary maintenance refers to the marking of symbolic boundaries, which happens mainly (but not exclusively) through discourse (written and spoken language in use). Examples include othering practices, stereotypes, prejudices, social categorization, discursive everyday racism and ethnic jokes. Each of these can be expressed through different media, including not only speech in interaction, but also policy documents, mediatized public discourse, books, and imagery such as cartoons or artwork.

**Figure 1** Model of ethnic boundary maintenance



The symbolic dimension of ethnic boundary maintenance can be coupled with a behavioral dimension, in which case people behave in a particular way vis-à-vis in-group and out-group members. The behavioral dimension of ethnic boundary maintenance can be further subdivided into externally-oriented processes aimed at excluding outsiders and maintaining social closure, and internally-oriented rules and processes, which focus on maintaining group cohesion and cultural distinctiveness. Social closure is most typically protected through discriminatory practices on different levels (everyday, institutional, legalized) by different actors (individuals as well as institutions and the state). The internally-oriented dimension includes both scripts of action that govern interethnic encounters and describe how to behave appropriately as a group member, and mechanisms that enforce these scripts of action, such as ethnic conformity pressure and corresponding social sanctioning in case of norm violation.

## ETHNIC BOUNDARY NEGOTIATION AND CHANGE

Boundaries are of course not only maintained, but can also be contested and negotiated by individuals, therefore changing in the process. Because all boundaries are to some extent exclusionary, there are always actors – typically those in the disadvantaged, underprivileged position – who contest existing symbolic and social boundaries, and negotiate boundary maintaining mechanisms, in order to (re)gain recognition, power or access to resources.

Based on previous work by Lamont & Bail (2005), Zolberg and Woon (1999) and Horowitz (1975), Wimmer (2013) offers the most encompassing typology of strategies of ethnic boundary negotiation<sup>5</sup>: different ways in which individual and collective actors can relate to an existing established mode of classification and closure, and how they can attempt to enforce their vision of the legitimate divisions of society. He distinguishes between five types of such strategies, and argues that the strategy chosen largely depends on the actors' position in different power hierarchies. The first two options – *expansion* and *contraction* – are both subtypes of the larger strategy of *boundary shifting* (Zolberg & Woon, 1999), and both aim at changing the topography of boundaries. They are

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<sup>5</sup> Wimmer himself uses the term “ethnic boundary making” but I prefer to use the term “ethnic boundary negotiation”, in order to stress that these strategies are used to relate to an already established boundary. As such, I am able to distinguish processes of ethnic boundary maintenance from those that essentially contest or try to change existing boundaries, rather than keeping them in place. In his theory on the making and unmaking of ethnic boundaries, Wimmer does not make that distinction, in part because he advocates an “agency-rich” approach to the study of ethnic boundaries, which focuses on how boundaries are “made” rather than “maintained.” I do not agree with this distinction, because maintenance also requires agency and boundary work. Wimmer seems to deny this when he says that “much of the earlier work in this tradition (...) was rather static and focused mostly on the features of the boundaries themselves and the processes of their maintenance,” adding that the newer research shifts the emphasis towards “boundary making” or “boundary work” (2013, 45).

opposed to each other, however, in terms of what kind of shift happens. In the case of expansion, actors “create a more encompassing boundary by grouping existing categories into a new, expanded category” (Wimmer, 2008, p. 987). A typical strategy of boundary expansion is the politics of nation building – the endeavor to turn different ethnic groups into one larger national category. A well-known example is the creation of the Turkish state out of a large number of ethnic groups. The opposite strategy, contraction, narrows existing boundaries. This can happen through *fission* – splitting the existing category in two – or by emphasizing lower levels of differentiation. According to Wimmer, this strategy is especially attractive for individuals and groups with limited political power and whose “action radius” is confined to their immediate social environment.

In the case of *transvaluation* (or *inversion*), actors do not target the location of the boundary, but attempt to change the hierarchical order of the groups. Both *normative inversion* and *equalization* qualify as strategies of transvaluation, the former inverting the existing rank order, the latter establishing equality in status and political power. Normative inversion is often coupled with the *reverse stigmatization* of the majority and can result in conceptual struggles between individuals on both sides of the boundary over the meaning and implication of the boundary. To give an example: the male Albanian students in Duemmler et al.’s study (2010) invert the hierarchical ordering of two groups by claiming moral superiority. Albanian immigrants present themselves as morally superior based on women’s behavior in their relationship with men. In this case, men do not contest the boundary but try to change its meaning. Similar phenomena have been observed among Filipino Americans (Espiritu, 2001) and Korean Americans (Chong, 1998), who both claim cultural and moral superiority vis-à-vis the majority group based on strong family values and female chastity.

*Repositioning* happens when actors seek to change their own position in an existing hierarchy. Just like transvaluation, the boundary itself is not contested, but contrary to transvaluation, the ethnic hierarchy is not contested either: people subscribe to the hierarchy but try to escape minority stigma and acquire a better standing through either *individual repositioning* (boundary crossing) or *collective repositioning*, reinforcing the legitimacy of the boundary and hierarchy. Not all boundaries can be easily crossed however: dominant groups may police their boundaries against trespassers, making it difficult or impossible for minority groups to assimilate and integrate into the dominant group.

*Boundary blurring*, finally, reduces the importance of ethnicity as a principle of categorization. The legitimacy of ethnic, national or racial boundaries is undermined and instead, other, non-ethnic principles of categorization and identification are promoted. These other principles of categorization include the stressing of local forms of belonging (Wallman, 1978) evocation of all-encompassing



global or human qualities and categories (Lyman & Douglass, 1973), and emphasis on “civilizational commonalities.”

Boundary negotiation not only involves the above ways of dealing with existing symbolic or social boundaries, but also responding in an active way to boundary maintaining mechanisms such as discrimination and ethnic conformity pressure. How people respond to these behavioral aspects of boundary maintenance is not only important for their own individual-level structural and socio-cultural incorporation, but also for changing social boundaries. How people cope with discrimination, for example, not only has important consequences for their well-being and subjective incorporation, but also for their social and structural incorporation. If people’s answer to discrimination is to retreat to their ethnic community, social boundaries change less, compared to when people actively fight racism and discrimination and try to become socially accepted by members of mainstream society. What matters most in the study of boundary negotiation, then, is to examine what factors account for the variation in negotiation strategies, because those give insight into the circumstances under which social boundaries are more likely to be changed.

## **SUMMARY**

The basic idea communicated in the ethnic boundary approach is that the continuing existence of ethnic groups does not depend on continuing cultural differences, but rather on the maintenance of a boundary. Ethnic boundaries have both a symbolic and a social dimension – the former referring to dichotomous notions of “us” versus “them,” which are coupled with particular contrasting cultural diacritica, the latter to groupings of people on an aggregate level. The basic idea carried forward in Barth’s ethnic boundary theory is that the persistence of these ethnic boundaries does not depend on enduring cultural differences, but upon active processes of boundary maintenance. I argue that the process of ethnic boundary maintenance involves both a symbolic and a behavioral dimension. Unlike Lamont and Molnar (2002), I do not see the marking of symbolic boundaries as restricted to micro-level interaction: boundaries can equally be marked on a non-interpersonal higher level, such as in public discourse or policy documents. Regarding the behavioral dimension of ethnic boundary maintenance, I have made a distinction between externally-oriented and internally-oriented processes. The former aim to maintain social closure, the latter are focused on maintaining group cohesion and cultural distinctiveness.

Boundaries are social constructions and their maintenance is a dynamic process. But they present themselves as an external reality to individuals who experience them, and constrain their actions. This does not mean however that individuals must passively accept the boundaries the way they are.

Typical for the agency-rich approach of present-day ethnic boundary scholarship is the idea that ethnic boundaries are not static, and can be negotiated, redefined and contested by individual actors and groups, who have the power to change social boundaries in doing so.



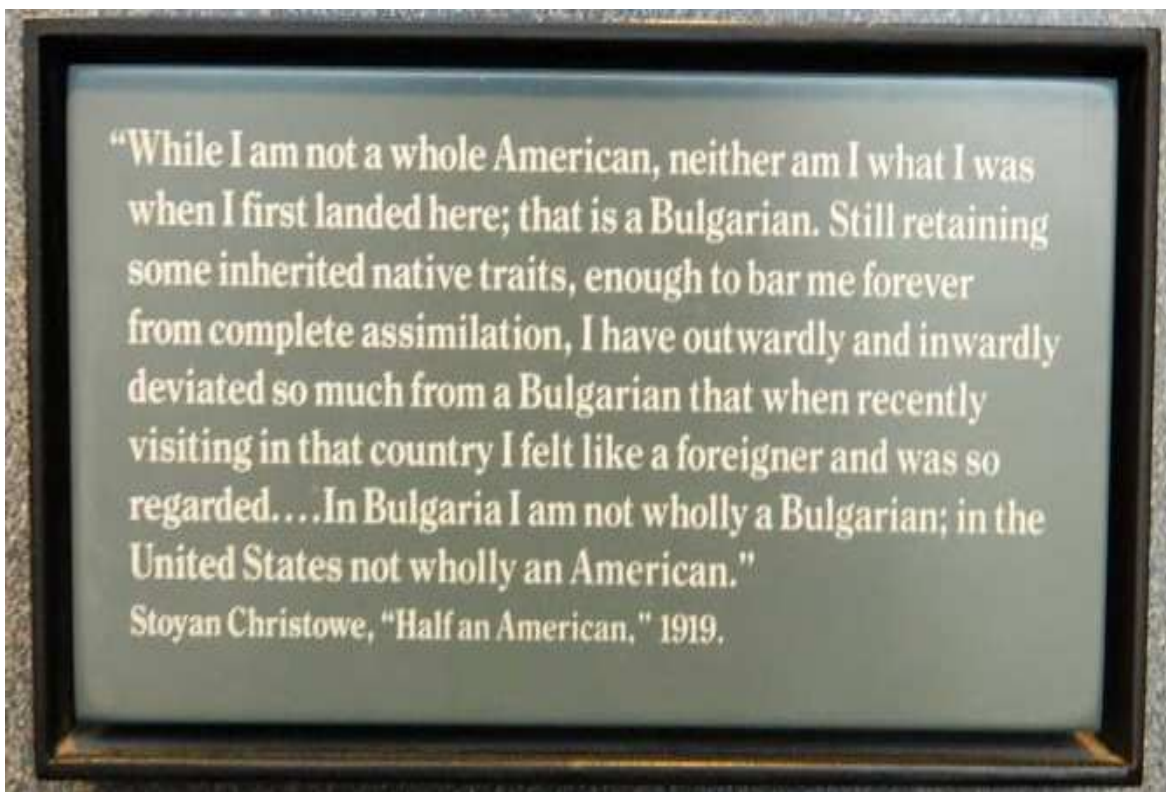
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## CHAPTER 3

# SHAPING LIVES

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*Boundaries, incorporation & ethnicity*



*Ellis Island Immigration Museum, New York*



Assimilation is about seduction and not simply coercion; about discovery and not only loss and twilight; about profound conflicts of loyalties and a kind of existential red-alertness and not merely conformity to group pressure (as if the process of assimilation were but a gigantic Asch experiment) and taking the path of least resistance. It is also about creative interminglings and extraordinary hybridities and not at all simply surrender on the terms of a dominant core.

RUBEN RUMBAUT (1997, p. 953)



## INTRODUCTION

One of my main theoretical arguments is that ethnic boundary dynamics are crucial in explaining aspects of socio-cultural incorporation and processes of ethnic change. Pachucki et al. (2007) suggest that many questions that are raised in theories of immigrant adaptation could be revisited using a boundary-work approach, so focusing on how ethnic boundaries are maintained by different actors and how they are negotiated by the individuals who experience them helps to account for inter- and intragroup differences regarding different modes of socio-cultural incorporation.

This chapter lays the theoretical foundation for the study of how ethnic boundary dynamics shape socio-cultural incorporation, and the continuing or declining importance of ethnicity. I start by discussing the major theoretical paradigms of immigrant incorporation, focusing on how these conceptualize and explain socio-cultural incorporation and ethnic change. I begin with an overview of assimilation theories and their critiques, and argue that, by focusing mainly on structural incorporation, they provide insufficient tools to study contingencies in socio-cultural incorporation. Subsequently, I discuss research on hybridity, creolization and transnationalism, which conceptualizes socio-cultural incorporation in a more nuanced and complex way, but does not offer a theoretical framework that helps to account for variation in socio-cultural incorporation. Considering that the first two traditions are strongly US-based, I also introduce European research on incorporation, focusing mainly on theoretical frameworks. Based on this overview, I subsequently discuss the importance of ethnic boundary dynamics in understanding differences in socio-cultural integration. Overall, I argue that a focus on ethnic boundary dynamics helps to explain differences in the (continuing) relevance of ethnicity in everyday life, identity and patterns of association among immigrants and their descendants.

## ASSIMILATION & SEGMENTED ASSIMILATION THEORIES

The concept *assimilation* has been central to the understanding of immigrant incorporation and adaptation in the United States since the colonial era. However, as American society has changed, so have the definition, conceptualization and specifications of assimilation (Alba & Nee, 2003, pp. 17-18). In what follows, I present an overview of old and new versions of assimilation theory<sup>1</sup>, focusing specifically on what they have to say about socio-cultural aspects of incorporation, and the enduring or declining relevance of ethnicity.

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<sup>1</sup> Large parts of this section heavily draw upon chapter 2 of Alba and Nee's (2003) *Remaking the American Mainstream. Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration*.



## CLASSICAL ASSIMILATIONISM REVISITED

Robert Park and the sociologists of the Chicago School spearheaded studies of the processes of immigrant incorporation. They also provided a first definition of assimilation – one in which social and cultural aspects of incorporation are central: “a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons and groups and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life” (Park & Burgess, 1921, p. 735). For Park and Burgess, assimilation does not imply a complete renunciation of all signs of ethnic origins, but leaves room for the persistence of ethnic elements within a context of cultural solidarity (Alba & Nee, 2003).

According to Park (1950), race-relations go through a cycle of “contact, competition, accommodation and eventual assimilation.” Eventually, ethnic differences diminish and assimilation occurs, mainly as a result of “personal intercourse and the friendships that inevitably grow up out of them.” In his later writings, Park backs away from a view of assimilation as inevitable and preordained (Kazal, 1995) and recognizes that there is also a possibility that groups would live together in a symbiotic relationship, “in physical contiguity, but in more or less complete moral isolation” (Park, 1950).

Addressing Park’s limited attention for structural constraints in the assimilation process, Warner and Srole (1945) draw attention to the importance of factors such as class, skin color and racial/ethnic subsystems for the rate of assimilation. They posit that all ethnic groups assimilate to some extent but that there is great variation among them in the time required for assimilation to occur. They argue that “the social mobility of readily identifiable minority groups, especially blacks, is likely to be confined within racial-caste boundaries” (Zhou, 1997, p. 976). The value of Warner and Srole’s contribution is that it introduces into the assimilation framework the interaction between internal group characteristics and external institutional factors such as phenotypical ranking and racial/ethnic subsystems in explaining the pace of assimilation.

By the middle of the twentieth century, *assimilation* was the core concept in the studies of ethnicity and immigrant incorporation, but very little had been accomplished in terms of the operationalization of the concept. This changes with the publication of Milton Gordon’s *Assimilation in American Life* (1964), in which he presented a multidimensional concept of assimilation that identified seven types of assimilation, four of which represent a particular stage in the process towards complete assimilation: *acculturation* (cultural assimilation), *structural assimilation*, *amalgamation* (marital assimilation) and finally *identificational assimilation*. The three remaining

types (attitude receptional assimilation, behavioral receptional assimilation and civic assimilation) represent necessary conditions without which complete assimilation could never take place. His contribution should not be seen as a theory of assimilation specifying which mechanisms hinder or promote assimilation, but rather as the codification of a conceptual framework (Alba & Nee, 2003). According to Gordon, acculturation - the minority group's adoption of the cultural patterns of the host society - is the (largely inevitable) first step in the process towards full assimilation. Once *structural assimilation* - "[l]arge scale entrance into cliques, clubs, and institutions of the host society on the level of primary interaction" - occurs, the remaining types of assimilation will take place "like a row of tenpins bowled over in rapid succession" (Gordon, 1964, pp. 80-81). The end point of this process is *identificational assimilation*, which can only be achieved in the absence of prejudice and discrimination in the "core society."

Classical assimilationism conceptualizes assimilation as a *straight-line process* (Gans, 1973; Warner & Srole, 1945) that unfolds in the sequence of generational steps (Alba & Nee, 2003): each new generation moves further away from an "ethnic ground zero" (Lieberson, 1973) and closer to complete assimilation. In terms of ethnicity, the idea is that immigrants and their offspring will gradually abandon their ethnic culture and increasingly adopt cultural elements from the dominant group. From the classical assimilationist standpoint, distinctive ethnic traits are disadvantageous (Child, 1943; Warner & Srole, 1945), so, consequently, immigrants must free themselves from their old cultures in order to achieve social mobility. Some scholars, like Warner and Srole (1945), recognized that the assimilation process proceeds faster for some groups than others, while other scholars, such as Robert Park in his later writings, believed that assimilation may never happen for some groups. But the idea of *continuing progression* is central to all early versions of assimilation theory. As Kazal said, "Scholars disagreed on the type and degree of assimilation bringing immigrant groups together, or closer to the core. But, they agreed, such processes were at work" (Kazal, 1995, p. 437).

## CRITIQUE AND ALTERNATIVE MODELS

The classical assimilation model has been subjected to vigorous critiques, especially since the 1960s. The first idea that was heavily contested is the straight-line conception of assimilation. In terms of ethnicity, several studies have challenged this assertion, demonstrating that ethnicity could go through periods of recreation and revival. Hansen, for instance, introduced the principle of *third generation interest*, or a revived interest in the ethnic group's history among the third generation. Hansen described this phenomenon as "what the son wishes to forget the grandson wishes to remember" (Hansen, 1987, pp. 16-17).

A second idea that has been rejected is the inevitability of assimilation. Classical assimilation sees assimilation as the inevitable “natural end point of the process of incorporation into American society” (Alba & Nee, 2003, p. 3) for all ethnic groups. Starting in the 1960s, however, different authors (Bodnar, 1987; Glazer & Moynihan, 1963; Yancey, Ericksen, & Juliani, 1976) contested the idea that American society will eventually become a melting pot of different ethnic groups that have shed their old ways in favor of the adoption of American norms. This critique was most prominently voiced by ethnic retentionists (cf. *infra*) who claim that ethnicity continues to matter, even beyond second and third generations, both because of processes within ethnic groups and because American mainstream society continually contributes to the recreation of ethno-racial groups.

A third feature that has been found objectionable is the assumption that societies have a unified core into which immigrants and their offspring assimilate (Alba & Nee, 2003; Barth & Noel, 1972; Portes & Zhou, 1993). The “apparent ethnocentrism” of old conceptions of assimilation promotes one particular cultural model, that of the WASP middle-class, as representing the cultural core of U.S. society and, therefore, the normative standard by which other groups are to be assessed (Alba & Nee, 2003, p. 4). Classical assimilationists fail to take into account, however, that American society was never a unified whole, but rather a fragmented society, both culturally and socioeconomically. To put it in the words of Alba and Nee, “American culture varies greatly by locale and social class; acculturation hardly takes place in the shadow of a single, middle-class cultural standard.” When studying acculturation, they argue, it is therefore important to depart from “a differentiated and syncretic conception of culture and a recognition that American culture was and is more mixed” (Alba & Nee, 1997, p. 833)

Aside from Alba and Nee’s *neo-assimilation theory* (cf. *infra*), three alternative responses to the classical assimilation theory have developed: cultural pluralism, the bumpy-line approach and segmented assimilation theory.

### *Cultural pluralism*

Cultural pluralists or multiculturalists reject the assimilationist assumption of a unified core, and instead “perceive American society as composed of a fluid and heterogeneous collection of ethnic and racial minority groups, as well as the dominant majority group of European Americans” (Zhou, 1997, p. 981). Historians such as Gutman (1977), Bodnar (1987), Buhle (1980) and Zunz (1985), for instance, present a pluralistic picture of the United States as a “host of ethnic enclaves” – enclaves that did not dissolve into a larger American society, but retained their cultural distinctiveness and adjusted to American capitalism on their own terms (Kazal, 1995, p. 458). Glazer & Moynihan’s *Beyond the Melting Pot* (1963) represents the first outright attack on the erosion of ethnicity and the

idea of an Anglo-Saxon center that assimilated effectively. In the book, they declare that America continually recreates ethnic groups through mechanisms of common economic interest, ethnic organizational life, family ties and group identity.

In contrast to the idea that ethnicity erodes with each passing generation, cultural pluralists or so-called “ethnic retentionists” (Gans, 1997), claim that there is always a degree of ethnic retention, even beyond the second generation. Primordial characteristics are constantly recreated and reshaped, but this reshaping is always grounded in real-life contexts and social experiences. Unlike classical assimilation theory, this perspective does not consider the retention of pre-migration cultural patterns as maladaptive, but rather as distinct ways of adapting to the circumstances and difficulties confronted in the host society (Bodnar, 1987; Conzen, Gerber, Morawska, Pozzetta, & Vecoli, 1992; Greeley, 1974; Yancey et al., 1976).

### *Bumpy-line assimilation*

In response to the idea that ethnicity continues to matter, Gans (1992) amended the faulted notion of straight-line assimilation with *bumpy-line assimilation*. He argues that acculturation and assimilation have continued among immigrants, but they also construct their own acculturation and assimilation in response to environmental pressures (Zhou, 1997). The divergent acculturation paths that result from different experiences and circumstances are bumps in the road to eventual assimilation – a process that has “no predictable end” (Gans, 1992, p. 44). The notion of the bumpy line acknowledges that ethnicity can reemerge in response to specific conditions. But the basic idea of classical assimilation remains essentially the same in the bumpy line theory, namely that there is a generational dynamic behind ethnic change that pushes each generation closer to a state of complete assimilation.

### *Segmented assimilation theory*

The most influential reaction to the too unified conception of American society is the *segmented assimilation model*, as first developed by Portes and Zhou (1993) and elaborated on by Portes and Rumbaut (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996; 2001; Rumbaut & Portes, 2001). The segmented assimilation theory rejects the idea of a single straight-line assimilation path that eventually leads to equal outcomes for all groups, and instead proposes three adaptation paths: one leading to “growing acculturation and parallel integration into the white middle-class,” a second *downward assimilation* path leading to permanent poverty and assimilation into the underclass and a third that combines economic advancement with the “deliberate preservation of the immigrant community’s values and tight solidarity” (Portes & Zhou, 1993, p. 82). The path immigrants follow is the result of a complex set of vulnerabilities and barriers to the resources and safety nets available to them.

A first decisive factor is the first generation, including their human capital and the context they find upon arrival in their new country. Aspects of this *context of reception* include the official policy toward certain nationalities, public receptivity or rejection towards particular newcomers and the character and resources of preexisting co-ethnic communities. These factors that together shape immigrants' *modes of incorporation* (Portes & Rumbaut, 1990; 1996).

Three features of the context of reception make second generation particularly vulnerable to downward assimilation: discrimination, settlement in underprivileged inner-city neighborhoods and a *bifurcated labor market* that offers high-paid jobs for the highly-skilled and poorly paid jobs for the unskilled, with few opportunities in between. In terms of socio-cultural incorporation, downward assimilation means that those who are confronted with these features have a higher tendency to identify with and acculturate into America's so-called *underclass*. For example, stigma and discrimination often result in a higher prevalence of ethnic and racial-minority self-definitions and a lower prevalence of assimilative identities (Rumbaut & Portes, 2001, p. 309). Settlement is important, as several studies have demonstrated that immigrant youth can adopt the lifestyles, outlooks and even identities of inner-city minority youth, especially if they are classified as similar to native minorities based on their skin color (Kasinitz, Battle, & Miyares, 2001; Portes & Stepick, 1993; Stepick & Swartz, 1998). Acculturation into America's underclass is even more likely if immigrant youth are jobless as a result of a bifurcated labor market. In the American hourglass economy in which occupational ladders for intergenerational mobility have evaporated, children of immigrants either remain at the bottom of the social ladder or have to work their way up by means of advanced education in the course of one generation. If they do not succeed, they are more at risk for assimilation into the adversarial stance of impoverished groups at the bottom of the hourglass economy.

However, different modes of incorporation also make available different *resources* to confront these challenges. The most important are the resources made available through networks in the co-ethnic community (Portes & Zhou, 1993). According to the segmented assimilation theory, tight ethnic minority groups serve as protection from downward assimilation. Remaining ensconced in ethnic communities means having a better chance for upward mobility because the conformity pressure and social control exerted by that community leads to a more paced, selective process of acculturation (Rumbaut & Portes, 2001, p. 3003), helping to prevent the youngsters from assimilating into the underprivileged segments of American society. Additionally, co-ethnic communities are a source of social capital that can provide their members with moral and material resources (Portes & Zhou, 1993; Zhou & Bankston, 1994). As a consequence, strong ethnic

communities have proven to be beneficial for both educational attainment (Fuligni, 2001; Gibson, 1989; Matute Bianchi, 1986; Portes, Fernandez-Kelly, & Haller, 2009; Zhou & Bankston, 1994) as well as employment (Bailey & Waldinger, 1991; Marger, 2001; Sanders & Nee, 1996; Wilson & Portes, 1980; Zhou & Logan, 1989).

A final factor that can help ward off or, conversely, lead to downward assimilation is the parents' acculturation pace as compared to their children. *Consonant acculturation* occurs when children and parents learn the language and culture at approximately the same pace; *dissonant acculturation* when children adopt the language and culture faster their parents. The latter can be problematic, as it often results in family conflict and decreasing parental authority (Kwak, 2003; Stepick, Stepick, Eugene, Teed, & Labissiere, 2001; Zhou, 2001). A third alternative is *selective acculturation*, or a "paced learning of the host culture along with retention of significant elements of the culture of origin" (Rumbaut & Portes, 2001, p. 308). This can lead to better psychosocial and achievement outcomes because it results in positive intergenerational relations.

Adopting the segmented assimilation theory, Rumbaut (1994) illustrates how different mobility paths are each accompanied by changes in character and salience of ethnicity. Based on research among different immigrant groups in the United States, he identifies four main types of ethnic self-identities: (1) an ancestral, immigrant or national-origin identity; (2) an additive hyphenated identity; (3) an assimilative national identity and (4) a dissimilative racial or panethnic identity. The study finds support for the segmented assimilation hypothesis as location and perceived discrimination affect the ethnic identity of immigrant children; those who have experienced discrimination are less likely to identify as American, and those who live in deprived inner-city neighborhoods are more inclined to report a dissimilative racial or panethnic identity.

Notwithstanding the theoretical and empirical dominance of the segmented assimilation theory, it has been subjected to some points of critique. A first critique is that the segmented assimilation model equates assimilation with social mobility, as illustrated by the concept *downward assimilation* (Gans, 2007). As a result of this focus on mobility, empirical studies using the segmented assimilation model mainly focus on processes of structural and socioeconomic incorporation (Stepick & Stepick, 2010), leaving subjective aspects of incorporation, or what Rumbaut (1994) refers to as "the crucible within," largely under-studied and theoretically underdeveloped.

A second point of critique is that the segmented assimilation model pays no attention to the importance of the national context, taking the structural features of American society for granted. This makes it especially difficult to apply the theory to European contexts (Alba, 2005; Schneider & Crul, 2013). The notion of *underclass* is central in conceptualizing and explaining downward

assimilation, but in European cities there is no comparably underprivileged and racially discriminated native group like the black urban underclass in US cities (Foner & Lucassen, 2012). Residential segregation of immigrant groups in deprived neighborhoods exists in European cities, but these areas cannot be compared in scale nor in terms of social problems with the so-called *ghettos* in American cities (Schneider & Crul, 2013). A recent study among Turks in Berlin, Mexicans in Los Angeles and Dominicans in New York – all groups at risk for downward assimilation – shows that the latter two believe there to be far more disorder (including gangs and crime) in their neighborhoods than the former. Also, in most countries national welfare regimes prevent the most unsuccessful and deprived from completely falling through the cracks, helping to prevent the development of an underclass at risk for criminality and downward assimilation (Crul & Mollenkopf, 2012).

A third criticism is that the segmented assimilation theory uses national origin as a proxy for mode of incorporation and family socio-economic status, hence potentially obscuring underlying social processes that produce differential outcomes for the second generation (Stepick & Stepick, 2010). The theory compares different ethnic groups in the same national context, but to assign an entire ethnic group to one category of assimilation is dangerous, as it ignores diversity within the second generation (Schneider & Crul, 2013; Vermeulen, 2010). This critique is related to Wimmer's claim (2013) that several contemporary incorporation theories rely on a Herderian worldview in which ethnic groups are seen as natural entities and the logic unit of analysis.

Fourth, some find that the theory is not always supported by empirical data. Kasinitz, Mollenkopf and Waters conclude, for instance, that “their subjects rarely fit in the three boxes posited by segmented assimilation theory” (Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, & Waters, 2004, p. 397). This critique applies specifically to the notion of *downward assimilation*. Several authors argue that studies within the segmented assimilation framework are quick to conclude that certain immigrant groups are at risk for downward assimilation into the underclass (Alba, Kasinitz, & Waters, 2011; Vermeulen, 2010; Waldinger & Feliciano, 2004). According to Vermeulen, this occurs for two reasons: first, segmented assimilation theory uses a “very weak version of the concept of underclass,” invoking the notion too easily (2010); second, there is no clear distinction between *being at risk* for downward assimilation, and actually having been downwardly mobile. In contrast with the bleak picture that is often portrayed by Portes and his colleagues (See for instance Haller, Portes, & Lynch, 2011 for the latest discussion), other scholars sketch a much more positive picture, demonstrating that “the kids are (mostly) alright” (Alba et al., 2011; see also Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, Waters, & Holdaway, 2008).

## ETHNIC STRATIFICATION THEORY

Shortly after the publication of Gordon's seminal volume, Shibutani and Kwan (1965) published a comparative study in which they attempt to specify causal mechanisms within the assimilation paradigm. Central in their study is the concept *social distance*, which refers not to the physical distance between groups, but to the subjective state of "nearness felt to certain individuals" (Shibutani & Kwan, 1965, p. 263). When social distance is perceived as small, there is a feeling of common identity, closeness and shared experiences; when it is perceived as wide, people see each other as belonging to another category. Defined as such, social distance can be regarded as the extent to which there are symbolic boundaries between two groups.

The social distance between groups, is created and maintained "through the human practice of classifying people in to ranked categories" (Alba & Nee, 2003, p. 31). For Shibutani and Kwan, ethno-cultural differences between groups are not primordial or rooted in biological difference, but rather the result of cognitive mechanisms and social construction. This conceptualization of social distance strongly echoes Barth's views on ethnicity and the persistence of ethnic groups. Both theoretical perspectives advocate the study of social processes of boundary construction rather than the study of "the cultural stuff" or other attributes of specific groups. According to Shibutani and Kwan, a reduction of social distance precedes and stimulates structural assimilation, and not the other way around, as implied in Gordon's hypothesis.

Shibutani and Kwan demonstrate that ethnic stratification orders tend to be long-lasting once established and institutionalized. Ethnic stratification, they argue, not only results from the symbolic construction of ethnic differences in informal arrangements, but also from subordination and exclusion through institutional power and coercion - a claim which mirrors my own proposition that social boundaries result from the combination of the symbolic and behavioral dimension of ethnic boundary maintenance. The only way minorities can become upwardly mobile, they argue, is through the reduction of social distance, which stems from structural changes at the macro level. Without changes at the macro level, ethnic stratification orders tend to remain static. In explaining these structural changes, Shibutani and Kwan emphasize the importance of technological innovation, as it induces changes in the mode of production. Changes in the economic system "introduce opportunities for minority groups to acquire new competitive advantages that make them indispensable to employers" (Alba & Nee, 2003). When minorities can offer employers particular services or skills, the latter will in turn seek institutional changes favorable to the interest of the minority groups.



According to Alba and Nee, Shibutani and Kwan's study adds several features that the canonical account fails to address. First, they offer a complex causal analysis that allows for the introduction of contingency (i.e., variable group trajectories). Second, they make a distinction among different levels of aggregation, and hence incorporate interaction among individuals and groups, as well as the larger social environment into the analytic accounting. They note that changes in social distance at the micro level are explained by changes at the macro level. Finally, their analysis stresses the centrality of stratification in the ethnic experience, rather than presenting assimilation as seemingly universal (Alba & Nee, 2003, p. 34).

### **THE REAPPRAISAL OF ASSIMILATION**

In the 1980s and 1990s, the social sciences witnessed a renewed appreciation of assimilation as a powerful force and useful concept (See for instance Alba, 1999; Alba & Nee, 1997; Brubaker, 2001; Gleason, 1992; Higham, 1981; Morawska, 1994). Those who continued to defend the usefulness of the concept did not simply resurrect it, however. Newer versions of assimilation theory no longer believed in the cultural hegemony of an Anglo-Saxon core and the inevitability of assimilation (Kazal, 1995). Several authors also pointed out that the polarization between assimilationists and ethnic retentionists was unwarranted, and that assimilation and ethnic resilience can exist side by side (Gans, 1997; Morawska, 1990). According to Gans (1997), for instance, assimilation and cultural pluralism can be reconciled if one recognizes that the two are not a dichotomy, but a range of adaptations. Similarly, Morawska argued that assimilation theory is to be seen as one of a number of possible explanatory frameworks in which the immigrants' adaptation to the host society can be accounted for (Morawska, 1994, p. 76).

Alba and Nee's neo-assimilation theory is certainly the most influential and complete reinvention and adaptation of classical assimilation. Their conceptualization explicitly breaks classic definitions of the term:

We do not assume that assimilation is a universal outcome, occurring in a straight-line trajectory... To the extent that assimilation occurs, it proceeds incrementally, usually as an intergenerational process, stemming both from individuals' purposive action and from the unintended consequences of their workaday decisions. (Alba & Nee, 2003, p. 39).

Central to Alba and Nee's theory is the idea of *context-bound rationality*, which views agency as stemming from choices made by actors who take into account the costs and benefits embedded in the institutional environment. They argue that immigrants' adaptation to their host society is not shaped by one single causal mechanism, but a variety of mechanisms operating at different levels. They

distinguish four such mechanisms of assimilation: *purposive action*, *network mechanisms*, *forms of capital* and *institutional mechanisms*. *Purposive action* refers to the fact that immigrants and their descendants act purposively, in accordance with mental models shaped by cultural beliefs, as well as by institutional constraints. They weigh the costs and benefits of "ethnic" versus "mainstream" strategies (including the educational system and open labor market), or combine the two.

*Network mechanisms* are described as "the social processes that monitor and enforce norms within close-knit groups" (Alba & Nee, 2003, p. 42). Network mechanisms sustain the group norms that are necessary for joint action and, hence, maximized welfare at the group-level. Individuals follow the norms, engage in joint-action and cooperate not only because their interests are linked to the success of the group, but their identity as well. Alba and Nee argue that the importance of network mechanisms that promote welfare maximization is particularly high in contexts of racism and discrimination: "When discriminatory barriers block an individualistic pattern of social mobility, assimilation, when it occurs, depends on collectivist strategies" (Alba & Nee, 2003, p. 45).

Third, they point to the importance of different *forms of capital* in accounting for differences in patterns of adaptation within and between ethnic groups. The forms-of-capital model (Nee & Sanders, 2001) predicts that the descendants of immigrant minorities will assimilate at varying rates depending on the first generation's mix of various forms of capital. Rather than focusing on how the ethnic community protects their youth from the exposure to the influence of inner-city minority youth, the forms-of-capital framework focuses on mechanisms at work within the immigrant family that transfer human and cultural capital from one generation to another. It also points out that labor migrants (a group that typically has limited amount of human and financial capital) need to rely on social capital in order to move ahead, which reduces the risks of international migration but, at the same, time results in dependency on the co-ethnic community.

Finally, Alba and Nee highlight the importance of *institutional mechanisms* in explaining divergent patterns of adaptation. They argue that "purposive action by individuals and within closely-knit groups cannot be understood apart from the institutional framework within which incentives are structured" (Alba & Nee, 2003, p. 53). They see the state as the ultimate source of coercion that sets the underlying rules for competition and cooperation in society. How state organizations monitor and enforce these formal rules strongly affects the adaptation paths of immigrants and their individual members. They give the example of the increasing cost of discrimination, as a result of state regulations that sanction discriminatory behavior. Just like Shibutani and Kwan, Alba and Nee argue that the most important institutional changes are those that lead to changes in values. For them, institutional mechanisms of monitoring and enforcement are the deeper causes of adaptation insofar

as they determine whether the purposive action of individuals and network mechanisms result in integrating or segregating behavior.

## **SUMMARY**

This overview started with an introduction to classic straight-line assimilation theories, most of which conceptualize assimilation in terms of social and cultural incorporation. Apart from Warner and Srole, who draw attention to the importance of structural barriers for explaining the pace of assimilation, these early theories pay little attention to factors that account for variation in the degree of (social and cultural) assimilation. Shibutani and Kwan's ethnic stratification theory – which was written at the same time as many of the canonical assimilation theories – is different in the sense that it offers a causal analysis that explains variation in assimilation trajectories. What I retain from their analysis is the idea that social distance between groups is first and foremost subjective and constructed, and that structural assimilation follows, rather than precedes, a reduction of social distance.

Addressing the shortcomings of early assimilationism, segmented assimilation theory and new assimilation theory no longer see assimilation as an inevitable and straight-line process, but recognize that different paths are possible and groups assimilate at varied paces. Both theories offer a well-developed theoretical framework that help to explain variation in assimilatory trajectories, but these models focus mainly on socio-economic incorporation, and lack sufficient explanation for variation in socio-cultural integration. Also, as I will discuss in the following section, the classic concept of assimilation does not adequately capture the complexity of socio-cultural aspects of incorporation.

## **HYBRIDITY, CREOLIZATION & TRANSNATIONALISM**

Several scholars have argued that processes of ethnic change and identification are too complex to be described and explained through the concepts offered by segmented assimilation and assimilation theory. Foner (1997) states that “the classic concept of assimilation glosses over many complexities in the way immigrants and their institutions change” and that it is “too simplistic to analyze immigrant change in a complex society like the United States.” The notion of segmented assimilation, which attempts to refine the assimilation concept, is still not entirely equipped to make sense of changed behavioral patterns, she argues, because similarity in behavior is not necessarily an indication that immigrants have internalized the host society's norms, values and cultural practices. Rather, similarity in behavioral patterns can be caused by the fact that people – regardless of their

immigration background – react in the same way to similar social and economic conditions. Also, what might seem like a consequence of assimilation may be the result of “pre-migration Americanization” through contact with relatives who have migrated prior or mass media (Rumbaut, 1997).

An alternative is to recognize that immigrants’ cultures neither resemble those one left behind in the sending country nor the mainstream culture of the host society; instead immigrants create a hybrid culture in which premigration cultural patterns are transformed and blended with new elements (See for instance Faas, 2009; Foner, 1997; Gibson, 1989). Rather than assuming that old traits are replaced by new ones, this approach conceptualizes acculturation as an “additive process or one in which old and new traits are blended” (Gibson, 1989, p. 25). Foner (1997) sees cultural incorporation as a *creolization process* in which immigrants combine pre-migration cultural patterns with new cultural norms into “a blend of meanings, perceptions, and social patterns.” During this process, pre-migration customs, values, and attitudes are reinterpreted and new meanings, ideologies and patterns of behavior develop in response to conditions and circumstances in the host society.

Self-identification is also a complex combination of old and new, which is shaped by experiences in the receiving society. Just like old cultural patterns are not simply replaced by new ones, identities linked to the country of origin are not simply substituted by an assimilative national identity. Rather, people self-identify to varying degrees with different ethnic, national or panethnic labels, resulting in *hyphenated*, *hybrid* or *creole* identities in which ethno-racial identities are combined with national identification. These hybrid identities and cultures or “multiple positionings” (Ewing, 2006) are not seen as a particular stage on the path towards assimilation or the development of an assimilative identity, but rather as a specific way of including oneself in society. Modood (2010) argues that ethnic, religious and racial identities can exist alongside a national identity, and that the resulting hybrid identity can be seen as complex form of identification with the receiving society and a movement towards inclusion and social cohesion. Similarly, Ehrkamp (2005) talks about the complexities of multiple and sometimes conflicting attachments of contemporary migrants, and advocates for an understanding of transnational ties and engagement with the host society as complementary rather than contradictory.

Linked to the conceptualization of identity as a complex combination of different group attachments is the idea that ethnicity and self-identification are fluid, dynamic and situational constructs that vary according to relationships and context (Cornell & Hartmann, 2007; Kiang & Fuligni, 2009; Nagel, 1994; Waters, 1990). Following McBeth (1989), Nagel (1994) talks about the “layering of ethnic identity,” arguing that every individual carries a *portfolio of identities* that are

more or less salient in various situations and vis-à-vis various audiences. The identity people choose from their portfolio in a specific context depends partly on where and with whom the interaction occurs. For instance, Padilla (2006) and Espiritu (1993) find that individuals choose from an array of pan-ethnic and nationality-based identities, “depending on the perceived strategic utility and symbolic appropriateness of the identities in different settings and audiences” (Nagel, 1994, p. 155).

Related to the finding that socio-cultural incorporation is characterized by a blend of the old and the new is the continuing importance of transnational ties, activities and belongings (Basch, Schiller, & Blanc, 1994; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007). Most migration scholars now recognize that many contemporary migrants maintain various kinds of ties to their homelands, while simultaneously being incorporated into their host countries (Morawska, 2008). In contrast with the idea that transnational orientations, activities and ties rapidly decline among the second generation (Lucassen, 2006; Portes, Guarnizo, & Landolt, 1999), several studies point to the continuing relevance of transnational connections beyond the first generation (Levitt, 2002).

Transnational involvement can take many forms. First, there is *economic transnationalism*, which is most evident in the sending of remittances (Choate, 2007; Schans, 2009) and transnational entrepreneurship (Portes, 2003). Second, migrants and their descendants can engage in *political transnationalism*, which includes “electoral participation (either as voters or as candidates), membership in political associations, parties or campaigns in two different countries, lobbying the authorities of one country to influence its policies toward another, and nation building itself” (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007, p. 136). Political transnationalism is made possible by the fact that many migrants and their descendants hold dual citizenship (Bloemraad, 2004; Levitt, 2001), which allows them to participate formally in the political practices and debates of two or more nation-states and to claim rights from more than one government. Third, many migrants stay socially connected to their homeland, maintaining kinship ties and other social relations across borders. In some cases they do so because they consider the migration to be temporary and envision a future return to their home countries. A well-documented example is *transnational motherhood*, when immigrant mothers try to be effectively involved in the daily lives of their children who remain in the home country despite the large distance that separates them (Dreby, 2006; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Parrenas, 2005). As for migrants or later generations who do not plan to return to the sending country, transnational ties can remain important. This is apparent in the high prevalence of transnational marriages among the second generation of several ethnic groups (Balzani, 2006; Beck-Gernsheim, 2007; Charsley & Shaw, 2006; Kibria, 2012; Milewski & Hamel, 2010).

## EUROPEAN INCORPORATION THEORIES

The above described theoretical perspectives originated in the United States, and, although a growing number of European studies apply them to the European context (See for instance de Graaf & van Zenderen, 2009; Diehl & Schnell, 2006; Phalet & Heath, 2010; Schneider & Crul, 2010; Silberman et al., 2006; Vermeulen, 2010), both regions still have rather different theoretical and research agendas when it comes to the study of immigration, incorporation and ethnicity (Morawska, 2008). First, in Europe *assimilation* as a concept has a decidedly negative connotation. The most common conceptual equivalent is that of *integration*, which is just like assimilation understood as a multidimensional phenomenon and a two-way process.

Second, European incorporation research is more comparatively oriented and focuses more strongly on the importance of the national context for immigrant incorporation (Crul & Mollenkopf, 2012; Morawska, 2008; Schneider & Crul, 2013). In fact, one of the most important European contributions to the international theoretical debate on integration has been to recognize the national context as a crucial factor in integration (Schneider & Crul, 2013). In contrast, the American theoretical debate on immigrant incorporation seems to have “a persistent blind spot for the importance of national context” (Schneider & Crul, 2013, p. 23; Thomson & Crul, 2008). It has been argued, however, that the European attention for context is often taken to extremes: many European studies give a one-directional interpretation of immigrants' and their offspring's integration, focusing primarily on outside or receiver-side forces. American studies, in contrast, are much more *agentic* and combine context and agency in their explanatory framework (Morawska, 2008, p. 474).

Third, European immigration and ethnic studies give a lot of attention to ethnicity and religion, something that lacks an equivalent in the United States. According to Morawska (2008), the notion of ethnicity as socially and culturally constructed is very much in use in contemporary European empirical research, while in the US this is treated as one of many possible integration trajectories. Also, in Europe religion is seen as an important factor shaping immigrants' and their offspring's incorporation into the host society, while in the US religion is a marginal theme.

Fourth, both regions associate different roles with co-ethnic communities in the process of assimilation/integration (Schneider & Crul, 2010). In the US, *ethnic enclaves* are generally considered beneficial because they are seen as “stepping stones for economic success” (Schneider & Crul, 2010, p. 1144) and help to prevent downward assimilation (See for instance Portes & Zhou, 1993). But in Europe “integration” carries the implicit ideal of cultural homogeneity, therefore so-called *parallel societies* (ethnically bound subgroups) are considered antithetical to integration (Schneider & Crul, 2010) not only in public discourse, but also to some extent in academia. Also,

there is more attention paid to negative consequences of strong ethnic communities, particularly for the position of women, in Europe (Crul & Vermeulen, 2003; De Vries, 1995; Vermeulen, 2010).

In contrast with American studies, which are more explicitly theoretically informed, European research on immigrant incorporation is much less theory-driven and more problem-oriented (Martiniello & Rath, 2010; Morawska, 2008; Schneider & Crul, 2010). When it *is* theoretically informed, it reflects mainstream social science debates rather than field-specific theoretical modes of immigrant assimilation, ethnic persistence, transnationalism or integration (Morawska, 2008). As of recently, several scholars have tried to apply American theories – in particular the segmented assimilation paradigm – to the European context, or at least raised the question of whether or not American theories also apply to Europe (Alba, 2005; Alba & Waters, 2011; Crul & Mollenkopf, 2012; Penn & Lambert, 2009; Phalet & Heath, 2010; Silberman et al., 2006; Vermeulen, 2010). Others, however, have cautioned against transferring American theories to the European context (Crul & Mollenkopf, 2012; Crul & Schneider, 2010; Martiniello & Rath, 2010). Crul and Schneider, for instance, point out that segmented outcomes exist in Europe, as in the US, but that the mechanisms and institutional settings behind them will likely differ from those described in the segmented assimilation theory (2010, p. 1264).

Partly in response to the US-centeredness of dominant theoretical paradigms, several attempts have been made to construct European-oriented or general theories of immigrant incorporation. The most comprehensive is Essers' *theory of intergenerational integration*, which asserts that every theory of intergenerational integration includes three different, but interdependent aspects that require explanation: *social integration*, or the inclusion as an individual into a social system; *social structure*, which includes both *social inequality* (differences in certain traits within aggregates of individual actors) and *social differentiation* (differences with regard to the various social systems within a broader societal context); and *societal integration* of the whole society with regard to certain structural cleavages and conflicts. Applying this framework to the labor market position of the Turkish population in Belgium, for instance, a focus on social integration means that one has to explain the position of an individual in the labor market. If (s)he holds a labor market position that is similar to an individual actor in a comparable segment of the mainstream group, we can consider it a case of *individual assimilation* – a situation of social integration of individual immigrants into a subsystem of the host society and/or increasing similarity to individual actors in comparable segments of the mainstream population. In terms of social structure, one has to examine the extent to which the Turkish population in Belgium as a whole has a lower labor market position (social inequality), as well as their own ethnic labor market (social differentiation). When there are no

structural inequalities between ethnic groups or ethnic differentiation, we can say that Belgium is characterized by *societal assimilation* – a situation characterized by the absence of ethnic inequalities or ethnic differentiation, or, to put it in terms of boundary processes, no social boundaries between different ethnic groups.

The aim of the theory of intergenerational integration is to explain why immigrants and their descendants choose the path towards assimilation into the host society or to draw on their ethnic social capital. The basic idea of the theory is the following:

Migrations and subsequent social processes of integration are (mostly indirect) consequences of situationally reasonable reactions of the involved actors to the respectively given societal conditions. These situationally shaped individual responses lead to - mostly unintended - structural consequences (at different societal levels), which themselves create a new situation logic for the actors. (Esser, 2004, p. 1127)

To put it differently, “the basic model of intergenerational integration explains different structural outcomes of immigration – societal assimilation, ethnic inequality/ethnic differentiation, ethnic conflicts – as aggregated consequences of the immigrants’ rational “situation-logical actions geared to the prevailing circumstances” (Esser, 2004, p. 1139).

Esser’s model of intergenerational integration consists of three basic steps. First, there is the *logic of the situation*, which links objective societal structures with subjective parameters guiding actions of individual actors. Central in this first logic is the notion *social production functions*, which states that actors’ actions “serve to secure physical well-being and social approval by investment in socially defined cultural goals.” Any theory of intergenerational integration has to explain why people gear their actions to the prevailing constitution and cultural goals in the host society or instead choose ethnic alternatives and utilize their ethnic group capital. The path they choose is shaped by “structural (and/or institutional and cultural) disadvantages.” In general, immigrants should have an objective interest in assimilative action, because this generates the more efficient general capital. But because disadvantages can produce gaps and delays in the achievement of prevailing cultural goals, choosing for *ethnic alternatives* and using the less efficient *ethnic capital* can be a better and/or safer option.

The second step is the *logic of selection*, which specifies a rule about the (causal) connection between external parameters and the selection of a certain behavior. Esser introduces the concepts *expected utility* and *bounded rationality* to explain how people choose a certain behavior, noting “it is a choice between an attendant option with a secure gain and a – more or less – risky and costly investment” (Esser, 2004, p. 1136). Differences in the expected utility of each option are shaped by



three structural conditions: group size, cultural and social distances between the ethnic minority group and the dominant group and the level of embeddedness in ethnic networks. The bigger the group, the more efficient the ethnic alternatives, hence, continuing migration (or what Waters and Jimenez (2005) call *immigrant replenishment*) enhances the value of the ethnic option. Cultural and social distances decrease with the level of exposure to the receiving society, caused, for example, by the duration of stay and interethnic contacts. Esser stresses that it is not time or generation *per se* that cause assimilative change, but rather whether exposure to the core areas of society actually occurs.

Applying these two logics to the labor market position of the Turkish population in Belgium means that people are best off if they look for a job in the mainstream labor market (because, among other reasons, it offers better pay). But discrimination by ethnic Belgians can make it more efficient for the Turkish population to look for a job within the ethnic labor market, which tends to pay less, but is also less risky in terms of unemployment. In the case of a large Turkish network with wide social distance from the Belgian mainstream, when an individual is deeply embedded in the Turkish network, chances will be higher that (s)he chooses the ethnic option over the mainstream one because the investment is less costly and the gain more secure.

Finally, there is the *logic of aggregation* towards a certain collective outcome, which connects micro processes of actors and actions with the macro level of social structures. The decisions actors make, and the effects of these decisions, always lead to structural consequences. In the simplest case, the individual-level outcomes of actors' decisions aggregate to distributions of traits within the population. For instance, individual decisions to be employed in the ethnic labor market result in a high degree of ethnic differentiation in terms of labor. To give another example in the field of socio-cultural incorporation, when many individuals choose to marry co-ethnics as a consequence of taboo on interethnic marriages, this results in a low rate of interethnic marriage (often used as an indicator of ethnic boundaries in society) on an aggregate level. But structural patterns can also be the *unintended consequences* of particular actions. Esser gives the example of the formation of transnational systems as an unintended consequence of investment in an ethnic economy.

In contrast with Esser's theory of intergenerational integration, Crul and Schneider's *comparative integration context theory* gives much more centrality to the importance of the social context (Crul & Schneider, 2010; Crul, Schneider, & Lelie, 2013). The basic idea is that participation in social organizations and belonging to local communities are highly dependent on the integration context. Both the context of *institutional arrangements* and *social and political discourse* are important to take into account when studying how immigrants and their children find their place and position in society. Two different perspectives are needed in order to fully understand immigrant participation in

key institutions: a societal perspective, which looks at how national and local institutional arrangements and discourses facilitate or hamper participation, and an agency-centered perspective, which focuses on how individuals and groups “develop options and make choices, challenging given opportunities and structural configurations” (Crul & Schneider, 2010, p. 1260). In highlighting the importance of studying both structure and agency, the comparative integration context theory addresses Morawska’s critique that European studies focus too much on the importance of context, while paying less attention to how individuals and groups respond to the constraints and opportunities they face.

Much like American assimilation theories, the two European theoretical frameworks focus mainly on structural incorporation, but their claim that both context and agency are important in explaining intergenerational integration is also useful for the study of socio-cultural incorporation. In line with these two perspectives, I also assert individual-level incorporation as the result of a negotiation process in which actors try to realize their preferred lifestyle given external (constraining) parameters. In the following, I argue that the study of ethnic boundary dynamics, including several dimensions of boundary maintenance as well as individual boundary negotiation, is essential for understanding differences in socio-cultural incorporation because it implies a focus on both the external parameters that might constrain people’s choices, as well as how people deal with these constraints in realizing their goals.

## **SOCIO-CULTURAL INCORPORATION AND ETHNIC BOUNDARIES**

As previously discussed, after the collapse of classical assimilation theory, the major theoretical paradigms shifted their attention from the study of social and cultural assimilation to that of structural incorporation and socioeconomic mobility. Both the segmented and new assimilation theories, for instance, offer a theoretical framework that is centered on explaining differences in socio-structural outcomes, and explain differences in acculturation and self-identification as products of how immigrants and their descendants are structurally incorporated. Studies conceptualizing ethnic change in terms of hybridity might offer a more nuanced explanation of ethnicity-related processes and changes, but they do not provide a theoretical framework that explains within- and between-group differences. In sum, none of the contemporary frameworks discussed offer a satisfactory theoretical model that can account for differences in socio-cultural incorporation and ethnic change.

This dissertation is an attempt to fill this gap by demonstrating how ethnic boundary dynamics explain differences in socio-cultural incorporation and change. I agree with Alba (2005) that the

nature of ethnic boundaries and the processes that affect them are “critical to ethnic construction and change” but that little has been done in this respect. Different authors have rediscovered the usefulness of the ethnic boundary paradigm for conceptualizing processes of immigrant incorporation and assimilation (Alba & Nee, 2003; Zolberg & Woon, 1999), but very few have explicitly focused on how ethnic boundary maintenance actually *shapes* processes of immigrant incorporation. By studying how and by whom boundaries are drawn, and what their properties are, one can begin to understand not only how social distinctions between different groups develop, but also why some groups assimilate faster than others, both socio-culturally and economically.

Alba (2005) recognizes the importance of the nature of ethnic boundaries for processes of incorporation and assimilation. He claims that the nature of ethnic boundaries is crucial in explaining how “ethnic individuals, parts of ethnic groups, or even entire groups narrow the social distance that separates them from the mainstream and its opportunities.” More specifically, assimilation of individuals or groups is shaped by whether boundaries are blurred or bright<sup>2</sup>. Boundaries are *bright* when “the distinction involved is unambiguous, so that individuals know at all times which side of the boundary they are on.” In this case, Alba argues, assimilation takes the form of *boundary crossing*: a discarding of signs of membership of an ethnic group in an attempt to pass as a member of the group on the other side of the boundary. Boundaries are *blurred* when self-representation and social representation allow for ambiguous locations with respect to the boundary. This eases assimilation, as people are not forced to choose between involvement in the mainstream and attachment to their family and ethnic group (Alba, 2005, p. 22). According to Alba, Turks in Germany represent a case of bright boundaries, whereas the boundary between Mexicans and the mainstream in the US is a blurred one. In Germany, the boundary is based on religious differences and reinforced by barriers to citizenship for the second generation that existed until 2000. Because the boundary is bright, assimilation is largely a matter of individual boundary crossing – of discarding the signs of membership of the ethnic group and seeking acceptance from the dominant

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<sup>2</sup> At times, it seems that Alba is explaining assimilation as the decline of boundaries. When assimilation is defined as the declining relevance of ethnic boundaries (or blurring of boundaries), and blurred boundaries are said to facilitate assimilation, explanans and explanandum are virtually the same. The way I see it, the confusion stems from a rather unsophisticated use of the concept of social boundary; there is no conceptual distinction between the different ways boundaries manifest themselves. In defining a social boundary as “a categorical distinction that members of a society recognize in their quotidian activities and that affects their mental orientations and actions towards one another,” Alba and Nee (2003) recognize that boundaries have both a categorical and behavioral dimension, but they merge the two into one definition of social boundaries. They also do not explicitly distinguish how boundaries manifest themselves in interaction or discourse (categorical and behavioral), and how this results in boundaries on an aggregate group-level (social boundaries)

group. This happens rarely however, given that the risks associated with seeking acceptance from a mainstream that discriminates, while potentially facing accusations of disloyalty from the own ethnic group can be quite intimidating for many. In the case of Mexicans in the US, this is much less the case, given that in the case of a blurred boundary, assimilation has a much broader social base and that it can occur gradually.

Whether a boundary is blurred or bright, Alba argues, depends on how it has been institutionalized in different domains. Institutionalization of a boundary refers to the distinction that is made between natives and immigrants in institutions such as schools, politics or the work place, as well as to all other distinctions that are correlated with it. Alba argues that “when this complex of distinctions is manifest in many domains (implying that participants enact it with regularity in their everyday lives) and is associated with salient asymmetries in social status and power, then it is unlikely to be blur-able.”

The fact that other studies do not explicitly refer to the importance of ethnic boundaries for incorporation does not mean that there is no support for my claim that boundary dynamics are essential for explaining socio-cultural incorporation and ethnic change. In fact, many scholars of incorporation are concerned with boundary patterns, but do not address it using the conceptual boundary toolkit (Pachucki et al., 2007). A couple of examples illustrate my point. When Warner and Srole (1945) claim that phenotypical ranking affects the rate of assimilation and odds for social mobility, they are pointing out the role of symbolic/categorical boundaries in processes of incorporation and mobility. Shibutani and Kwan’s claim that the social distance between groups is socially constructed and essential in explaining ethnic stratification, they basically refer to the social construction and importance of symbolic boundaries for creating and maintaining social boundaries (which includes ethnic inequality). And when Portes and colleagues draw our attention to the importance of strong co-ethnic communities for warding off downward assimilation, they actually demonstrate the impact of conformity pressure (which I have described as an introspective mechanism of ethnic boundary maintenance) for both acculturation and socioeconomic mobility. The European-based comparative integration context theory highlights the importance of several discursive contexts for the second generation’s feeling of belonging (Crul & Schneider, 2010; Schneider & Crul, 2013). Finally, all those who recognize the strong role of racism and discrimination in shaping self-identification are highlighting the importance of the construction of symbolic and behavioral dimension of ethnic boundary maintenance for ethnic minorities’ subjective incorporation.

In what follows, I develop a tentative model of what I call *bounded incorporation*, a model that integrates the ethnic boundary approach into existing theories of incorporation. The structure of my model mirrors that of Esser's theory of intergenerational integration, in the sense that it (1) includes a focus on both context (ethnic boundary maintenance) and agency (ethnic boundary negotiation) and (2) sees social boundaries as the intended or unintended consequences of individual incorporation (which itself follows from actor's bounded rationality).

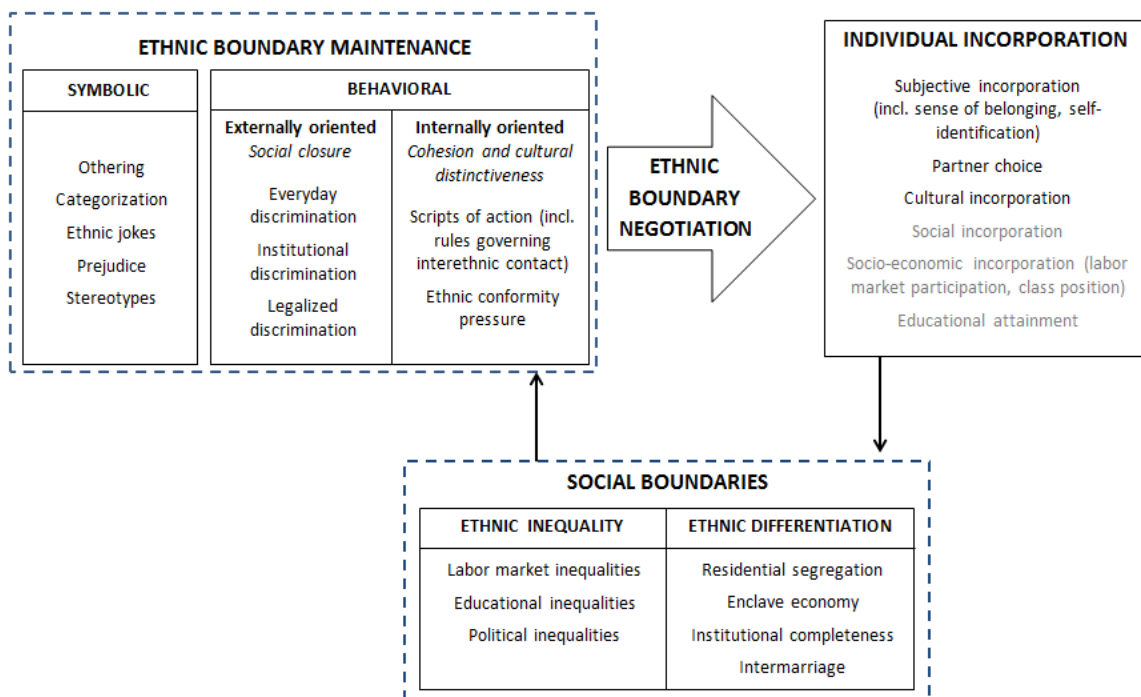
### **SYNTHESIS: CONCEPTUAL MODEL**

I argue that ethnic boundary dynamics – including both boundary maintenance and boundary negotiation – are crucial in shaping individual-level socio-cultural incorporation. Focusing on how ethnic boundary dynamics shape processes of incorporation is a useful alternative for the many U.S.-based theories of immigrant incorporation, which tend to take the structural features of American society for granted (Alba, 2005). Studying the properties of boundaries and how they are maintained and negotiated not only enables the study of incorporation in societies other than the United States, but can also offer a more in-depth understanding of what particular features actually mean for incorporation.

Figure 2 offers a visual representation of the conceptual model that guides the empirical analyses in this dissertation. The model mirrors Esser's theory of intergenerational integration as it reproduces his three different logics, namely a logic of structure (step 1: ethnic boundary maintenance), a logic of selection (step 2: ethnic boundary negotiation) and a logic of aggregation (step 3: social boundaries). The central idea behind the model is that individual-level differences in incorporation can partly be explained by the extent to which individuals are exposed to ethnic boundaries (logic of structure) and how they respond to these boundaries (logic of selection). Following Esser, I furthermore claim that individual-level incorporation translates into social boundaries (or oppositely societal integration) on an aggregate level, which expresses itself in ethnic inequalities or ethnic differentiation. Consequently, if one wants to explain within-and between-group differences regarding socio-cultural aspects of incorporation, one must focus on how both the minority and the mainstream group maintain ethnic boundaries through discourse and other forms of representation (symbolic dimension) and through behavior (behavioral dimension), as well as to how individuals respond to these boundary maintaining mechanisms. Like Esser (2004, p. 1127), I argue that these "situationally shaped individual responses" shape individual-level incorporation, in turn leading to (mostly unintended) structural consequences, which themselves create a new situation logic for the actors.

An analysis of how boundary dynamics shape socio-cultural incorporation should first start with a focus detailing how boundaries between two groups are maintained, meaning through what mechanisms, processes and actions do different social actors (including not only individuals but also institutions and the state) mark and hence maintain ethnic boundaries. I build on Alba's study (2005) by offering a conceptual framework that helps to analyze the extent to which boundaries are institutionalized and how they are maintained in everyday interaction. Rather than merely studying static institutionalization, this model treats ethnic boundary maintenance as a dynamic process carried out on multiple levels by multiple actors (including not only institutions but also individual people).

**Figure 2** Model of bounded incorporation



As already explained in the previous chapter, I distinguish the symbolic and the behavioral dimensions of ethnic boundary maintenance, based on Wimmer's claim that boundaries consist of both a categorical and a behavioral dimension. An analysis of how symbolic boundaries are drawn includes the study of boundary markers – the cultural diacritica that are used to draw a boundary between “us” and “them” – as well as the ways boundaries are expressed in different forms of (written and spoken) discourse and other forms of representation (including, for example, cartoons or artwork). A study of the behavioral dimension of ethnic boundary maintenance focuses on how a

cognitive or discursive distinction between different groups is translated into action. I distinguish between externally-oriented dynamics, which are essentially practices of social closure, and internally-oriented dynamics of ethnic boundary maintenance, which are aimed at maintaining group cohesiveness and cultural distinctiveness. Following Barth's plea to model processes of boundary maintenance separately on a micro, meso and macro level, I argue that it is important to pay attention to how boundaries are constructed in interaction with others (micro), through meso-level processes that create dichotomies and boundaries that include and exclude, and through far-reaching macro-level state policies and media discourses.

Following Alba (2005) and Shibutani and Kwan (1965), I hypothesize that the stability and brightness of a boundary increase as it is constructed by multiple actors on multiple levels and manifests itself in more domains of life. When an ethnic boundary is enacted and experienced in many domains and is common in everyday life, the perceived social distance is large, which in turn shapes how individuals position themselves vis-à-vis "the other" in terms of culture, belonging and identity.

In line with the current agency-rich approach to the study of ethnic boundary dynamics and the idea of bounded rationality (Alba & Nee, 2003; Esser, 2004), I argue that any analysis of the impact of ethnic boundaries on individual-level (socio-cultural) incorporation has to take individual agency into account. Just like Alba and Nee and Esser, I conceive individual incorporation as the intended or unintended results of "immigrants' rational situation-logical actions" that respond to prevailing circumstances (Esser, 2004, p. 1139). As social actors, immigrants and their children are not passive, but actively "implement integration strategies, invent composite lifestyles and ways of thinking" (Manco, 2004). A focus on individual agency not only includes a focus on how individuals negotiate, redraw, reposition or reinterpret the symbolic boundaries they encounter, but also how they actively deal with boundary maintaining mechanisms such as discrimination and ethnic conformity pressure, all in an attempt to claim the lifestyles, identities or opportunities denied to them from the outside. An analysis of how people deal with boundary maintaining mechanisms should pay attention to how this is shaped by their position in different power hierarchies (including not only ethnic hierarchies but also power inequalities based on age, gender and socioeconomic status), as well as by characteristics of the socio-cultural contexts in which they are embedded.

## **RESEARCH AIMS & QUESTIONS**

This doctoral dissertation is dedicated to demonstrating that the ethnic boundary approach is critical for studies of immigrant incorporation and that a focus on ethnic boundary dynamics is an essential

part of explaining inter- and intragroup differences in socio-cultural incorporation. I demonstrate this relevance based on qualitative research among Turkish Belgians in two Flemish regions, namely the city of Ghent, and the mining towns in Limburg. Broadly speaking, three questions are central in this dissertation:

1. *What mechanisms of ethnic boundary maintenance are second and third generation Turkish Belgians confronted with in their everyday lives?*
2. *How do second and third generation Turkish Belgians negotiate the boundaries and boundary maintaining mechanisms they are confronted with?*
3. *How do ethnic boundary dynamics (both ethnic boundary maintenance and negotiation) shape individual-level aspects of the socio-cultural incorporation of second- and third-generation Turkish Belgians?*

As can be seen in Figure 3, these three questions correspond with three aspects of my model of bounded incorporation, namely *boundary maintenance*, *boundary negotiation*, and *individual incorporation*. It is not my aim to give a full answer to these questions, nor do I want to come to an entire theory of socio-cultural incorporation. What I do intend to do is to single out a number of themes, based on what emerged from the data and gaps in the literature – that form an important part of the answer to these questions.

An initial theme that emerged very clearly from the data is the issue of *ethnic conformity pressure* by the co-ethnic community. Since the beginning of the data collection (in Ghent), Turkish research participants repeatedly referred to a high degree of social control in their community, and the pressure not to become “too Belgian.” Given that this conformity pressure is aimed at preserving a group’s distinctiveness, I came to see this phenomenon as an internally-oriented dimension of ethnic boundary maintenance. Several studies have already addressed a similar phenomenon in the Netherlands (De Vries, 1987; Lindo, 1996), but not much is known about why ethnic conformity pressure is more prevalent or more effective in some communities than in others. Also, there is little research regarding how individual members of a community deal with pressure from the co-ethnic community to conform, nor about how it affects their cultural incorporation. In this dissertation, I address these lacunae, but in order to do so, I also need to develop a greater understanding of to what Turkish Belgians feel they have to conform to. This means that I have to learn what it means to be Turkish, by looking for the *boundary markers* that Turkish Belgians use to define themselves vis-à-vis those belonging to the mainstream. Based on these observations, the following five sub-questions can be added to the main research questions:

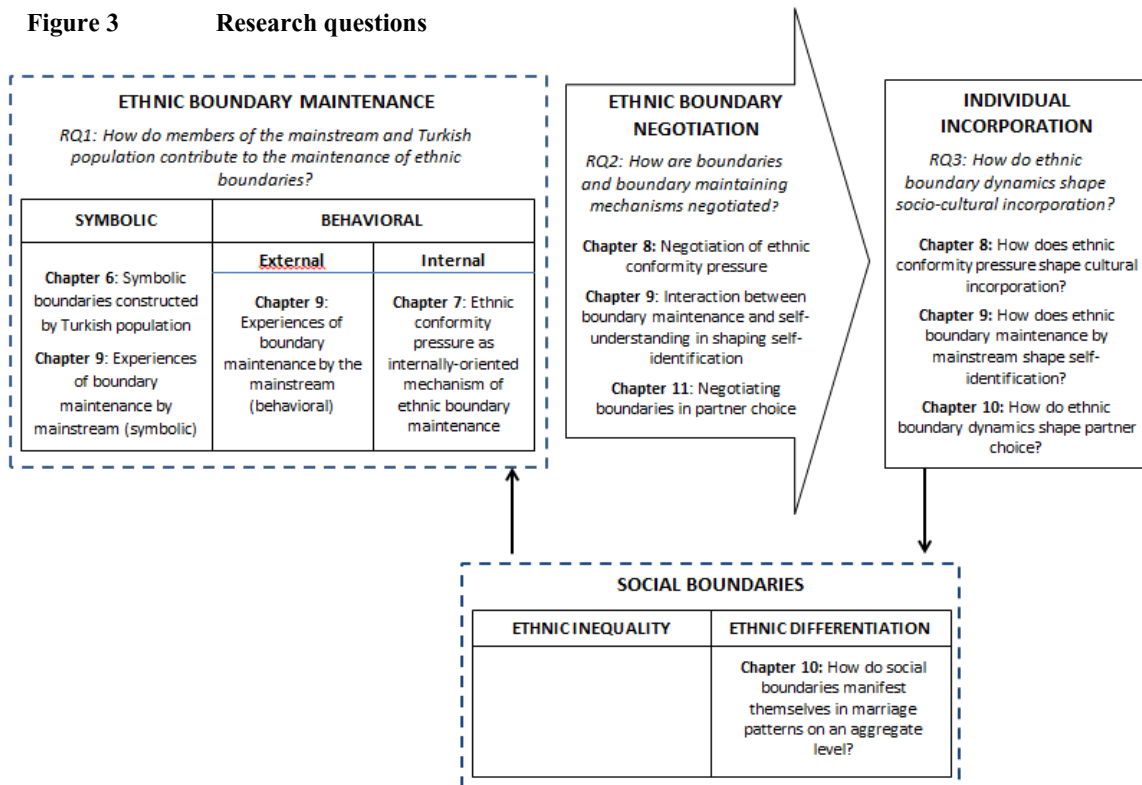


- *What symbolic boundary markers do Turkish Belgians use to draw a boundary between themselves and ethnic Belgians? (Chapter 6)*
- *How does conformity pressure from the co-ethnic community manifest itself? (Chapter 7)*
- *How can differences in the occurrence and enforcement of conformity pressure from the co-ethnic community be explained? (Chapter 7)*
- *How do people respond to ethnic conformity pressure by the co-ethnic community? (Chapter 8)*
- *What do responses to ethnic conformity pressure mean in terms of socio-cultural incorporation and ethnic boundary change? (Chapter 8)*

As can be seen in Figure 3, these five questions cover several logics of my bounded incorporation model: the question about symbolic boundary drawing by the Turkish community looks at the symbolic dimension of ethnic boundary maintenance; the second and third question focus on the behavioral dimension of ethnic boundary maintenance; the fourth centers on the aspect of ethnic boundary negotiation; and the last one is aimed at deciphering the impact the combination of ethnic boundary maintenance and negotiation has on individual-level socio-cultural incorporation.

A second theme that emerged from the data is the high degree of perceived exclusion among the respondents, and the impact this has on their self-identification. Many studies focus on the impact of discrimination on incorporation and identification, but much less attention has been devoted to the effects of more subtle exclusionary practices (such as ethnic jokes and discursive othering). Also, studies that focus on the link between discrimination and self-identification are mainly quantitative and leave little room for the study of how context and self-identification interact in the formation of a stable identity. I take both into account by asking the following three questions (which are all addressed in chapter 9):

- *How do Turkish Belgians experience processes of ethnic boundary drawing by the mainstream in their everyday lives?*
- *How do such experiences (of ethnic boundary maintenance by the mainstream) shape Turkish Belgians' self-identification?*
- *How do context and self-understanding interact in the process of self-identification of Turkish Belgians?*

**Figure 3** Research questions

The third theme, finally, is partner choice in a context of bright boundaries. Many studies have argued that partner choice is a good indicator for assimilation or the disappearance of ethnic boundaries. Consequently, a focus on who people marry and why, can provide valuable insights to the existence of social boundaries on an aggregate level, as well as how partner choice is shaped by boundary maintenance and negotiation. The following questions will be addressed in chapters ten and eleven:

- *What partner choice patterns do we find on an aggregate level, and what does this tell us about social boundaries between Turkish Belgians and the mainstream? (chapter 10)*
- *Why do people prefer or marry a specific type of partner and what is the role of ethnic boundary dynamics? (chapter 10 & 11)*
- *What boundaries did people who engaged in an interethnic marriage confront and how did they negotiate them? (chapter 11)*

In the conclusion of this dissertation, I will link the findings to previous research, as well as build a bridge between the mainly micro-level analyses in this dissertation and implications on a macro-structural level. Additionally, I discuss theoretical implications of the research, suggest topics for further research and list potential policy implications of my research.



# CHAPTER 4

## TURKISH-BELGIAN TRAJECTORIES & BOUNDARIES

*The Turkish population in Belgium*





**THE IMMIGRANTS***by Margaret Atwood*

They are allowed to inherit  
 the sidewalks involved as palmfruits, bricks  
 exhausted and soft, the deep  
 lawnscent, orchards whorled  
 to the land's contours, the inflected weather  
 only to be told they are too poor  
 to keep it up, or someone  
 has noticed and wants to kill them; or the towns  
 pass laws which declare them obsolete.

I see them coming  
 up from the hold smelling of vomit,  
 infested, emaciated, their skins grey  
 with travel; as they step on shore  
 the old countries recede, become  
 perfect, thumbnail castles preserved  
 like gallstones in a glass bottle, the  
 towns dwindle upon the hillsides  
 in a light paperweight-clear.

They carry their carpetbags and trunks  
 with clothes, dishes, the family pictures;  
 they think they will make an order  
 like the old one, sow miniature orchards,  
 carve children and flocks out of wood  
 but always they are too poor, the sky  
 is flat, the green fruit shrivels  
 in the prairie sun, wood is for burning;  
 and if they go back, the towns  
 in time have crumbled, their tongues  
 stumble among awkward teeth, their ears  
 are filled with the sound of breaking glass.  
 I wish I could forget them  
 and so forget myself:

my mind is a wide pink map  
 across which move year after year  
 arrows and dotted lines, further and further,  
 people in railway cars  
 their heads stuck out of the windows  
 at stations, drinking milk or singing,  
 their features hidden with beards or shawls  
 day and night riding across an ocean of unknown  
 land to an unknown land.



## MIGRATION HISTORY & DEMOGRAPHICS

Turkish migration to Belgium offers a classic example of the labor migration typical in Western Europe in the 1960s and early 1970s (Reniers, 1999). One condition for large-scale migration is pressure to emigrate from the place of origin, and for Turkish migrants, the most important push factor was the weak economic prospect in Turkey (Loobuyck, 2006). Migration from Turkey to Belgium consists of three distinct migration waves (Lievens, 2000). The first wave of labor migration, which started in the beginning of the 1960s and ended in the middle of the 1970s, was initiated by the Belgian government in an attempt to resolve the shortage of laborers in certain industrial sectors. Labor migration was initially conceived as being temporary and rotational: migrants were supposed to return home after the expiration of their contract and replaced by a new group (Reniers, 1999). The first wave consisted mainly of male migrants with little or no formal education (Phalet & Heath, 2011; Reniers, 2000). They mostly originated from rural areas situated in a cluster of central Anatolian provinces, especially Afyon, Eskisehir and Kayseri. Almost one third of the early Turkish immigrants in Belgium come from Afyon, in particular the district of Emirdağ (Reniers, 1999). Seventy-five per cent of the men were married, making this migration essentially a family or household undertaking. According to Reniers (2000), Turkish migration is an example of conservative migration, a migration form that is undertaken “in order to preserve what one has” and that permits households to continue living within their region of origin after a brief stay abroad.

In response to the economic crisis that followed the first petrol shock in 1973, Belgium – just like many other European countries – decided to close its borders for non-qualified labor immigrants in 1974 (Eggerickx, 2006). The concept *migration stop* is misleading however, because migration continued, first mostly through *family reunification*, and later through *family formation* (or marriage migration). Despite initial plans to go back to Turkey, many migrants eventually chose to settle permanently, partly because revenues turned out to be too low to guarantee a satisfying living standard for the family back home or invest in the economy in the region of origin. The decision to stay for at least a couple more years gave rise to a second wave of family reunification migration.

Because of the moratorium on migration, legal possibilities to come to Belgium were significantly reduced, and this created the new dynamic of *marriage migration*. In a context where labor permits were only given to highly qualified migrants, family formation and family reunification were, for many, the only ways to legally enter Belgian (and by extension European) territory. This third wave of migration is ongoing and brings around 3,000 Turkish citizens to Belgium annually (Timmerman, Lodewijckx, & Wets, 2009).

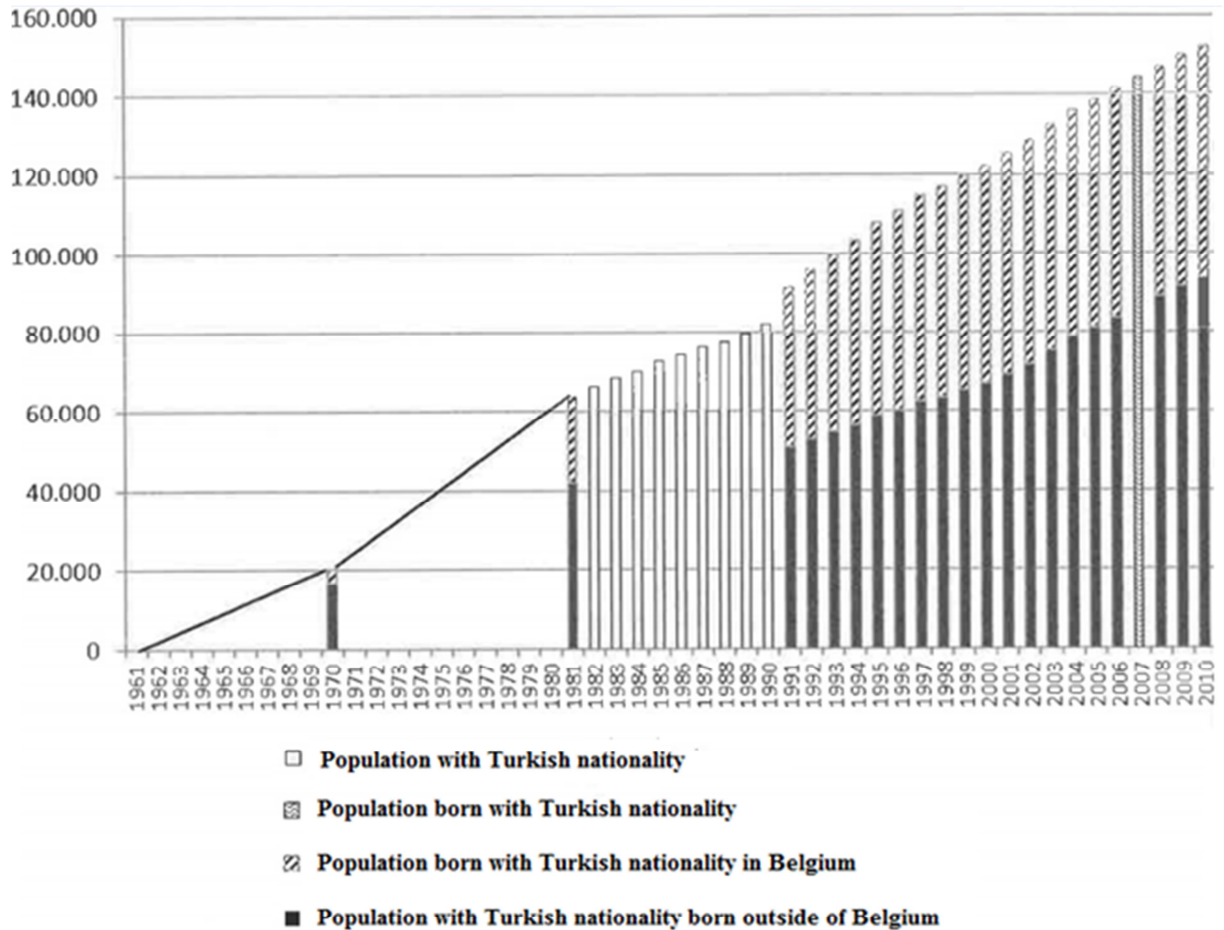


Today, the adult immigrant population consists of four distinct generations based on their exposure to Belgian society (Lievens, 1999). The *first generation* is made up of the pioneers who came as adults (16 years or older) in the 1960s and 1970s, as well as those adults who came through family reunification and family formation (marriage migration). The intermediate or *1.5 generation* are the young family members (7-16 years old) who joined the first generation in the 1970s and 1980s. The *second generation* are the children of the first or 1.5 generation who are born in Belgium or moved there before the age of 6. Finally, the *third generation* is those who have at least one parent who belongs to the second generation. Because of continuous chain migration and resulting *immigrant replenishment* (Waters & Jimenez, 2005), generations and cohorts do not overlap, and people of the second generation can be the same age and grow up in the same context as people from the third generation. Following Waters and Jimenez, I argue that immigrant replenishment has important implications for socio-cultural incorporation and that *generation* is no longer a proxy for how far removed one is from the so-called ethnic ground zero (Lieberson, 1973) associated with the pioneers of the 1960s and 1970s. I, therefore, argue that it is important to be critical about the concept *generation* or the idea of *generational change* when empirically studying aspects of socio-cultural incorporation.

In 1961, as few as 320 people with Turkish nationality were residing in Belgium, but by 1970, that number had risen to 20,000 (Schoonvaere, 2013, p. 5). By 1994, Belgium reached a historical maximum of 92,272 people with Turkish nationality (Schoonvaere, 2013: p. 5). By 2004, the number of people with only Turkish nationality had declined to 40,000 due to a high number of naturalizations, and since then, it has remained relatively constant. In contrast, the number of people of Turkish ancestry has continued to rise, mainly as a result of continuing migration through marriage; up until at least 2007, there has been an annual inflow of around 3,000 Turkish citizens a year (Timmerman et al., 2009), the majority of whom arrive in Belgium through a transnational marriage. As can be seen in Figure 4, Belgium now counts about 155,000 people of Turkish ancestry, over 90,000 of whom are born outside of Belgium. As such, the Turkish population is the fifth largest population with foreign roots in Belgium, after Moroccan, Italian, Dutch and French.

In the first phase of Turkish migration to Belgium, the Turkish population mainly settled in Belgian regions with mining and industrial activities in the provinces of Limburg, Henegouwen and Luik. By the 1980s, more were found in larger cities such as Brussels, Ghent and Antwerp. By 2006, 25.2 per cent of those born with Turkish nationality were living in Brussels, 16.1 per cent in East Flanders, 20 per cent in Limburg, 12.3 per cent in Antwerp and 10 per cent each in Henegouwen and Luik (Schoonvaere, 2013).

Figure 4 Evolution of the Turkish population in Belgium (Source: Schoonvaere, 2013)



## BELGIAN AND FLEMISH INTEGRATION POLICY

Compared to other North-West European immigrant-receiving countries, Belgium stands out because of its slow adoption of formal integration policies (Loobuyck & Jacobs, 2006; Phaet & Swyngedouw, 2003). It was not until the late 1980s, after the success of extreme-right party *Vlaams Blok*, that issues of immigrant integration appeared on the political agenda. In 1989, the Belgian government called the Royal Commissariat for Migrant Policy (*Koninklijk Commissariaat voor Migrantenbeleid*) into being, a semi-official government body set up to develop a coherent federal policy regarding immigrant incorporation. Like in other European countries' policies, the central

concept in the commissariat's reports was *integration*, which was conceptualized as the incorporation of migrants into Belgian society according to three guiding principles:

(a) assimilation where the public order demands this; (b) consistent promotion of the best possible fit in accordance with the orientating social principles which support the culture of the host country and which are related to “modernity,” “emancipation” and “true pluralism” – as understood by a modern western state – and (c) unambiguous respect for the cultural diversity-as-mutual-enrichment in all other areas. (Loobuyck & Jacobs, 2006, p. 108).

Defined as such, the Belgian immigrant integration policy occupies a middle-ground between the French assimilationist policy and Anglo-Saxon multiculturalism. Critics argue, however, that in practice, Belgian integration policy and discourse is ethnocentric, expecting and promoting assimilation rather than multicultural diversity (Blommaert & Verschueren, 1992).

When discussing migration and migrant policies in Belgium, it is important to note that there is *multi-level governance*, in that migration and migrant policies are spread over different levels. To summarize a very complex structure, the national (federal) government is responsible for *migration policy*, while the communities and regions (including Flanders and Wallonia) have “autonomous jurisdiction about the *integration policy*” (Loobuyck & Jacobs, 2006). Because of this, there are stark differences between the Flemish and French-speaking communities. In general, Flanders has an integration policy that closely resembles the Anglo-Saxon and (former) Dutch multiculturalist model, while the francophone policy leans towards the French assimilationist model (Loobuyck & Jacobs, 2006). On all levels, policy tends to be *inclusive* and *coordinated*, which means that diversity should automatically be taken into account in whatever policy field: every minister and administration has to take responsibility regarding matters of immigrant incorporation (Loobuyck & Jacobs, 2006, p. 110).

The first Flemish policy note, accepted in March 1989, stated that there was a need for (a) a specific approach that focuses on eliminating social disadvantages and facilitating emancipation through recognition of cultural identity and (b) the establishment of a categorical *integration sector*. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, this initial note was further developed and formalized into decrees and strategic plans, but the core idea of equal participation and emancipation through preservation of cultural identity always remained the same. Today, the Flemish policy is a mix of categorical and inclusive elements (Loobuyck & Jacobs, 2006, p. 110). The Flemish government strives for an inclusive policy, but there is still room for categorical policies that are specifically oriented towards immigrant groups. The attention to categorical elements in the integration policy, such as support for immigrant associations, is in line with the multiculturalist belief that the preservation of heritage cultural identity can promote emancipation and participation in the host society. But whether or not

the Flemish government (as the local institutions that have to implement these policy ideals) practices what it preaches, is highly debatable. To give an example, the introduction of a headscarf ban in many schools and city administrations suggests that not all actors and institutions in the field actually promote heritage culture maintenance, hence falling short of realizing the ideal situation described in policy documents.

## **SOCIO-CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS**

### **RELIGION**

Even though Turks in Belgium are often depicted as a group that is relatively homogeneous in terms of ethnicity and region of origin (Lesthaeghe, 2000), the group is diverse in terms of religious, ethnic and cultural background. Although most Turkish Belgians are Sunni Muslims from Central Anatolia, the Turkish population in Belgium also includes Turks of Kurdish origin, Christians and the generally more progressive Alevis (Wets, 2006). There is also religious diversity within the Sunni Muslim group, as there are many different religious affiliations. The most influential Turkish Islamic movement is the *Diyanet*, a Belgian “spin-off” of the Presidency of Religious Affairs in Turkey, which was founded in 1923 to promote “a modern, national vision of Hanafi Sunni Islam subordinate to Kemalist secularity” (Manço & Kanmaz, 2004). The *Diyanet* represents the official Turkish attitude towards Islam, one that is liberal and secular (Timmerman, Vanderwaeren, & Crul, 2003). The *Diyanet* unites about two-thirds of the Turkish mosques in Belgium and is the most popular religious affiliation among Turkish Belgians (Lesthaeghe & Neels, 2000). The second most popular affiliation is the Islamist movement *Milli Görüş*, which was founded in Germany in 1973 (close to a third of the Turkish mosques in Belgium belong to this group). In addition to these two main players, there are also some smaller affiliations, including the Nurcu, Süleymancı and Nakşibendi movements, which together account for about 10 per cent of the Turkish Muslims in Belgium (Lesthaeghe & Neels, 2000)

### **COMMUNITY RECONSTRUCTION**

As a result of the highly specific initial migration pattern, and continuing marriage migration, Turkish communities in certain Belgian cities can be considered *transplanted communities* with a high degree of cohesion, normative consensus and social control (Reniers, 1999; Surkyn & Reniers, 1997). Each of these communities has an almost “one-to-one link with an area or even with a town or village in Turkey” (Lesthaeghe, 2000). In popular speech, some streets or neighborhoods in Belgium

are named after the origin of the majority of its inhabitants. The boulevard “Chaussée de Haecht” in Brussels, for instance, is also known as “Chaussée d’Emirdag” (Timmerman, 1995).

These transplanted communities maintain and expand their strong community ties in two ways. First, they maintain extensive cultural, political and commercial ties with “mirror communities” in Turkey, which facilitates chain migration and transnational marriages (Reniers, 2000), and contributes to the retention of pre-migration cultural norms and practices. The high degree of transnationalism and “double allegiance” is most notably expressed in the strong preference for transnational marriages (Lievens, 1999; Reniers, 2001; Timmerman et al., 2009), as well as through continued interest in Turkish media, a high prevalence of property ownership and frequent contacts with the community of origin, both through telecommunication and annual visits to the region of origin (Kaya & Kentel, 2007; Lesthaeghe, 2000). This strong orientation to Turkey has been transmitted to the Turkish second generation, whose interest in the host society has been described as minimal (Lesthaeghe, 2000).

Second, ties are maintained through various associations and federations, which are most often linked to existing social, political, religious and ethnic cleavages in Turkey (Jacobs, Phalet, & Swyngedouw, 2004; Vanparys, 2001). In Flanders, there are four federations that together support over 250 Turkish associations. In 2001, the city of Ghent alone counted 52 recognized Turkish associations (Demirogullari, 2001), comparable to that in other cities with large Turkish populations. Usually, the first organizations that were created were the mosque organizations (Vanparys, 2001). Later, other socio-cultural associations came into being, often affiliated with a particular religious or political affiliation. Since 1986, there has been an increase in autonomous associations that are no longer related to a political or religious organization (Vanparys, 2001).

## **GENDER & FAMILY RELATIONS**

Turkish culture has been characterized as a group-oriented culture, with tightly knit social networks and little room for personal initiative (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1990). While it is true that Turkey as a whole is rapidly changing from a traditional agrarian society to a modern, urbanized nation (Phalet & Claeys, 1993), we also have to recognize that these changes mainly happened in major cities and coastal areas – much less in the rural areas where most migrants are from (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1990). Consequently, those rural Turkish immigrants brought with them a culture that was, at the time of departure, characterized by a patriarchal family system and traditional gender roles. Like in many other Mediterranean populations, Turkish families tend to be characterized by *strong family ties*. In strong families, the familial group more than the individual predominates in the socialization of the young, and the family (rather than for example welfare organizations) is seen as a source of protection

against difficulties imposed by social and economic realities (Reher, 1998, p. 212). Among the Turkish population, for example, it is very common that partner choice and marriage are a family-rather than an individual affair. Groups with strong families also tend to be characterized by greater social cohesion, and social control of behavior tends to be more effective (Reher, 1998, p. 215)

Several studies in different European countries demonstrate that, despite the presence of competing models and messages from the host society's dominant culture, Turkish immigrant parents are rather successful in transmitting pre-migration norms, values and cultural practices to the second generation (Gungor, 2008; Gungor, Fleischmann, & Phalet, 2011; Nauck, 1989). Turkish parents in Germany and the Netherlands, for instance, pass along filial obligations and traditional gender roles to their children (Nauck, 1989). The observation that the second generation values traditional family and gender relations is also supported by the finding that Turkish adolescents in prefer a mixed acculturation pattern of ethnic retention in the private sphere and adaption to mainstream Belgian culture in public life (Gungor & Bornstein, 2009; See Phalet & Hagendoorn, 1996 for similar results in The Netherlands).

Upon closer inspection however, there seem to be important gender differences in so-called *intergenerational value-transmission*, with young Turkish men being more conservative and attached to their heritage culture than their female counterparts (Gungor & Bornstein, 2009; Idema & Phalet, 2007). Idema and Phalet (2007) found that the gender role values of Turkish adolescent girls in Germany were more egalitarian than those of their mothers, but the values of adolescent boys were just as conservative as their fathers. However, the female shift away from conservatism seems to apply only to gender roles. A study on acculturative change among Turkish families in the Netherlands (Phalet and Haker, 2005) pointed out that young women were significantly less conservative than young men when it came to gender roles, but that there were no gender differences in family relatedness, or attitudes towards family obligations and parental authority.

## **SYMBOLIC BOUNDARIES AND EXCLUSION**

Cross-European studies repeatedly demonstrate that Belgians on average evince greater prejudice, racism and right-wing opinions than most EU countries (Billiet & De Witte, 2008; Strabac & Listhaug, 2008; Zick, Pettigrew, & Wagner, 2008). Both in Belgium and Europe at large, anti-immigrant hostility and xenophobia are particularly strong with regard to the Muslim population (Spruyt & Elchardus, 2012; Strabac & Listhaug, 2008). Being overwhelmingly Muslim and Europe's largest immigrant group, the Turkish population can be regarded as the quintessential outsider and the target of Islamophobic and anti-immigrant sentiments.

The strained relationship between ethnic and Turkish Belgians can best be described as one characterized by “bright” ethno-religious boundaries (Alba, 2005). In European immigration debates and public discourse, Islam is the focus of attention, because European identity, despite national variations, remains deeply embedded in a Christian tradition in which Muslim immigrants constitute a visible other (Zolberg & Woon, 1999). Consequently, in Europe, religious boundaries function in the same way as racial boundaries in the United States (Foner & Alba, 2008; Zolberg & Woon, 1999); it is religion – more specifically Islam – that marks the boundary between “us” and “them”, between those who belong to the center and those who are considered outsiders. The boundary is bright in the sense that there is no ambiguity over who belongs where: Islam and Muslims’ cultures are presented as essentially different from Western values, and more often than not they are essentialized and represented as monolithic and unchangeable.

The idea that Islam and Muslims are essentially different from “the West” has its roots in the *Orientalism* described by Said (1978). During colonialism, European domination was not only political and economic, but also cultural. This cultural domination, or orientalism, consisted of representing “the West” (“us,” or Europe) as familiar, civilized, controlled and morally superior and “the East” (“them,” “the Orient”) as strange, uncivilized, irrational and backward. This representation helped to legitimize the colonial subjugation; being civilized and culturally superior, “the West” had the moral duty of “saving” the Orient from its backwardness by bringing them civilization. The contemporary perception of Islam can be seen as an example of neo-orientalist thinking (Saeed, 2007) in the sense that it homogenizes and essentializes the Muslim population, and represents Muslim culture and religion as essentially different from Western identity.

The construction of Islam and Muslims as essentially different is based on the representation of “Islamic culture” as characterized by pre-modern attitudes and practices. The most important boundary marker that is used to differentiate “Muslims” from “Westerners” is the former groups’ patriarchal culture, which is represented as a culture of honor in which the status of women is low (Razack, 2004). Honor killings, forced marriages, headscarves and genital mutilation are all seen and addressed as cultural problems and signs of the oppressiveness of the traditional Muslim family (Razack, 2004; White, 1997). The headscarf in particular is central to contemporary concerns about Muslim women and has become the quintessential symbol of their oppression (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Auslander, 2000; Mandel, 1989). In contrast with the “pre-modern,” “tribal,” “misogynist” Muslim, the prototypical European is conceived of as “modern,” “equality-minded” and “individualist” (Razack, 2004). In Flanders (Belgium) in particular, Muslims are particularly blamed for “unequal gender relations and the repression of women; being disloyal to the countries of residence; being

pretentious and domineering; misuse of the social security provisions; always posing as victims and construing every criticism as an expression of racism; and having a way of life that is incompatible with the western European one” (Spruyt & Elchardus, 2012, p. 815). Such a negative portrayal serves to reinforce the illusion that “the West” is better than “the rest.” To put it in the words of Zemni (2007, p. 8):

The critique of Islam and the Muslim is a very functional occupation in our society. It allows us to attribute a variety of positive characteristics to ourselves and dismiss shortcomings or problems as minor flaws or marginal phenomena. The “culture of the *allochton*” – usually summarized under the term Islam – becomes a container term that offers an explanation for “their” behavior, but also serves as the mirror image of our self-proclaimed ideals. By continually narrowing down Islam to a few ahistorical and unsophisticated one-liners, we create the illusion of our own virginity. The more we claim that Islam oppresses women, the more we mean that we are in favor of equality between men and women, as if it is an almost genetic matter, as if it has always been this way. The more we emphasize that Islam is against homosexuality, the more we pretend “the West” has no problems with it.

Several studies show that media plays an important role in spreading these unfavorable views among the larger public. Korteweg and Yurdakul (2009) point out that newspaper discussions on honor killing draw boundaries between Muslim immigrants and the majority population – in this case the Dutch and the German. Their analysis demonstrates that in many newspaper discussions, honor killings are discussed in ways that posit a stark difference between the emancipated, Western German and the Muslim other. In these discussions, ethnicity, national origin, religion and gender intersect to segregate Muslims from Dutch and German society and juxtapose “Arab” and “Turkish” with “emancipated,” “free” and “Western.” By describing honor killings as a form of violence against women that is rooted in Islam, ethnicity or national origin, newspaper discussions reinforce the already bright boundary between Muslim immigrants and the German majority.

In Flanders and the Netherlands, the idea that Muslims are essentially different and difficult to integrate is best represented by the existence and continued use of the word *allochtoon* (allochthon). Although semantically, *allochtoon* refers to “people who come from elsewhere”, it is most commonly used in policy and public discourse to refer to non-western (i.e., Muslim) ethnic groups considered disadvantaged or less integrated into “modern” societies.

The increased fear of Islam that followed the terrorist attacks of September 11 has exacerbated these unfavorable views and even fuelled acts of aggression and harassment toward Muslims in many European countries (Allen & Nielsen, 2002). In Belgium, the situation has been described as follows:



Despite an absence of physical attacks, a growing intolerance of Muslims was acknowledged, especially in Brussels. Verbal attacks against Muslim pupils were common in schools, with both teachers and pupils being responsible. Numerous incidents were reported when female Muslim pupils had the hijab torn from them (...) On the Internet and SMS text-messages, anti-Muslim sentiment and language dramatically increased. Anonymity probably accounts for this higher incidence of explicit Islamophobia. There was also a marked rise in the activities of the far-right who seemed to target immigrants and Belgians alike. (Allen and Nielsen, 2002, p. 15)

Intolerance for Turkish Belgians also expresses itself in a high degree of *discrimination* in several domains of life, including the labor market (De Rycke, Swyngedouw, & Phalet, 1999; Vandezande, Fleischmann, Baysu, Swyngedouw, & Phalet, 2009), work place (Van Laer & Janssens, 2011; Vandezande et al., 2009) education (Stevens, 2008; Vandezande et al., 2009), housing market (Van der Bracht & Van de Putte, 2013; Vandezande et al., 2009) and in personal contact with authorities (Blommaert & Verschueren, 1993) and ethnic Belgians (Vandezande et al., 2009). A study among Turks in Antwerp and Brussels pointed out that Turkish Belgians feel discriminated against mainly based on their ethnicity, and much less so on the basis of their skin color or religion<sup>1</sup> (Vandezande et al., 2009), which is remarkable given the anti-Islamic sentiments in mainstream society (For similar results in France, see Silberman, Alba, & Fournier, 2006). The highest percentage for religion-based discrimination is found among women, which likely related to the headscarf, which is a highly visible marker of their ethnicity.

## SOCIAL BOUNDARIES

Social boundaries between Turkish and ethnic Belgians are quite significant, both in terms of ethnic differentiation and structural inequalities. *Ethnic differentiation* in residential segregation, friendship and partner choice point to the continuing importance of ethnicity and exclusion by the majority group. Social boundaries also manifest themselves in stark *inequalities* between Turkish Belgians and ethnic Belgians in terms of educational and occupational attainment.

## ETHNIC DIFFERENTIATION

One way social boundaries manifest themselves is through degrees and patterns of *residential segregation*. Several studies have demonstrated a very high degree of residential segregation of the Turkish population (Fleischmann, Phalet, Deboosere, & Neels, 2009; Lesthaeghe, 2000). The current

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<sup>1</sup> 35 to 45 per cent of men and women reported feeling discriminated based on their ethnicity, while only 10 to 22 per cent link discrimination to their religion

patterns are partially the product of cities' historical economic infrastructure (Verhaeghe, Van der Bracht, & Van de Putte, 2012), chain migration and the creation of transplanted communities, as well as discrimination against migrants and their low socio-economic status, which together pushed Turkish Belgians into poorer neighborhoods (Kesteloot, De Decker, & Manço, 1997). There are signs, however, that the tide is turning. A recent study of residential patterns in Ghent showed that ethnic segregation of the Turkish population is on the decline and that a significant number of Turkish Belgians are moving to more affluent suburbs (Verhaeghe et al., 2012).

Because most Turkish immigrants chose to send their children to schools in their communities and neighborhoods, neighborhood segregation patterns are reproduced within schools. The increase in immigrant students in particular schools, combined with the departure of native students, resulted in the creation of so-called *concentration schools* in which 30 percent to 80 percent and even up to 100 percent of the school population belongs to an ethnic minority group (Van Houtte & Stevens, 2009). Many Turkish children attend these concentration schools (Mahieu, 2002; Merry, 2005), including about half of Turkish pupils in Antwerp (both in primary and secondary schools), where minorities make up at least 50 percent of the student body in concentration schools.

Little research is available about interethnic contact and friendships, but the large number of Turkish associations (cf. supra) and high level of segregation in both neighborhoods and schools suggest that intra-ethnic connections prevail over interethnic ones among Turks. Regarding educational segregation, studies show a complicated pattern: a recent study in Flanders has shown that immigrant students have more friends of immigrant origin and fewer friends of Belgian origin as the concentration of immigrant students at school increases (Van Houtte & Stevens, 2009). At the same time however, native Belgian students have more interethnic friendships as the percentage of minority pupils increases. Overall, minority youngsters in Flanders seem to have slightly more interethnic than intra-ethnic friendships (Baerveldt, Zijlstra, de Wolf, Van Rossem, & Van Duijn, 2007).

When it comes to partner choice, a multitude of studies shows that Turkish Belgians strongly prefer a co-ethnic partner. There has been a very low degree of interethnic marriages in this population over the past five decades. A study based on 1991 census data showed that 7 per cent of all married Turkish men and 3.8 per cent of the women were married to a Western-European partner (Lievens 1999). More recent studies carried out among the second generation indicate an increase in interethnic marriages, but one that is rather small and occurs mainly among men (Hartung, Vandezande, Phalet, & Swyngedouw, 2011; Huschek, de Valk, & Liefbroer, 2012)

## **ETHNIC INEQUALITIES**

Turkish Belgians are, in many ways, at the bottom of the ethnic hierarchy in Belgium. Several studies show that they lag behind both in terms of educational and occupational attainment, not only compared to ethnic Belgians, but, in some cases, other immigrant groups as well.

### *Educational attainment*

Since the early 1990s, different studies have demonstrated a persistent “Turkish disadvantage” in educational attainment, for both first and second generation Turks in Belgium (Baysu & de Valk, 2012; Duquet, Glorieux, Laurijssen, & Van Dorsselaer, 2006; Lacante, Van Esbroeck, De Schrijver, & Palmén, 2007; Phalet, Deboosere, & Bastiaenssen, 2007; Phalet & Swyngedouw, 2003; Timmerman et al., 2003). In general, first-generation migrants’ educational attainment was very low. Research based on the 1991 census (Phalet & Swyngedouw, 2003) shows that in Flanders 82 per cent of the women and 65.2 per cent of the men had received only primary education or no formal education at all. Figures were only slightly better for Wallonia and Brussels, with 74.4 per cent and 75.5 per cent for women and 55 per cent and 60.3 per cent for men, respectively.

Using the 2001 Belgian Census, Phalet and colleagues (2007) paint a rather bleak picture of the second generation’s educational attainment. Their study shows that Turks have the highest secondary school drop-out rate of all ethnic groups: 36 per cent has less than full secondary qualifications, compared to 13 per cent of ethnic Belgians (See also Duquet et al., 2006). Those who do complete secondary education are much more likely to follow vocational rather than technical or academic tracks. It has been argued that vocational training is associated with an “avoid demotion strategy of educational investment”: Turks try reduce school failure and dropout rates by choosing less ambitious technical or vocational training (Phalet & Swyngedouw, 2003). These study programs however, often offer poor employment prospects (Timmerman et al., 2003), and do not prepare the students for higher education. Phalet and colleagues (2007) also point out that Turkish Belgians are most under-represented in tertiary forms of education: they are six times less likely than ethnic Belgians to have a university degree (3 percent versus 18 per cent). According to Phalet and colleagues, Turkish Belgians’ educational disadvantage can be explained mainly by the lack of relevant human and socio-economic capital in their families. The low educational level of the first generation, predominant working-class profile of the families, and high rate of unemployment and inactivity, all contribute to the educational disadvantage of the next generation.

### *Occupational attainment*

Immigrants’ occupational attainment as well as that of their offspring is undoubtedly the critical measure of socio-economic integration and ethnic inequality. But for Turks, the picture is not a rosy

one: according to Phalet and Swyngedouw (2003), Turks and other non-European immigrant communities in Belgium experience “cumulative and enduring socio-economic disadvantage.” In the 1960s and early 1970s, Turkish migrants were welcomed with open arms as a much-needed source of labor, but their prospects for economic success proved slim when the economic crisis struck in the mid-70s. As a result of the international oil crisis, the closing of the coalmines and the rapid decline of heavy industry, many people lost their jobs, and, as most were employed in the industrial sector, Turks were disproportionately affected. Turkish laborers had a difficult time adapting to the new labor market structure after they lost their jobs because they were unable to speak Flemish or French (Wets, 2006). By 1990, 34 per cent of first-generation Turkish men and 75 per cent of women in Flanders were unemployed.

A study based on the 1991 census shows what it was like for the second generation in the early 1990s (Neels & Stoop, 2000). There were dramatic differences in gross unemployment levels by ethnic group, with Turks and Moroccans having much higher unemployment rates compared to ethnic Belgians. Among the Turkish second generation in Flanders, 34.8 per cent of men and 73.5 per cent of women were unemployed, compared to 4.2 per cent and 14.7 per cent of the ethnic Belgians, respectively. This ethnic gap can only partly be accounted by ethnic differences in education, age structure and settlement patterns. Ethnic disparities are lower in Wallonia and in Brussels, despite the fact that Flanders is the most prosperous region. According to Phalet and Swyngedouw (2003), possible explanations include urban segregation and economic segmentation, as well as public ethnocentrism, anti-immigrant attitudes of employers and ineffective anti-discrimination policies and measures.

More recent figures indicate that there is still ethnic inequality in the labor market, both in terms of unemployment (VDAB, 2009, 2012) and the quality of jobs. Members of the Turkish population are still disproportionately represented in temporary employment, and low-paid jobs (including industrial cleaning, hotel and restaurant business and construction) and underrepresented in higher paid jobs (Phalet & Heath, 2011; Vertommen & Martens, 2005). Ethnic entrepreneurship exists and offers some alternative employment opportunities, but overall entrepreneurship has largely remained a marginal phenomenon (Moors, 2000, cited in Phalet & Swyngedouw, 2003).



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## CHAPTER 5

# STUDYING TURKISH- BELGIAN LIVES

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*Methodology*



*Fieldwork in Emirdag, Turkey*



Our task is not merely to declare our compassion, solidarity or ideological preferences in evocative language – it is the hard work of analyzing and modeling in order to understand more of what is going on.

FREDRIK BARTH (1969)





## RESEARCH METHODS

I selected a qualitative approach to this research because of the nature of the research questions and the population. First, qualitative research is well-suited for *interpretive research* that explores micro social processes, experiences, and meaning-giving in context. In-depth interviews, more specifically, have been identified as especially appropriate for understanding experience (Silverman, 2000). Second, it is an ideal way to study sensitive topics – such as when research is concerned with deviance and social control, and where it intrudes the private sphere (Renzetti & Lee, 1993), as is the case in my research. Third, qualitative research is better suited to study populations that are potentially suspicious of the researcher and the research project (in my case, because I am an ethnic outsider), because it helps to build rapport and establish trust between the participants and the researcher. Fourth, quantitative research is arguably ill-suited for studying identification and cultural incorporation among minorities because measurement items in quantitative research can be ambiguous or incomprehensible<sup>1</sup> (Hesters, 2011; Van Kerckem, 2007). Fifth, qualitative research is better for exploring topics that are relatively under-researched because it is more flexible compared to quantitative research; it establishes a strong link between empirical results and theory because of the *iterative approach* in which data and theory are constantly linked to each other.

One of the downsides of qualitative research is that the process is time consuming. This counts for both data collection<sup>2</sup> (including preparatory fieldwork, actual data collection and interview transcriptions) and the analysis. Unlike in quantitative research, where statistical analyses are carried out with the help of software packages, qualitative data analysis requires more effort of the researcher. Software can help to structure the analysis, but in the end it is the researcher who has to look for and establish interrelationships and patterns in the data, which entails intensive familiarization with the data.

## METHODOLOGICAL AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL APPROACHES

This research project is informed by three different epistemological and methodological approaches, each of which has shaped my research decisions from start to finish. First, this research project is characterized by an *emic approach* that focuses on the actors' point of view (Agar, 1980, p. 20). It studies how the research participants perceive and categorize the world, as well as the meanings they

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<sup>1</sup> My own experiences while collecting survey data for my master's thesis, for instance, taught me that abstract concepts such as identity are not always known or well-understood by Turkish-Belgian research participants.

<sup>2</sup> This is not to say that data collection in quantitative research is not time consuming. The difference between the two methods of data collection lies mainly in the time it takes to analyze the data.

assign to experiences and phenomena. The emic approach stands in contrast with an etic approach, which focuses on the categorizations, explanations and interpretations of the researcher.

Second, I adopt a *coproduction approach*, considering those I talked to as research *participants* rather than as mere *sources* of information. I gave them the authority to partially set my research agenda by focusing my analysis on those themes that are most prominent in their accounts of what it is like to live in Belgium as a person of Turkish ancestry – which is how I ended up with a focus on ethnic boundary maintenance. I treat my research participants as inquirers into their culture and environment alongside myself as a researcher, and see them as interpretive actors, rather than as people who have privileged access to some external reality (Fielding, 1993; Sharrock & Anderson, 1980). When it concerns their own behavior, experiences or meaning giving, I do treat them as experts, while always exercising a certain degree of skepticism toward answers that seem unexpected, contradictory or socially desirable. Following Agar (1980, p. 159), I do not regard accounts that contradict other evidence as “a reliability problem,” “an error” or “lying,” but see differences between their reports and actual behavior as a normal part of human interaction, and as something that needs to be explained and dealt with methodologically, rather than ignored.

Third, in all stages of my research, I apply the principles of *Grounded Theory*, as formulated by Strauss and Corbin (1990). In the Grounded Theory approach, theory is *inductively* derived from the study of the phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 21). Theoretical literature is secondary to the data, unlike in many quantitative studies where data is used to test theories. In this dissertation, for instance, the idea that boundaries are important for studying socio-cultural incorporation was not something I had in mind at the outset, based on what I had read in the theoretical and empirical literature. Rather, the idea emerged after having analyzed a number of interviews, after which I turned to the literature in search of similar findings or ideas that could validate my findings and inform me how to proceed with my research. The inductive approach also implies that data collection and analysis are done concurrently, rather than separately; after a period of data collection, the researcher looks at the data, links it with existing research, starts developing her theory and goes back into the field to complete and refine it (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 57; coding procedures will be discussed in depth at the end of this chapter).

Finally, following many other qualitative researchers, I believe that there is no such thing as a neutral researcher or apolitical research (Agar, 1980, p. 29; Conaway, 1986; Lather, 1988). As explained in the preface, I tend to side and empathize with the excluded and the underdog, and, consequently, my research topic and participants are not entities about which I can feel neutral. My research is in part aimed at “humanizing stereotypes” (Agar, 1980, p. 252) and complicating the

simplified, and often incorrect, notions that the mainstream has about Turkish Belgians. In line with many others, I see this involvement as positive for my research, because “if you do not care one way or the other, it is hard to ‘do science’ because you do not understand enough about the people you are doing science with” (Agar, 1980, p. 71).

## INTRODUCING THE PLAYERS

### THE RESEARCH POPULATION

As discussed in in previous chapters, my dissertation focuses on Belgian-born children and grandchildren of Turkish immigrants in Flanders, Belgium<sup>3</sup>. The sample includes people belonging to both the second generation – people who are born in Belgium or moved there before the age of six, but whose parents are born in Turkey – or the third generation (at least one parent is second generation).

I choose Turkish Belgians as the focus of my research for three reasons, two theoretical and one practical. First, by focusing on Turks in Belgium, I study members of Europe’s largest non-EU immigrant group. Turkish Belgians are also living in a country that has one of the highest levels of anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiments in Western Europe (Strabac & Listhaug, 2008). Because Turks are the quintessential foreigners in Europe, with Flanders being one of the most xenophobic regions there (Billiet & De Witte, 2008), being Turkish in Flanders implies confrontation with strong ethnic boundaries constructed by the mainstream. Second, Turkish communities are sociologically pertinent because of their strong social cohesion. By choosing Turks (rather than, for instance, Moroccans), I create an opportunity to study how tight ethnic communities shape individual-level socio-cultural incorporation through ethnic boundary maintenance. Third, I chose Turkish Belgians because I was already acquainted with this group through my master’s thesis. I had also been living in Ghent for nearly ten years. I chose only one ethnic group, because it allowed me to get to know the population, cultural practices and languages in depth.

I collected data in two Flemish regions, namely the city of Ghent and the five mining towns in Limburg. Both areas drew migrants in the 1960s because of their strong need for manual laborers, but differ from each other in terms of the social structure of their Turkish communities. Ghent is a fairly large city in the Northeast of Belgium, and attracted Turkish migrants to work in the textile

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<sup>3</sup> I use “Belgium” and “Flanders” interchangeably because I collected data only in Flanders. However, most existing studies among Turks are based on Belgian (national) rather than Flemish (regional) data. Despite the fact that I have only studied Turks in Flanders, I will consistently refer to them as “Turkish Belgians,” given that my data signal that “Belgian” is a more meaningful category for them than “Flemish.”

industry. The Turkish community in Ghent stands out for its uniformity in terms of region of origin: the overwhelming majority comes from Emirdağ in Central Anatolia. Consequently, the Emirdağ community in Ghent is characterized by a very high degree of network closure. The mining towns are a collection of smaller towns in the province of Limburg in the Northeast, and owe their large Turkish populations to the presence of the coal mines. In contrast to Ghent's homogeneous Turkish community, the Turkish populations in Limburg's mining towns are much more diversified. People come from all over Turkey, and those who come from the same region do not necessarily live in the same neighborhoods. Consequently, network closure is not as high as in Ghent, and there is more diversity in terms of premigration cultural beliefs and practices.

## **THE RESEARCHER**

Considering that the self is "the key fieldwork tool" (Van Mannen, Manning, & Miller, 1989), reflexivity is an important part of qualitative research. Researchers bring baggage to the field that can influence the interactional processes and ultimate research outcome. This baggage therefore needs to be subjected to careful examination. According to Reinharz (2011), there is a tripartite division of *personal selves* (the selves one brings to the field), *research selves* (concerned with doing research) and *situational selves* (selves created in the field). Here I will briefly describe the first two, and return to the issue of reflexivity later on.

### *Personal selves*

When I started my research in late 2007, I was a heterosexual single woman in my late twenties. This remained more or less the same throughout fieldwork. Being in my late twenties/early thirties, I belong to the same age category as most of my research participants, which was a strong asset (cf. *infra*). In terms of ethnicity: I am not ethnically Turkish and do not belong to any other ethnic minority group. In terms of my personality, I have been described as outgoing and sociable, and someone who interacts easily with other people.

I believe that there is no such thing as an inherent *epistemological privilege* associated with a particular aspect of one's identity (Padfield & Procter, 1996; Styles, 1979). I, for example, disagree with the assumption that there is an inherent *female gender benefit* (See also Padfield & Procter, 1996) as well as with the idea that insiders always have epistemological privileges compared over outsiders (an idea that underlies much research in feminist studies). In fact, I do not look at myself as an outsider (based on my ethnic background), but rather see myself and my research participants as individuals who carry multiple selves, which produce both similarities and differences. What matters is that researchers are aware of the limitations and advantages that accompany each specific aspect of

the self, and that they use this knowledge in their self-presentation. In some cases, it helps to stress the similarities, especially when it concerns gaining access, while in other cases, differences can be beneficial. What matters, then, is *impression management* (Giovannini, 1986), or stressing aspects of your identity that are most relevant to your audience (Feldman, Bell, & Berger, 2003) and underplaying those that might be problematic. Throughout the discussion of my data collection, I pay attention to how I have emphasized or underplayed particular personal selves in order to come to my researcher-preferred definition of the situation – i.e., one in which the research participant and I felt most at ease, enhancing trust and rapport, as well as disclosure.

### *Research selves*

When deciding how to conduct research, interact with research participants and present oneself, the researcher needs to find a balance between instrumental, ethical and personal considerations. Even though research selves are essentially concerned with how one carries out research and presents oneself as a researcher, I felt them to be inextricably linked to personal selves, in the sense that it is impossible to adopt a research role that is at odds with one's own personality.

In my case, these three considerations resulted in the adoption of the role of informal, yet engaged and knowledgeable, researcher. Both during field work and in-depth interviews I tried to find the right balance between being professional and “a nice person to talk to” (Green, Barbour, Barnard, & Kitzinger, 1993). In line with feminist methodologies, I adopted a so-called *democratic interview approach* in which I tried to minimize the power imbalance between myself and research participants. During interviews, for example, I regularly made *confessions of ignorance* to give myself a relatively low status (Shakespeare, 1993, cited in Horn, 1997). More than adopting the role of the naïve researcher, however, I focused on creating rapport by subtly drawing attention to commonalities. In most cases I acted based on our shared age category, but I could stress any type of commonality, including gender, education, being from the same city, having the same interests, and so on. Rather than dressing conservatively and professionally in order to separate myself from my research participants, as is often suggested (See for instance Gailey & Prohaska, 2011; Green et al., 1993; Gurney, 1985), I dressed the way I usually do, which can be described as *casual chic* - a style that is also popular among young urban Turkish women.

Adopting this democratic, *non-hierarchical approach* felt like the most appropriate thing to do, not only from a personal perspective – acting very formal feels at odds with my personality – but also in instrumental and ethical terms. Given my position as a highly educated researcher that belongs to the center of Belgian society, I regarded it as very important to create a research setting in which power imbalances were reduced, especially in interactions with people who were different

from me in terms of age (those who were younger) and educational level (those with secondary education or less). Several feminist researchers have argued that the very nature of the interview and the power dynamics at play between the interviewer and interviewee, can put the latter in a vulnerable position, especially when the researcher assumes an authoritative stance (Finch, 1993; Oakley, 1981; Stanley & Wise, 1993). It is assumed that the researcher, being a knowledgeable professional who organizes the interview and asks the questions, has more control and hence more power compared to the interviewee. Feminist theorizing emphasizes the importance of a non-hierarchical interview setting in which both interviewer and interviewee occupy the same position. Over and above feminist ethical considerations, a non-hierarchical research approach is also preferred over the more “objective” approach for instrumental motives. In an equal interview/research setting, distances between the researcher and research participant are reduced, which, in turn, stimulates trust and rapport, promotes conversation and “encourages a reasonable depth of response” (Campbell, 2003).

In order to be taken seriously, and come across as knowledgeable and professional, I presented myself as someone who was committed to building an accurate image of the research participants’ life-world and experiences, one that was not clouded by prejudices, assumptions or stereotypes. I showed genuine interest, respect and openness for whatever they had to say, and displayed *cultural sensitivity*, which involved stressing that I was committed to learning about their lifestyles, and communicating in ways that they could understand, believe and regard as relevant to themselves (Renzetti & Lee, 1993). Additionally, I displayed my knowledge about Turkey, Turkish culture and customs and the Turkish population in Belgium. In line with Johnson (1986), I saw this sharing of knowledge as a potential *rite de passage* (Van Gennep, 1960) – a transition from being an outsider (in ethnic terms) to being regarded as more of an insider.

In order to not violate certain cultural gender role conceptions and avoid sexual hustling, I tried to downplay my gender, especially in my research interactions with male participants, but only to the extent that I still felt comfortable. Because I tend to dress very feminine in my daily life, I wanted to find a balance between dressing appropriately for the particular research interaction and not feeling uneasy. In most cases, I just made sure I was not wearing tight or short clothes, but I did continue to dress feminine and wear make-up because it is common for Turkish Belgian women to dress up demurely but femininely.

To summarize, given the low status Turkish Belgians generally have in Belgian society, and my own position as a researcher that belongs to the Belgian mainstream, my self-presentation was an important tool to successfully execute this research project. This mattered at all stages of the research

- from the access stage until (and beyond) the presentation of the results. My self-presentation as a researcher was closely aligned with my personal selves, in the sense that I adopted a research role that did not feel at odds with my personality and interaction style, and acted based on personal selves that I shared with the research participants. Finding a good balance between coming across as a nice person to talk to (through my democratic interview approach) and a serious researcher (by displaying knowledge and cultural sensitivity), was instrumental to gaining access, building rapport between myself and my research participants and obtaining the necessary data.

## **DATA COLLECTION**

### **GAINING ACCESS**

“Gaining access” is not a one-time event, or something that is gained and never to be lost. It is a continuous and dynamic process of building, maintaining and deepening relationships (Brewer, 1993; Feldman et al., 2003). In my research, I followed Feldman, Bell and Berger’s (2003, p. x) claim that the key to gaining access lies in how you present yourself and relate to others. Gaining access is shaped most by the researcher’s relationship building skills, which include – among other things – “the ability to be flexible, to be persistent without being annoying, and to recognize luck and accept opportunities when they are offered.”

Technically speaking, I had already gained some access before I started doing this research. For my master’s thesis I had studied identification processes among Turkish-Belgian men using survey data that I had collected myself among this population in Ghent. Consequently, at the start of my doctoral research, I already had some knowledge about the Turkish community in Ghent and how to find and approach potential research participants.

The first step I took to gain access for this project was to get to know the Turkish population in Belgium and my selected regions through informal conversations, fieldwork in Ghent and existing research. Starting by gathering information about the people and the setting in which you want to study is not only useful for the research itself, but also eases access because it makes you appear competent (Feldman et al., 2003). I started by contacting experts and potential key informants – most of them Turkish-Belgian politicians and community workers – asking them for a meeting so I could present my research and get their feedback. During these informal conversations, I briefly introduced my research topic, asked them what they thought about it, and what their main impressions and concerns were regarding the Turkish population in their city or region. In addition, I asked them for further contacts, as well as suggestions for interesting fieldwork possibilities.



Fieldwork started in September, 2008, and mainly consisted of going to events organized by people from the Turkish community, and Turkish restaurants, shops, mosques and other places where I expected to find Turkish Belgians. These visits were aimed at building contacts, acquiring basic knowledge about what was going on in the community and making myself known and trusted. Unlike the typical textbook suggestion (See for instance Agar, 1980), I usually went to these places and events alone, and not with someone trusted or well-known in the community<sup>4</sup>.

During this first phase of research, my biggest concern was that I may not gain trust easily, given the combination of my identity as an ethnic Belgian, my research topic and the irritation among Turkish Belgians about the constant focus in public and political discourse on their “lack of integration.” Also, there often is a perception in minority communities that “researchers come into the community, take what they can get out of it, and are never seen again” (Renzetti & Lee, 1993). I wanted to de-construct the assumption they might have of me (of the ethnocentric, self-interested researcher who was going to study how “integrated” they are), which could threaten their successful participation in my research project.

My self-presentation was the first tool I used to achieve trust and rapport. As already discussed, I represented myself as a young, easy-going and engaged researcher, rather than as an experienced, detached researcher, both during fieldwork and the interviews (cf. supra). I also emphasized the emic approach of my research, explaining that I was truly interested in *their* side of the story and who they are as individuals. I often expressed my disapproval about how matters of incorporation were discussed in public and political discourse, and stressed that I had an entirely different approach. For instance, in a pamphlet I designed to inform and find respondents, I wrote:

My research is not about “integration” in the common sense of the word. I do not want to know if you, as a Turkish Belgian, have “adapted” and live according to Belgian values and norms. What I AM interested in is how you experience growing up in Belgium as a person of Turkish origin. [...] In other words, I want to hear from Turkish people themselves what it is like to live here, and what difficulties they face. I think too much is expected from allochtonous people, but they are not heard regarding what they experience and want. (Translated from Dutch, quotation marks and capital letters in original.)

By presenting my approach as different from, and critical of, the dominant public discourse, I tried to attract attention and make people less suspicious of my research and me as researcher.

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<sup>4</sup> Retrospectively, I believe my fieldwork would have been much more efficient and less stressful if I would have walked into these places together with someone known and trusted in the community – someone who could introduce me to others and help me earn their trust.

Third, I acquainted myself with the Turkish population and engaging in so-called *commitment acts* (Feldman et al., 2003). Acts of commitment demonstrate the researcher's commitment to learning the culture, which helps not only foster rapport, but also humanizes researchers. These acts signal that the researcher is more than simply a person who wants information (Feldman et al., 2003). I took every opportunity to learn about cultural specificities, attended as many events organized by Turkish organizations as possible, studied Turkish and, in the summer of 2009, went to Emirdağ, the most important region of origin. Initially, this visit was aimed at expanding my network of potential participants and gain access to certain segments of the Turkish population that proved difficult to reach in Belgium. However, the trip turned out to be more effective in terms of the access it gave me when I returned to Belgium: whenever I mentioned to people that I had been to their region of origin, this was met with positive surprise and seemed to strengthen rapport.

Finally, I engaged in *acts of reciprocity* in order to show my gratitude and maintain rapport. I offered to give students feedback on their writing assignments, helped someone with statistics and became a volunteer in an organization that offers homework guidance to underprivileged children (many of whom are Turkish). I helped a community organization set up and carry out a project on transnational marriages among Turkish Belgians, and gave my expert opinion to whoever requested it.

Again, the above methods that helped me gain access were necessary because of potential distrust by the members of my research population vis-à-vis myself, which was highly likely given my research topic and the fact that I belong to the mainstream of Belgian society. In addition, these endeavors also made me a more confident researcher because they provided me with knowledge, enhanced my cultural sensitivity and helped me get in touch with potential research participants in an informal setting.

### **DATA COLLECTION: A CYCLICAL PROCESS**

Following the principles of Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), data were collected according to a *dialectic cyclical process* in which data collection and analysis are done concurrently, rather than in separately scheduled parts of a linear research process. Collecting data in different phases allowed me to reflect upon my methods and adapt them as necessary, as well as to identify important themes and questions that could be addressed more in-depth in subsequent data collection periods.

Broadly speaking, the data collection process consisted of two phases, and can be characterized by the *narrowing funnel approach*: beginning wide open to whatever you can learn and gradually focusing and narrowing until you finally engage in systematic testing (Agar, 1980, p. 184). In the

first phase of the project (October, 2008, to July, 2011), I collected data in Ghent using in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and ethnographic fieldwork. In the second phase (November, 2011, to December, 2012) I focused my attention on the mining towns in Limburg, while also conducting additional in-depth interviews in Ghent. Within each phase there were several intensive periods of data collection during which I spent a lot of time in the field, contacted potential participants and carried out in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (see Table 1; see Appendix 2 for a full list of all interviews).

From November, 2008, until July, 2009 (period 1), I carried out fieldwork in Ghent and interviewed 13 people. In this period, interviews addressed a broad range of topics (cf. *infra*), and tended to be very long (See Appendix 3). I used these interviews to narrow my research focus and reflect upon my self-presentation and interview approach. Period 2 was dedicated to extra data collection on partner preferences and transnational marriages, and which included not only in-depth interviews but also focus group discussions and a number of informal conversations. In period 3, I collected a small number of additional in-depth interviews in Ghent, all of which focused on the issue of ethnic conformity pressure through social control.

Phase 2 started with explorative conversations with three key research informants from the mining towns in Limburg, and, soon after, I started with the fourth period of data collection – a very intensive one, during which I collected in-depth interviews in the mining towns in Limburg as well as additional interviews in Ghent. By then I had identified all of the important themes, and I addressed them in each interview. In the fifth and final period of data collection, I mainly carried out interviews with mixed couples about their interethnic marriage.

**TABLE 1: PERIODS OF DATA COLLECTION**

(General = Addressing all themes; ECP = Ethnic conformity pressure; people who have been interviewed twice, have been included twice)

	Period	Focus	Location	Interview participants	Focus group participants
1	Nov 2008-July 2009	General	Ghent	13	-
2	Oct-Nov 2010	Partner preference	Ghent	6	24
3	April-July 2011	ECP	Ghent	6	-
4	Nov 2011-Feb 2012	General	Mining towns + Ghent	34	-
5	Oct - Dec 2012	Interethnic marriage	Mining towns + Ghent	9	-
<b>Total</b>				<b>68</b>	<b>24</b>

## IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Overall, the in-depth interviews are the main source of data for this research project. Following a Grounded Theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), I put together a theoretical sample based on the concepts that proved to have relevance to the evolving theory. *Theoretical relevance* refers to the significance of particular concepts “because they are repeatedly present or notably absent” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 176). Because concepts and relationships accumulate during the interplay of data collection and analysis, initial sampling decisions tend to change once the project is underway. At the outset, I chose for *open sampling*, which is “open to those persons, places and situations that will provide the greatest opportunity to gather the most relevant data about the phenomenon under investigation” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 181), and looked for diversity in terms of gender, educational level, region of origin and socio-economic background. The criteria for being included in the sample were: (1) being 18 years or older<sup>5</sup> (2) being born in Belgium or having moved there before the age of seven and (3) being of Turkish ancestry.

After having analyzed the first set of interviews, I collected additional data based on theoretically relevant concepts. For example, after having identified ethnic conformity pressure as an important aspect of ethnic boundary maintenance during my research in Ghent, I collected data in the mining towns in Limburg. As such, I enabled myself to do a comparative study of the impact of the social structure of a city and community on the occurrence and enforcement of ethnic conformity pressure. After analyzing a number of these new interviews and developing a sort of theory of ethnic conformity pressure, I moved on to *discriminate sampling*, looking for more people – both in Ghent and the mining towns – to verify my findings, the relationships between different categories and to fill in “poorly developed categories” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 187) until I reached a point of theoretical saturation.

### *Participant recruitment and sample composition*

In the first phase of the project, I used a *multiple start snowballing approach* to create a sample that was as diverse as possible. I started by contacting the people I already knew, either by telephone, email or through Facebook, asking them if they wanted to participate in an interview and/or spread the word about my research to other people. I designed a pamphlet (see Appendix 4) in which I explained my research to potential research participants, based on Feldman, Bell and Berger’s recommendations (2003) on how to develop a *hook* that will convince people to participate. A good hook, they argue, should (1) attract attention, (2) summarize the project, (3) legitimize the researcher

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<sup>5</sup> I set this age limit because of my interest in self-identification. Adolescence is a period characterized by identity formation, and I wanted to interview only those people who had already passed that phase.

and (4) explain the benefits. In the pamphlet, I tried to attract attention by including visual and narrative elements that signaled my knowledge about and interest in the Turkish population and culture (including, for example, a picture of myself at a Turkish football game), as well as by presenting my research as different than general discussions of incorporation in public discourse. I legitimized myself as a researcher by including a reference to my academic affiliation, and by demonstrating my professional approach through a detailed description of how an interview would proceed. Finally, I included the following text to describe how the research could be beneficial to them as individuals or to the entire group:

Everyone can help me out, and so can you! But why would you do that? Well, maybe you are tired of the fact that Muslims are always portrayed negatively, or that people have a wrong idea about Turks in Belgium. Or maybe you just want to talk at length about your problems or are you looking for someone to listen who does not judge you.

These pamphlets were included in emails, distributed among people who offered to help recruit research participants and given to people during fieldwork. Once I had established a sufficiently large network of participants using this strategy, I mainly relied on the help of intermediaries and accidental encounters during fieldwork to find more research participants. In the second phase, when I focused my attention on the mining towns, data collection proceeded very differently: compared to Ghent, very little fieldwork was involved, and I met most respondents through intermediaries. I started with three intermediaries who I had gotten to know during my research in Ghent, and used the snowball technique to enlarge my sample.

Table 2 gives an overview of the number of successful and unsuccessful attempts to recruit people for an in-depth interview. The figures represent the number of people who were contacted (and an *attempt* is defined as a request to participate in an in-depth interview by myself or an intermediary) either face-to-face or through an online medium or phone call<sup>6</sup>. Of the 84 people who were asked to participate in an in-depth interview, about three out of four participated in one or more interviews. Of those who did not participate, five people were positive about participating, but never did (in most cases because of busy agendas on both sides). Two people explicitly refused participation, and five did not reply to a request online or by mail. The 12 remaining people did not explicitly refuse participation, but did not seem eager to participate; five cancelled the interview last minute, and seven kept pushing back the meeting time. The table shows that men are much less

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<sup>6</sup> Merely calling someone without being able to explain what the research is about and asking them to participate does not count as an attempt. Sending an e-mail in which the research is explained and the recipient is asked to participate does count as an attempt.

likely to participate (one out of three versus one out of six women), but that they are also more reluctant to explicitly refuse.

**TABLE 2: UNIT (NON-) RESPONSE ANALYSIS**

(Figures represent number of interviewed people)

	SUCCESSFUL		UNSUCCESSFUL ATTEMPTS					Total
	1 interview	2-3 interviews	Positive	Refusal	No reply	Cancelled	Undecided	
Men	26	3	4	-	3	4	6	17
Women	28	5	1	2	2	1	1	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>22</b>

The 62 people who did participate were recruited in various ways (see Table 3). More than sixty percent of the interview respondents were recruited with the help of intermediaries<sup>7</sup>. Ten people were recruited out of my personal network, and nine during fieldwork. Only four people participated in response to a general call for participants (either online, through email or via a pamphlet). Overall, it seemed that the more personal the introduction, the higher the success: interviews almost always resulted from an introduction through intermediaries or organizations. The method second in line was a face-to-face request by myself without the help of an intermediary. The least successful were methods that involved no intermediary or face-to-face contact, including online calls for participation or emails.

**TABLE 3: PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT**

(Figures represent number of interviewed people)

	Intermediary	Fieldwork	Personal network	General call
1	6	2	3	2
2	2	2	-	-
3	6	-	-	-
4	23	4	3	1
5	3	-	4	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>40 (65%)</b>	<b>8 (13%)</b>	<b>10 (16%)</b>	<b>4 (6%)</b>

Table 4 summarizes the realized sample in terms of place of residence (during childhood), gender, generation and educational attainment. The final sample is fairly balanced in terms of educational attainment, with 30 people having obtained secondary education or less and 28 people

<sup>7</sup> 'Help' refers to active involvement (asking people to participate) as well as passive involvement (giving other people's contacts and providing a link between researcher and research participant).

having completed/enrolled in tertiary education<sup>8</sup>. Women are slightly overrepresented compared to men (33 versus 29), and more people belong to the second generation than the third (37 versus 25). I sampled more people in Ghent than in the mining towns (33 versus 24), partly because I started my research there, and the initial interviews did not always cover all topics in-depth.

**TABLE 4: REALIZED SAMPLE**

(Figures represent number of interviewed people)

		MEN			WOMEN			TOTAL
		2nd generation	3rd generation	Subtotal	2nd generation	3rd generation	Subtotal	
Ghent	Secondary/less	5	4	9	4	3	7	16
	Tertiary	4	4	8	6	3	9	17
	Subtotal	9	8	17	10	6	16	33
Mining Towns	Secondary/less	5	1	6	4	4	8	14
	Tertiary	1	3	4	6	-	6	10
	Subtotal	6	4	10	10	4	14	24
Other	Secondary	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Tertiary	2	-	2	-	3	3	5
<b>Total</b>		<b>17</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>62</b>

### *Interview context and approach*

In most cases, the first contact between myself and a potential research participant was not face-to-face but via the telephone or (although less commonly) email. In the beginning of my research, I made the interview appointment during this first phone call, making my first interviews *cold call interviews* (Sharp & Kremer, 2006) without any prior face-to-face contact. In some of these cold call interviews, the participant (especially the male ones) did not seem at ease, either with me as researcher or the interview context, which affected the flow of the interview and the depth of disclosure. In order to avoid hesitancy at the beginning of an interview, I offered potential research participants that I had never met face-to-face a first meeting, during which I would explain my research and how an interview would proceed. By doing so, I gave people the chance to familiarize themselves with me in an informal setting, which – I hoped – would enhance trust and rapport, a decision that has to be seen in the light of my non-hierarchical approach. In many cases, people said such a meeting was not necessary, or they told me during that first meeting that I could go ahead and continue with the interview.

<sup>8</sup> Given that all but one of the participants were over 18, most of them had finished secondary education. The number of people in tertiary education is a potential exaggeration, considering that some were only in their first year and could still drop out.

Also part of the non-hierarchical approach was my decision to give all interviewees control in terms of where the interview would take place. I gave all of them the possibility to choose the location of the interview themselves, as long as it was quiet enough for recording and they would feel at ease to talk openly. I told them they I had an interview room at my disposal at the university, or that we could go to a public place (usually a coffeehouse), but that I was also more than willing to go to their homes or any other place they felt comfortable. Over half of the interviews with men took place in a public place, one in four in the participant's home and about one in five at the university (see Table 5). Almost half of the interviews with women happened at their homes, and public places came second (39 per cent). Four interviews took place in the university, and one woman was interviewed in my own apartment. Couples were mostly interviewed in their own homes or in public.

Overall, the interviews in people's homes were the most successful in terms of trust and rapport. Interviewing people at home is especially effective because the interviewer is the guest and the research participants have more control over the situation. This situation made both parties feel more at ease: the participant felt comfortable because (s)he was in her own home, taking the pressure off me to create a comfortable environment, allowing me to focus on the content rather than the context of the interview. Going to people's houses also provided me with additional information about their living environment (city, neighborhood and the house itself) and often their families and lifestyle. Being in their living room, I got to see many aspects of their daily lives and things of value to them. I used these elements in my questions whenever possible (for instance, by asking who the people were in a particular picture). Several studies have argued that interviewing people in their own house can pose a safety threat, specifically for female researchers (See for instance Gailey & Prohaska, 2011; Lee, 1997; Paterson, Gregory, & Thorne, 1999; Sharp & Kremer, 2006). At no point, however, did I feel in danger or uncomfortable, rather the contrary: people were extremely welcoming and friendly.

Whenever I met people in the interview room at university, I tried to create a cozy atmosphere by offering snacks and coffee, in order to make the setting appear less formal. In case we met in a public place, I looked for a quiet corner where the participant's confidentiality would not be jeopardized or let the person choose where (s)he wanted to sit. In case we were in a coffee house or similar place, we usually had a couple of drinks, which I always offered to pay<sup>9</sup> as a gesture of reciprocity.

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<sup>9</sup> This often proved to be problematic when the research participant was male, because it is common among Turks that men pay for women when going out. Whenever they insisted on paying, I explained my point of view, namely that I was paying because I had invited them and that it was a way of thanking them for participating. In case men still insisted on paying after I had explained this, I accepted their offer in order not to be perceived as culturally insensitive or insult them.



**TABLE 5: INTERVIEW LOCATION**  
(Figures represent number of interviews)

	Participant's home	Office	Public place	Other
Men	6 (21%)	7 (24%)	16 (55%)	-
Women	14 (45%)	4 (13%)	12 (39%)	1 (3%)
Mixed	3 (50%)	-	2 (33%)	1 (17%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>23 (35%)</b>	<b>11 (17%)</b>	<b>30 (45%)</b>	<b>2 (3%)</b>

Also during the interview, I adopted several strategies to create a non-hierarchical, democratic interview approach. In addition to my self-presentation, I built in a lot of *flexibility* in the interview, telling participants they could take a break whenever they wanted, and asking my questions in a way that made the interaction appear more like a conversation than a structured interview. This non-directive interview style gives control to the participants and allows them to guide the course of the interview (or at least gives them that feeling) (Brannen, 1988). Most of the interviews were semi-structured in the sense that I had a range of topics that I needed to cover, but the order in which I addressed them, and how deep I delved into a particular topic, differed for every participant. I did not avoid asking sensitive questions, but showed understanding when they had difficulties talking about them, and offered to return to the topic later in the interview.

Several authors – particularly those within the feminist tradition – have urged researchers to engage in self-disclosure by sharing their own experiences and identity, so as to avoid exploitation of an already vulnerable, oppressed or stigmatized group (Lee, 1997; Oakley, 1981; Stanley & Wise, 1993). Self-disclosure is also seen as positive for instrumental reasons because it can result in more subject disclosures, and makes the researcher come across as more empathic, warm and congruent (Mann & Murphy, 1975). Because this reciprocity of information fit well with my interview style, and because I did not feel uncomfortable about disclosing personal information, I usually answered whatever questions people had. In the case that my answer could potentially affect their own responses to questions, I told them I would answer their question after the interview had been completed. However, in line with other researchers (See for instance Brannen, 1988; Gatrell, 2006), I noticed that spontaneous reciprocity of information was not necessary, and could often be ignored: whenever I mentioned a personal detail in order to build rapport, participants were either surprised or did not react at all.

My interview context and approach have to be seen in the light of my choice for a non-hierarchical interview approach in which power imbalances between myself as researcher and my research participants are minimized. This approach is aimed at making participants feel more in control and at ease, which, in turn, serves two goals, namely (1) creating an atmosphere that

enhances disclosure and generates “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 2002; cfr. *infra*) and (2) conducting ethical research that avoids making the research participants feel exploited, uneasy or annoyed.

### *Course of the interview*

After some initial small talk, which added to the creation of an informal atmosphere, I introduced the research topic and explained how the interview would proceed. Because interviewing is not “a known cultural activity” for everyone (Davies, 2008, p. 120), I felt it was important to carefully explain the topic, purpose of the interview and how it would proceed. I introduced the topic without labeling or defining its boundaries too closely, allowing them to emerge gradually as the participants spoke (See also Brannen, 1988; Davies, 2008). Most of the time I told people I was interested in what it was like to live in Belgium as a person of Turkish ancestry. In the more specific interviews, I told them what the topic was (usually partner choice or social control), and explained why I was interested in interviewing them about that topic.

Before every interview, I guaranteed confidentiality, explaining that no one would know what they had said and that I would always make sure they were not identifiable whenever I wrote about them. Everybody got the chance to choose their own pseudonym. I stressed that I was interested in *their* opinion, that there were no right or wrong answers and that I would never judge them for anything they would say. I asked them permission to digitally record the entire interview, explaining that doing so allowed me to listen attentively, rather than having to take notes the whole time. One person refused to be recorded but allowed me to take notes, and another asked me to delete the entire interview once we finished (out of fear for consequences for what she had told me). Finally, I told the interviewees that they should never feel forced to answer any question, and that they could end the interview whenever they wanted to.

Before starting the actual interview, I gave each participant a short questionnaire with questions about their socio-demographic and migration background and family composition (See Appendix 5). This questionnaire helped to gain basic knowledge about the participants’ social environment, which was further discussed in the open-ended questions and used to categorize the people according to their socio-demographic characteristics. In later phases of the data collection (starting from period 3 on), people were also asked to complete Kuhn and McPartland’s *twenty statement test* (TST) – a test that measures people’s self-image by asking them to answer the question “Who am I?” in 20 different ways (Kuhn & McPartland, 1954; see Appendix 6 for a fictive example). The TST helped contextualize questions about ethnicity and identity, and the answers were often used in the interview as a starting point for discussing a particular aspect of the participant’s identity or life.

Throughout the data collection period, the way the interviews were conducted changed a number of times in an attempt to create a more fluent interview style. In the first phase, the interview was built around a number of themes – including the family migration background, family relationships, being Turkish in Belgium, social networks, identificational and cultural positioning, characterization of the neighborhood and social control (See Appendix 3). After the first eight interviews, I scheduled follow-up conversations with four of the respondents (2 men, 2 women) to ask them a number of questions about the interview and myself as researcher. The purpose of these interviews was to get some feedback on what I could do better, and get more insight into how aspects of my personal selves, self-presentation and interview style had affected people’s decision to participate and their interview experience. I told all of them that they could openly address what I had done wrong, because I wanted to improve my interview style and self-presentation.

I adopted a completely different approach in the second phase of the research project (partly based on what emerged from these conversations, but mostly due to my narrowing of the research focus), one that was centered around the participants’ *identity hierarchy*. After people had completed the TST, they were given a series of label cards, each of which had a particular social identity written on it (such as “Turk”, “Turkish Belgian”, “Muslim”, “Husband/wife”, “student”; see Appendix 7 for a full list) and were asked to choose those that they considered applicable to them. After they had chosen the labels, I started by asking why they had not chosen particular labels, because I considered *not* choosing a particular identity label equally informative as choosing it. Subsequently, I asked them to order the labels according to how important those identities were to them – basically asking them to construct a *hierarchy of salience* (see Figure 5). Once they had finished doing this, I asked them to explain what meaning the labels had for them, and why they put them in that particular position. The labels not only allowed us to discuss matters of identity, but also the other topics of interest, including all matters of ethnic boundary maintenance (specifically ethnic conformity pressure, othering practices and discrimination), cultural self-positioning and partner choice. When people did not start talking about these topics themselves, I introduced them when it felt most appropriate. If someone selected the label “husband/wife” for instance, I initiated the topic “partner choice;” when people selected the label “Turkish Belgian”, I asked if they saw any differences between these two “groups;” when they selected “son/daughter,” I asked them about their relationship with their parents, and so on. This interview structure proved to be much more efficient in achieving a good flow, and helped focus on topics that mattered to the participants.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> On a cautionary note, this technique might have been less effective if I would have used it from the outset. Initially, I did not have the knowledge that I had at this phase of the research, which might have made it more difficult

Figure 5 Constructing an identity hierarchy with label cards



Interviews lasted from 18 minutes to almost 3 hours, depending on the topics covered and the interview dynamic (see Table 6). Some of the shorter interviews were follow-up interviews with people who had already been interviewed before. Not taking these into account, the shortest category generally includes interviews with a rather problematic flow and limited disclosure on the part of the interviewee. These only represent about 10 percent (6 out of 65) of the entire sample, however. So, overall, I am confident that most interviews proceeded as desired, with a natural flow and a reasonable depth of response.

**TABLE 6: INTERVIEW DURATION**

(Figures represent number of interviews; 2 non-recorded interviews not included; figures in between brackets represent number of first interviews)

	< 45 min	45 min – 1 hour	1 hour – 1h30 min	1h30 min - 2 hours	> 2 hours
Men	5 (3)	8 (7)	9	3	3
Women	5 (3)	6 (5)	7	12 (11)	1
Mixed	1 (0)	1 (0)	2	2	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>11 (17%)</b>	<b>15 (23%)</b>	<b>18 (28%)</b>	<b>17 (26%)</b>	<b>4 (6%)</b>

to ask the right questions, given this rather flexible interview structure and the fact that the every interview was slightly different in focus.

A good quality qualitative interview entails eliciting *thick descriptions* – answers that contain depth, detail and richness (Geertz, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 1995), and paying attention to social desirability. In order to achieve this, I had a number of guidelines that I followed for each interview (see Appendix 8 for the actual list I used for interviews). I used a lot of *probes* – follow-up questions after a particular statement used to elicit further information - to get more detailed descriptions, to explore reasons, motivations, feelings, reactions and consequences, and to contextualize a particular phenomenon. When people seemed uncomfortable about a certain topic, I stressed again that I would never judge them for anything they told me, and reiterated that everything was confidential. I showed patience with shy or inarticulate participants by not probing too fast and giving them time to think and answer.

I considered non-verbal communication (including tone, silences and body language) an important source of information, and took notes of the interviewees' behavior before, during and after the interview. I used this information to evaluate how people responded to me as researcher and the interview context, using it as an integral part of my data (See Brannen, 1988). Non-verbal communication was specifically interesting in the case of sensitive topics (such as the importance of virginity) because it signaled how people felt about that topic, and helped to contextualize their opinions and stories.

After the interview was finished and I had switched off the digital recorder, I took some time to talk more informally with the participant. After we parted ways, I sat down as soon as possible to write down a report about the interview interaction in my field notes. These reports included my comments about my own behavior, impressions about the interviewee's behavior and his/her attitude towards myself, a description of the context and how it might have affected the interaction and any additional information the participant disclosed before or after the interview – when the recorder was switched off (see Appendix 9 for an example).

## **FOCUS GROUPS**

As part of the study on partner preferences, I included six focus groups with young, unmarried men and women, all of which were conducted in the context of other research projects (see Table 7). Three of them have been conducted in the context of a community project on partner choice in the Turkish community of Ghent. Employees of the organization responsible for this project – *Turkse Unie van België* – had requested my collaboration because of my expertise, and my task in the project consisted of setting up the content, helping recruit participants for the focus groups and assisting in conducting the discussions. Given my close involvement in the project, I can use these three focus groups as primary data, in addition to my in-depth interviews and informal conversations.

The three other focus groups were organized and conducted by a student as part of her master's thesis on partner preferences of young Turkish women, a project that I supervised. Given that I was not present myself during the discussions, I consider the transcripts of these focus groups secondary source data, which I use to corroborate the findings generated by my own data.

Even though the focus groups were not crafted with my research questions in mind, I decided to include them because of their value for the study of the relationship between boundary dynamics and partner choice. Considering that the study of partner preferences is challenging due to a taboo on many of the prevailing practices (such as transnational or interethnic marriages), focus groups are a valuable technique because they tend to be less hierarchical than in-depth interviews, which involve only the researcher and a research participant (Mortelmans, 2007, p. 333). Because of this, people are more likely to disclose information or be open about sensitive or stigmatized issues.

**TABLE 7: DESCRIPTION FOCUS GROUPS**

	Gender	Age Range	Educational Level	Participants	Recruitment
1	Female	19-24	Tertiary	5	Friend circle
2	Female	16-19	Secondary - vocational	8	Youth organization
3	Female	16-19	Secondary – vocational	7	Secondary school
4	Female	19-21	Secondary – vocational	4	Secondary school
5	Female	16-21	Secondary – general	11	Youth organization
6	Male	16-21	Secondary – mixed	9	Youth organization

### *Participant recruitment and focus group composition*

In both projects, participants were mainly recruited through youth organizations and schools. In the case of the community project, we started by contacting two schools that have a lot of Turkish pupils, and found one willing to collaborate. We went from classroom to classroom, explaining the project and asking for participation, which resulted in one focus group of four participants (all of them female and enrolled in vocational training). In addition, we contacted a youth organization, which resulted in two focus groups: one consisting of 9 male participants (of mixed educational background), and one consisting of 11 female participants (most of them enrolled in general secondary education – which tends to be academically oriented). A similar strategy was used by the master's student: she recruited respondents through a secondary vocational school, a youth organization for girls and an individual person who contacted her own friends. Within each focus group, all participants knew each other, either because they belonged to the same institution through which they were recruited or because one person was recruited and asked to bring friends to the focus-group discussion. This was an important prerequisite given the negative attitudes towards

premarital sexual intercourse and relationships and the high degree of gossip and social control within Turkish communities (De Vries, 1995; Timmerman *et al.*, 1999).

### *Context and approach*

In the case of the community project, interviews were conducted in the building where the *Turkse Unie van België* was housed – which is located in a well-known Turkish neighborhood in Ghent, and hence familiar terrain for most research participants. The other focus groups were held in the school or organization through which the participants were recruited. People were invited outside of office hours, so no one else was present aside from the focus group participants and the moderator(s). They were offered coffee, tea and/or soft drinks, as well as some sweet snacks.

The focus groups in the context of the community project were moderated by myself and an employee of the organization, who was of Turkish ancestry. As such, there was both an *academic moderator* – who could ask theoretically relevant questions and had expertise in conducting interviews – and an *everyday moderator* – who tends to let participants talk more freely, generating richer qualitative data (Mortelmans, 2007, p. 314). The role of the moderators was to set the agenda, balance participation and facilitate the discussion when necessary. We engaged in both *mining* (achieving depth) and *mapping* (inviting other contributions) to give depth as well as breadth to our data. Overall, we tried to make use of the group dynamic and to not intervene too much when the participants were discussing amongst each other. We did intervene however, when the discussion was dominated by only a few participants by encouraging those who were quiet to participate, either through eye contact or by carefully asking them about their opinion. Asking the silent participants to share their thoughts is important because they might keep quiet out of a fear of expressing a different opinion, or because they are thinking their standpoint through and, hence, have interesting ideas to share.

### *Course of the focus groups<sup>11</sup>*

As with the in-depth interviews, we took a few minutes in the focus groups to introduce the research topic and ourselves, explaining what the research was about, what it would be used for, how the focus group would proceed and ensuring confidentiality. In addition, we also asked the research participants to tell us their names, how old they were, what they were studying (or had studied) in school, and to choose a pseudonym.

Discussion topics included attitudes regarding age at marriage, preferred partner, arranged marriages and transnational marriages. Each of these topics was initiated by a video clip (Fadil,

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<sup>11</sup> This discussion is limited to how focus groups were conducted in the community project, seeing that I do not dispose of sufficiently accurate information on how the discussions proceeded in the thesis project

2009) in which young Turkish people (including Turkish Belgians as well as people still living in Turkey) talk about that particular topic. After each clip, participants were asked to comment on what they had seen and to give their own opinion and preferences. We let them talk as freely as possible, but every now and then we asked their opinion on a particular person or utterance, especially if it touched upon an interesting topic or opinion they had not yet addressed.

Overall, the discussions had a good flow, with most participants contributing to the conversation, and no dominant speakers who cut off or intimidated others. Whenever someone remained silent for a long time, which was regularly the case in the two larger groups, we carefully asked them for their point of view, which usually resulted in a response.

### **ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELDWORK AND INFORMAL CONVERSATIONS**

If ethnographic fieldwork generally involves “the immersion in a culture over a period of years, based on learning the language and participating in social events with the people of that culture” (Silverman, 2000), what I did is a form of *ethnography light*. In contrast to full-fledged ethnographic studies, I did not *immerse* myself in the Turkish communities I was studying over an extensive period of time, but rather acquainted myself with the people, communities and cultural specificities by regularly participating in social events and engaging in informal conversations. My ethnographic fieldwork was mainly aimed at gaining background knowledge, building a large and diverse network and creating rapport, and much less at the collection of actual data. It helped me to stay in touch with “current opinions that are circulating in the community” (Renzetti & Lee, 1993) and stay informed about what was happening in the cultural and political sphere.

Whenever I felt it was appropriate, I introduced certain topics in informal conversations with Turkish friends, acquaintances and research participants, in order to hear what they had to say about the issue *off the record*. I wrote this information down in my field notes and compared it during data analysis with the information obtained during in-depth interviews. This proved important particularly when the topic concerned was sensitive or taboo, and people hesitated to talk about it in a more formal in-depth interview. In addition to these informal conversations, I also conducted a couple of open interviews with key figures in the community (politicians, community workers, lawyers), who – usually through their profession – had a broader view of what was going on in Turkish communities in Belgium.

After each event or conversation, I made detailed field notes as soon as possible, summarizing what had happened, who I had met and what people had told me. I also contextualized that information by describing the setting, and comparing what I had heard and experienced to previously



obtained information. At the end of my data collection, I had 78 pages of field notes (35,000 words), starting from September 2008 and finishing in February 2013.<sup>12</sup>

## REFLEXIVITY

As I mentioned earlier, the self is a key fieldwork tool, and it is of utmost importance to scrutinize how aspects of the self affect the research process. According to Davies (2008, p. 112), researchers have to problematize *all* statuses, both the shared and the disparate, in terms of how they may affect their interaction with research participants. In what follows, I discuss the impact of my ethnicity, gender, age, marital status and social status, as well as the role of emotions in the field.

## ETHNICITY

Several ethnographers have argued that being an outsider has advantages as well as disadvantages (Agar, 1980; Gurney, 1985; Lee, 1997), and that shared social statuses do not necessarily guarantee understanding (Davies, 2008; Styles, 1979). Gurney (1985), for instance, claims that “marginality is a researcher’s greatest curse and greatest blessing.” A researcher, she argues, can feel plagued by frequent doubts about acceptance, but at the same time it also helps to maintain distance and be more critical. Just like Gurney, I was plagued by doubts about not being accepted and trusted by members of my research population, especially at the beginning of my research. My biggest fear was that people would not open up to me because I belong to “the mainstream” of Belgian society. It is difficult to say if my outsider status in ethnic terms indeed affected people’s willingness to participate, but if it did, it probably was mainly an issue for men, given that very few women refused to participate. Any negative impact of my outsider status was likely reduced due to the intermediaries who vouched for my trustworthiness.

My doubts about not being accepted proved unfounded when it concerned disclosure and rapport during interviews. Although many interviewees were initially a bit hesitant, this soon disappeared as a result of my democratic interview approach – a conclusion I draw based on the informal conversations that followed many interviews, and methodological follow-up conversations. Ali’s case is a good example:

Ali appears very uneasy and does not speak with ease at all. He clearly weighs his words and later, after the interview, admits that he was consciously paying attention to his language. But he adds that

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<sup>12</sup> When field notes are used in this dissertation, they are in a polished form that leaves out redundant information and information that can jeopardize the anonymity of participants or people I met during fieldwork.

he started feeling more at ease because I showed no negative reactions or facial expressions, which helped him talk more freely. (Field notes, 12 March, 2009)

In the follow-up conversation, a couple of months after the in-depth interview, he told me:

- Ali            You come across as sincere, interested, enthusiastic.  
 Klaartje      That is a good thing, I do not have to make a special effort for that.  
 Ali            You ask good questions.  
 Klaartje      What effect does that have on you during the interview?  
 Ali            It makes me talk more, if you interview in an inviting way.

In another follow-up conversation, a female interviewee referred to my non-hierarchical, informal interview approach as an important aspect of why she felt at ease:

In your case, it is good that you are really, really social, and that you explain everything in a fun way, that it is not boring. And the way you look, the way you come across — especially the latter. Someone who is really stand-offish, I wouldn't want that. (Azra, 26F, Ghent)

The fact that I was not Turkish seemed to be positive rather than negative. Ali, for instance, told me that he had perceived it as positive that “a Belgian person” is interested in the Turkish community, and Talha said that I had a more objective look on the situation because I was an outsider. Talha's remark is in line with the idea that ethnographers doing research in their own society can have difficulties given the assumption that their particular perspective is shared by their research participants (Davies, 2008, p. 119). Finally, Azra (as well as Ali) told me that they were more open to me precisely *because* I was not Turkish:

If you would have been Turkish, it would... would have been different I think. Because you know, you are not from our culture (thinks)... I would have paid extra attention I think. To all the things I was saying (...) (looks for words) Not that I would not trust a Turkish person, but... (thinks about how to put it). No... I would not – like about my ex and stuff, I would not have told it that easily. Because in our culture, people don't say things like “I had an ex, I was engaged”, no people are not going to say those things (...) Also because you do not know me. I can tell you something more easily, compared to, for instance, Fatma.

Although she does not say it with so many words, Azra would not open up as easily to a Turkish person out of fear that people are going to judge her or maybe even gossip about her.

On several occasions, especially toward the end of my research, I was delighted to encounter *symbols of acceptance* (Reinharz, 2011), mainly in the sense that people assigned me an expert status. In several informal conversations, people asked me for my opinion on what I was studying,

and some of them added that I probably knew the situation in the Turkish community better than them because I had spoken to so many different people. My expertise was also recognized by several Turkish organizations and professionals: the *Turkse Unie van Belgie* asked me to help set up a project on marriage migration; the *Unie van Turkse Verenigingen* invited me for a panel discussion on the same topic; and two Turkish lawyers requested information about transnational marriages.

My ethnicity, however, did affect the research in some negative ways, primarily in terms of the types of questions I asked myself and my research participants. I grew up in a society in which supposed cultural differences between the mainstream and the Muslim population are regularly stressed, which clearly affected the way I saw the world. No matter how much I wanted to avoid making assumptions or see my research participants as different, several times I was confronted with the unsettling fact that prejudices and boundaries had infiltrated my mind, clouded my perspective and made me ask the “wrong” questions. After my second interview for instance, I wrote down:

I often did not probe because he – in my opinion – did not give the answers I expected (he clearly did not make a distinction between the two cultures, and so I had to always bring it up myself). Every time I felt like I was going to check my own ideas, instead of listening to him, so I just did not do it. (field notes, 26 February, 2009)

At the time of the interview, I felt that the interview was not going as expected because I was asking the wrong questions – questions that did not capture how my interviewee saw the world. I now realize that my initial questions were not the right ones because I was cognitively drawing symbolic boundaries myself, assuming that there were clear cultural differences between “Turks” and “Belgians,” and this expressed itself to the research participants in the type of questions I asked them. I do not believe, however, that this was detrimental to the data I gathered because people made it clear that they themselves did not think in terms of ethnic boundaries. But the assumptions were detrimental in another sense: the “wrong” questions signaled to participants that I was an outsider with certain assumptions, as became clear in my post-interview conversation with Azra:

Klaartje	Did the interview feel forced at times? Like there were questions that you did not recognize yourself in?
Azra	Some questions were like “you are allochtonous, living in Belgium, and you are not allowed to do many things.”
Klaartje	And was that something that surfaced a lot [during the interview]?
Azra	Yes, they do it at work, too.

Because I was highly self-reflexive after each interview, scrutinizing my assumptions based on the interview dynamic and what interviewees told me in follow-up conversations, I managed to

overcome my assumptions and boundary thinking rather quickly. For instance, I still asked about potential cultural differences, but without drawing boundaries myself or making assumptions.

### **AGE, GENDER & MARITAL STATUS**

Based on my fieldwork experiences, I have decided to not only discuss the impact of my age, gender and marital status separately, but to also focus on the intersection of the three. I felt that being a young woman has strongly shaped my research outcomes, much more so, I believe, than my ethnicity. I include marital status as well, because in some cases this complicated the research endeavor.

#### *Gaining access*

It has frequently been argued that (young) female researchers have fewer problems negotiating access because they are perceived as powerless and less threatening (Easterday, Papademas, Schorr, & Valentine, 1977; Golde, 1986; Horn, 1997). In my own case, I believe that being female made it easier for me to gain access, both to male and female research participants. First of all, gender norms among Turkish Belgians would have made it difficult for a male researcher to interview women in a confidential setting, while the reverse is less of an issue. Being female, I had access to both male and female research participants, and could talk to them in a variety of settings without violating gender norms.

My age also potentially helped gain access and find research participants. First, if I had been older, it might have been more difficult to “find” participants. Because I belonged to (roughly) the same age category as my research population, I could ask my own friends if they knew people who could participate, and could go to social events for young people without being too much of an outsider in terms of age. Although I do not have any evidence for this, I also believe that my age might have convinced people to participate. However, it was probably more my self-presentation as a young-at-heart, informal researcher that was the real asset.

#### *Rapport and interview dynamic*

Overall, being in my late twenties/early thirties seemed perfect in terms of rapport because I was mature enough to talk about serious topics with older participants, and young enough to understand the life world of adolescents. It is hard to say what the role of my gender was in terms of rapport and disclosure, but there are indications that both men and women felt more comfortable with me than they would have with a man. Because topics were highly personal (sometimes involving questions about sexuality and relationships), women probably felt more comfortable disclosing it to another woman, also because of strong gender segregation in the Turkish-Belgian population. I also believe it

was easier for Turkish men to disclose personal information to a female researcher, because of gender norms. Based on my interviews, I got the impression that Turkish men seldom disclose personal information to each other. Ali, for instance, told me in the follow-up conversation:

- Klaartje      Are you more open to a woman than to a man? Or do you tell other things?  
Ali              Yes, I tell more to a woman  
Klaartje      And why?  
Ali              I tell more because they are better listeners. A man is different. I am not used to tell personal things to a man.

In general, the more I had in common with the participants, the easier it was to establish rapport by *doing similarity* – constructing in-group membership by establishing shared experiences via self-disclosure (Abell, Locke, Condor, Gibson, & Stevenson, 2006). Establishing rapport through shared experiences was easiest with women who were about my age. Although there were definitely women I had little in common with, we usually shared something we could talk about and sometimes even bond over. In research encounters with twenty-something women, I often noticed that they interpreted the situation as an encounter between peers, rather than one between researcher and interviewee. Some women, for instance, greeted me with three kisses – as is common among Turkish-Belgian women who know each other – especially if we were introduced to each other through a mutual friend. In some cases, we shook hands at the beginning, but said goodbye with kisses at the end, illustrating that throughout the interview they had assigned a new meaning to the encounter because of the interview dynamic. Many interviews with women started off a bit hesitantly – especially when the participants were younger than me – but gradually, the women noticeably became more relaxed and started to talk more freely.

In my research interactions with male participants, my self-presentation as a young, informal and engaged researcher was not always as effective as it was with the female participants. Two particular problems arose, namely (1) sexual hustling by men I had met in an informal context, and (2) a lack of rapport and disclosure during interviews with men who were not familiar with the practice of research.

### *Sexual hustling*

Just like many other (young) female researchers<sup>13</sup>, I have in many cases been approached as a single woman rather than a researcher, and have been the object of flirting or more serious *sexual hustling* (Gurney, 1985). This was not so much an effect of my gender alone, but rather related to me being

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<sup>13</sup> See, for instance, Arendell, 1997; Gailey & Prohaska, 2011; Gill & Maclean, 1990; Green et al., 1993; Gurney, 1985; Horn, 1997; Hunt, 1984; Sharp & Kremer, 2006; Warren, 1988

female, young *and* single, as well as the context in which I was doing research and my self-presentation.

Considering that I was living in one of the cities where my research was carried out, I often met possible participants in informal settings such as restaurants, clubs, coffee houses, the gym or even virtual ones such as Facebook. Given the fact that I was not doing research in a particular setting, such as a school or an organization, I had to rely on these haphazard encounters to find participants, especially in the beginning of my research project. Even when men gave a gendered meaning to the encounter, I tried to maneuver my research into the conversation, hoping that they would be interested in participating. In this case, I clearly took advantage of my gender in order to gain access to more research participants<sup>14</sup> and I especially did so when the man in question belonged to a category that was underrepresented in my interview sample (in particular men with no tertiary education). However, once the men had interpreted the interaction in gendered terms, it proved to be very difficult to give a new meaning to the interaction, and one case is particularly illustrative in this respect:

I met Tarik (mid-thirties) in the summer of 2009, during my trip to Turkey. He was sitting in a tea-garden together with some other men, and, after having chatted and talked about my research, I exchanged numbers with those that were interested in participating. Three months later, I met Tarik by chance in a night club in Ghent, and he really came on to me. When I left him to join my friends, he started texting me and the next few days he continued doing so and even started calling me late at night. I repeatedly told him I was not interested in a sexual or romantic relationship with him, but he nevertheless continued to call and text me. During one of the calls, it became clear he had been stalking me: he had waited a couple of times in front of a university building, assuming I was working there, hoping to see me. At one point he asked ‘When are you finally going to examine me?’ in a way that made the question seem obviously sexual. Although he wanted to meet me for other reasons than my research, I decided to give it a go. I again stressed that my motivations for meeting him were purely academic, both to make it clear to him and to ease my conscience that I was not being unethical by giving him false expectations. We eventually arranged a meeting in January, not in his house – as he requested – but in a public place. He did not show up, because – as it later turned out – he was in police court and could not let me know in time that he was unable to come. After this, I decided to give up on him, both because I felt it was useless and because meeting him would be potentially dangerous.

While going through my field notes and writing up the above paragraph, I felt embarrassed about not giving up on him as a respondent much sooner. Retrospectively, I feel that my efforts were

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<sup>14</sup> Many other female researchers have reported using their gender and even sexuality as effective research strategies (see, for example, Easterday et al., 1977; Rovner-Piecznik, 1976; Warren, 1988).

useless and even dangerous, and that continuing to show interest in him as a research participant might even have encouraged him to continue harassing me. My decision to meet him despite his behavior was grounded in my empirical and theoretical interests: his behavior showed clear signs of the stereotypical machismo that is often ascribed to Turkish men, which I interpreted as a sign of reactive ethnicity (Rumbaut, 1994). I assumed that other men with the same profile would display similar machismo, and that it was therefore better to invest my time in this one case. I endured most of his sexual hustling, thinking that it would be only temporary and that at one point he would come to respect me for not being “an easy woman.” But what this experience shows is that it is not always easy to change the initial meaning people give to the encounter. Because we met in a holiday setting, and later in a night club, it should not come as a surprise that Tarik came to see me as a single woman, rather than as a researcher; the circumstances in which we met determined the role assignment. No matter how hard I tried, it proved to be impossible to change the meaning he gave to the situation and the role he ascribed to me.

Female researchers have found it difficult to react to propositions because it can damage rapport (Gailey & Prohaska, 2011; Green et al., 1993; Gurney, 1985), and my case was no different. On the one hand, I wanted to make explicit from the beginning that I was not interested in a sexual or romantic relationship, in order to avoid the possibility that people would cooperate with my research to obtain something that I could/would never give them. On the other hand, I feared that an explicit statement of this kind would harm the rapport between me and the research participant. First of all, expressing my disinterest seemed contradictory to my statement that I was interested in their lives, problems and personality. Second, because of my ethnicity, I feared that they would interpret my sexual or romantic disinterest as racist – and, in fact, some of them explicitly did.

Responding in the “right” fashion felt of utmost importance because I noticed that impact of how I responded extended the individual level: my fieldwork experiences taught me that participants communicated with each other about their interactions with me, and I learned that how I reacted to the behavior of one could have consequences for how other potential participants came to see me. In most cases, I tried to make clear in a friendly way that I was not interested in anything romantic or sexual, trying to not jeopardize my access to more participants and information. Retrospectively, I sometimes think that it would have been better to make it explicitly clear that sexual overtures were not appreciated, nor tolerated. In the long run, this would have been beneficial to the image people had of me as a researcher and a woman.

*Problematic interview dynamic*

The second problem that arose during my data collection was a lack of rapport and disclosure in interviews with some male participants, particularly those with less education. Lower educated men tended not to have the knowledge or experience to help them know what to expect and how to behave in the context of research, which potentially made them feel uneasy. Through my non-hierarchical, democratic interview approach, I tried to make the encounter come across as more informal, but this was not always successful. Whereas my democratic approach incited women – especially those who were my own age and also had pursued higher education – to see me as a peer, this was difficult to reach with the men, in particular when they were younger and less educated. Because we had little in common, my only option to “do similarity” was to display my knowledge about the Turkish population and cultural practices. In some cases, this helped to ease the tension, but in other cases I just had to accept that I was dealing with a reticent, inarticulate respondent. I nevertheless tried my best to get the most information by being encouraging and approving and by asking descriptive rather than opinion questions.

**EDUCATION AND STATUS**

Even though I did not really make use of my status as university employee or doctoral researcher to gain access – something that was part of my non-hierarchical interview approach – it did seem to have significance for at least some of the research participants. Leyla, for instance, told me in the follow-up conversation that the fact that I was working at the university convinced her to participate in the interview:

- Leyla            If it would have been a total stranger, I would not have participated.
- Klaartje        But wasn't I a total stranger?
- Leyla            At that moment, yes. But it was also like, you know, how should I say it, Klaartje, you are assistant at the university, somehow that gives a bit of trust like, ok I can trust her, I can tell her a lot of things. If you would really be a stranger, and you work for a newspaper or a magazine or so, I would not have participated.

In a similar vein, Talha told me he had participated based on the purpose of the research. He said his participation usually depends on whether or not the research is going to do good for society, and participated in my research because he felt this to be the case. My position at the university, and the fact that I was doing the research to obtain a PhD signaled to at least some of the respondents that they could trust me and that I was not going to use the information for malicious purposes or distort what they had told me.



## THE IMPACT OF EMOTIONS DURING FIELDWORK

Not only do the researcher's socio-demographic characteristics, but also her emotions affect the research, from the choice of the topic and research participants to the processes of analysis and writing (Widdofield, 1999, cited in Sandoval, 2009). In my own case, two of the most important emotions were *guilt* and *fear*. I felt guilty whenever I contacted a (potential) participant for asking him/her to participate or help me find other research participants. Underlying this guilt was a fear that I would give them the feeling that I only saw them as potential research objects, reducing them to their Turkish ethnicity. Guilt and fear were strongest when I knew the person outside of my research, because I was afraid I would harm our friendship by giving them the impression I saw them only as Turkish, not as genuine people or friends.

It became clear that this fear was not unfounded, something that I experienced as very disturbing. In one of the in-depth interviews, for example, a female respondent subtly indicated that I was not any different than other people who reduced her to her ethnicity:

- Aleyna        Instead of just seeing me as an ordinary person... like, you know, who is [Aleyna]? – people automatically put it in the cultural context (...) A family issue is in my case automatically the consequence of our cultural background. While in fact, it has nothing to do with it (...) That really bothers me, to be honest.
- Klaartje       And now we are doing it again
- Aleyna        (smiling) Yes.

When I discussed this issue with one of my key informants, who had been the intermediary between me and at least 5 participants, he confirmed that some of them indeed had told him that they had gotten the feeling that I myself was thinking in terms of boundaries and approached them as Turkish. Given that at that point, I had already gained enough knowledge to avoid prejudiced questions and comments, I could not do anything but accept this criticism and learn to live with it. After all, I *was* focusing on Turks in Belgium. If I wanted to know if they themselves thought in terms of symbolic boundaries, I simply had to ask them if they saw essential differences between “Turks” and “Belgians.” As much as I wanted to be liked, I had to accept that “fieldworkers cannot be liked by all respondents” (Van Maanen, 1982, 111).

The impact of my guilt and fear for constructing symbolic boundaries collection made me refrain from truly convincing people to participate. During fieldwork, I was sometimes afraid to ask people if they were interested in participating, because I assumed they would not. When I did ask and they were not enthusiastic, I did not push them. One passage in my field notes illustrates how much I hated contacting people to participate, and how my fear was sometimes, but not always, unfounded:

Seeing that I could no longer postpone the horrible task of looking for respondents, I decided today was the day to systematically browse through my database of possible respondents and contact EVERYONE that matched the sample criteria for the article on ethnic conformity pressure. Honestly, I hate this SOOOO MUCH! I feel like I'm stalking people, and I don't want to do that. I told it to my colleague and he told me I just needed to get over it and do it. Do not think about it, just call. (...) I did it and it wasn't that horrible after all. On the contrary! I called [Can] for like the fourth time (the previous cancellations made me think he didn't want to participate), and he immediately apologized for not getting back to me after I called him last time. He was actually very willing to participate. Same in case of [Ercan]: he was gonna leave on holidays in two days, but I could definitely contact him later on. And also [Semra] and [Tayfun] agreed to participate, and would both look for other people so we could have a focus group about the topic. So see, worries for nothing. Or maybe not completely: the day after, I got "rejected" by [a woman] that I know quite well, because she was totally not in the mood to talk about her life, because it was too personal. At night, I saw [Batuhan] in [a local bar] and when I told him I hate the recruitment so much, he actually said: "Yeah well, it's true, like when I see that you are calling, I don't feel like picking up the phone."

Although most of the time, I tried to conquer my fears and just do what was needed, there were undoubtedly also occasions when I refrained from convincing people who might have participated if I had tried harder. I do not think this has resulted in a systematic bias in my data, however, considering that I hated convincing everyone and not just any particular group.

Overall, the positive emotions outweighed the negative ones, even during the period of data collection. I chose my research topic based on a sense of injustice about the exclusion and discrimination of an ethnic minority group, but over time, this general concern developed into strong empathy and respect for that group. During my fieldwork and in-depth interviews I really came to appreciate people's sociability, warm-heartedness and generosity. For every person who refused to participate or incited a negative feeling, there were at least five others who put a smile on my face by giving me a warm welcome in their homes and talking at length about their lives, dreams and fears. As much as I hated asking people to participate, I loved going to their homes to interview them. Over time, I have developed a kind of generalized love for my research population – a positive appreciation that goes beyond my research interactions – based on the warm-heartedness and generosity I have experienced during my research. In line with Agar (1980), I believe these positive attitudes are essential for doing good qualitative research:

It is hard to do science with people you like; it is also hard to do science with people you do not like; if you do not care one way or the other, it is hard to "do science" because you do not understand enough about the people you are doing science with.

Appreciating the people you are doing research with is not only important in order to understand their stories, but also in order to balance negative emotions and the fact that doing qualitative research is emotionally draining. It is the positive emotions that helped me get going and not give up when I faced challenges.

## **ETHICAL CHALLENGES**

Ethics is related to the application of a system of moral principles to prevent harming or wronging others, to promote the good, to be respectful and to be fair (Renzetti & Lee, 1993). Following Guillemin and Gillam (2004), I discuss two types of ethics, namely *procedural ethics* and *ethics in action* (or *situational ethics*).

### *Procedural ethics*

Procedural ethics refers to the ethical rules that a researcher has to take into account when setting up and carrying out the research, which – among others – includes the principle of *informed consent*, the protection of the research participants' *privacy* and the principles of *beneficence* and *non-maleficence* (Mortelmans, 2007). The rule of informed consent is the following:

the voluntary consent of the human subject is absolutely essential. This means that the person involved should have legal capacity to give consent; should be so situated as to exercise free power of choice, without the intervention of any element of fraud, deceit, duress, over-reaching or any other ulterior form of constraint or coercion; and should have sufficient knowledge and comprehension of the elements of the subject matter involved as to enable him to make an understanding and enlightened decision (The Nuremberg code, cited in Mortelmans, 2007, p. 175).

Three elements are central in this definition: consent needs to be given by someone that is *capable* of doing so, it must be *voluntary* and the potential participant has to have *sufficient information* about the research in order to make the decision to consent. Regarding the in-depth interviews and focus groups that I have carried out, these three conditions were fulfilled at all times. First, none of the respondents were children or intellectually disabled, and all can therefore be regarded as capable of consenting. Second, no one was put under pressure to participate. This means that when people explicitly refused to participate (which rarely happened), I did not try to convince them. When they seemed hesitant, however, I did exercise some effort to convince them, mainly by explaining very carefully what the research was about, how an interview would proceed and what the purpose was. Third, everybody who participated in an in-depth interview or focus group was informed about the research topic, the purpose of the research, how the interview would proceed and confidentiality. This was done at first contact, and repeated before the start of the interview, in both cases orally.

Several measures were taken to safeguard the *privacy* of the research participants. First, I tried to interview them in a setting where their privacy would not be jeopardized and where they could talk freely without having to fear that others would overhear what they were saying. When people chose to be interviewed at home, I told them – most of the time *before* actually meeting them there – that it was important that they could speak freely, and that, therefore, it was best if there was no one else around. In most cases, we were alone in the house or the room where the interview took place. In a limited amount of cases, people explicitly said that they had nothing to hide and that, therefore, other people did not have to vacate the interview scene, a decision that I respected. On only one occasion did I notice that a female participant was hesitant to disclose certain sensitive information because her brother was in the room. As soon as I noticed it, I signaled via body language that I understood what was going on and that she did not have to talk about it<sup>15</sup>. When people requested to be interviewed in a public place, I let them choose where they wanted to go, again telling them that it was important that they could talk freely. When they had chosen a rather busy place, I tried to pick a spot to sit where we would not be overheard. In most cases, this was no problem, also because other people present were usually busy talking, themselves, and did not pay attention to us.

Second, I guaranteed all people confidentiality, and let them choose their own pseudonym, which would be used instead of their real name. In some cases, people told me to use their real names because they had nothing to hide, hence *refusing confidentiality* (Arendell, 1997; Campbell, 2003). When this happened, I respected their decision, but only after having made sure that they really wanted it this way (I asked them again after the interview, once they knew what they had talked about). Confidentiality not only involved the use of a pseudonym, but also omitting all information that could reveal people's identity. This was specifically important for people who had a particular and rare combination of certain socio-demographic characteristics. To give a fictive example: a 25-year old woman who has studied history, lives in Ghent, and is married to an ethnic Belgian, could easily be identified by people who know her (especially given the fact that I used a snowball approach). In such a case, I left out the most specific and least relevant information, for instance replacing "History" by "university education", and referring to her as in her mid-twenties.

Third, privacy also entailed that I told people that no one else but me and potentially my supervisor would read or hear the entire interview. I felt this was important, because an entire

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<sup>15</sup> I was unable to safeguard her anonymity because the interview happened unexpectedly. I had interviewed her brother in his home first, and he offered to bring me to her, so I could interview her as well. While I was talking to her in the kitchen, he was in the living room nearby, talking to her husband and watching TV. Given that there was no door between kitchen and living room, and I felt it was inappropriate to ask her if we could do the interview in another room, I accepted these conditions and was especially attentive to how the setting influenced the interview.

interview with all its specific details and stories, can reveal participants' identity to people who know them, even if names and specific socio-demographic characteristics are left out<sup>16</sup>. However, on several occasions I had other people transcribe my interviews. In order to stay as close as possible to the principle of privacy, I made absolutely sure these people did not know the person I had interviewed, and told them what they would hear was absolutely confidential, and that they could not talk to anyone about it.

Finally, *beneficence* and *non-maleficence* (Gatrell, 2006) were the two most important ethical principles, especially given the fact that I was doing research with one of the most stigmatized and excluded groups in Belgian society. I wanted to produce research that was not going to harm my research participants, nor the research population, and instead might be beneficial to their position in society. My choice for a democratic, non-hierarchical interview approach, as well as the commitment acts I engaged in should be seen as one aspect of my commitment to non-maleficence. By offering my research participants my help in return for their participation, I hoped to be able to help them achieve goals that mattered to them.

But my commitment to non-maleficence and beneficence extended to the individual level: I also wanted to avoid depicting the entire research population in a bad light, and wanted to use my research and expertise to fight the problems they were facing by presenting a more nuanced, less prejudiced picture of the Turkish population in Belgium. I was particularly concerned about fueling the idea that Turkish Belgians were essentially different and solely responsible for their supposed failed integration. The topic of *ethnic conformity pressure* and *transnational marriages* in particular were potentially "dangerous" topics, given that my results might confirm existing stereotypes, especially when looked at uncritically or interpreted simplistically. Indeed, in the hands of the "wrong" people, there are elements that could be used as proof that "Turks do not want to integrate." But this is not what I draw from my findings. Ultimately, I followed the following guideline on how to deal with sensitive topics:

The best strategy for protecting the sensitivities of research participants and community members (...) is to design ethical and culturally sensitive research and to interpret findings tactfully and judiciously, with concern for the interests of the research participants, the gatekeepers and society (Renzetti & Lee, 1993, p. 17).

Second, it was important for me not to give my research participants the feeling that they were being used. I wanted to avoid being a researcher who "come[s] into the community, take[s] what

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<sup>16</sup> This is one of the reasons why I object to making qualitative data accessible to other researchers, even if they have been collected with public funding.

they can get out of it, and are never seen again” (Renzetti & Lee, 1993). In order to avoid such a situation of exploitation, I engaged in several acts of reciprocity, and considered it extremely important to use my research for the good of the community. I offered each respondent two cinema tickets as a sign of my appreciation for their participation, engaged in commitment acts and offered my help to whomever could use it. In addition, I gave my results back to the research population by putting my expertise at work in several projects. I created a website with information about my research and findings “in highly understandable terms” (Renzetti & Lee, 1993). In addition, I decided to write a non-academic book on three generations of Turkish Belgians – the aim of which is to give my results back to my research participants as well as to give ethnic Belgians a realistic, complex picture of the Turkish population in Belgium.

### *Situational ethics*

Sometimes it happens that during the research challenges or dilemmas arise that the researcher was not prepared for, and has to respond to immediately in an ethically sound way. In such a context, we speak of *situational ethics* or *ethics in practice* (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). In my own case, the most important challenges that arose during the research were related to cases of sexual hustling (cfr. supra). As discussed, responding to sexually suggestive remarks, date invitations or explicit sexual propositions was not easy, as I had to find a balance between not offending potential research participants and making clear that I was not interested in getting sexually or romantically involved with them. Discussing how exactly I responded is difficult, seeing that each case was different, but overall my response depended on how rude their own remarks were. For example, when I was asked on a date, I was more careful to not offend them, compared to when someone made explicit sexual remarks or proposals. The most difficult dilemma I faced was when I received a text message from Tarik’s girlfriend. He had been texting, calling and stalking me repeatedly (cfr. p. 124):

While I was getting ready this morning, I heard my phone, but was just too late to pick up. Immediately after, I get a text message, sent from Tarik’s phone, which says “[Tarik] is married slut, I am his wife.” I realize she probably saw his messages to me in his cell phone and decide to call her immediately to clarify the misunderstanding. I do not even have time to explain because she apologizes right away and almost starts to cry, saying that she has searched his phone and found several messages to several different women. (Field notes, 2 December 2009)

I felt torn at that moment between my role as a woman and that of a researcher; Since he was not really participating in my research project and I had not promised him confidentiality, it did not seem completely inappropriate to tell her that he was indeed contacting other women. However, no matter how much I wanted to tell her to leave him, I decided to adopt the role of researcher, and explained

to her that I knew him because of my research. When she told me she had seen a message in which he told me he loved me, I replied that there was no interest in him from my side, and that this should be clear from the messages I had sent him in response to his own. At that moment, it felt like the right thing to do, not only in terms of research ethics (I saw him as a potential research participant and did not want to interfere in his private life), but also for my own sake; by talking to her more extensively about his behavior, I might have aggravated him, hence endangering my own safety.

## DATA MANAGEMENT AND ANALYSIS

### INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION

Transcription constitutes an integral part of the data analysis process, and should be clearly disclosed in the methodology of a project (Wellard & McKenna, 2001). I have used a naturalistic approach to transcription, which captures every utterance in as much detail as possible (Oliver, Serovich, & Mason, 2005). This not only includes *verbatim* transcription of everything that is said, but also involves not correcting grammatical errors and incorporating nonverbal cues (e.g., silences, body language) and emotional expressions (e.g., different types of intonation, laughing, crying, hesitating, stuttering). In research underpinned by theoretical frameworks such as Grounded Theory and feminism, closeness between researchers and the text is critical to the research design (tHalcomb & Davidson, 2006). In such frameworks, naturalistic transcription is a logic option, because it facilitates data analysis by bringing researchers closer to their data.

In all, I have over 79 hours of interview material, most of which I transcribed myself. About ten interviews were transcribed by others who were given careful instructions about how to transcribe, in order to standardize all interview transcriptions. I systematically checked all of the transcriptions for errors by reading through them while simultaneously listening to the original recordings and making corrections where necessary. Such an assessment is a fundamental component of rigor and should be a routine practice in qualitative research (Poland, 1995).

Given that the interviews were in Dutch but the write-up of the analysis is in English, quotes taken from the transcriptions have to be translated. I translate as literally as possible, to the extent that this does not jeopardize understanding or meaning. In case understanding *is* jeopardized, I will make minimal changes to the quote, or add explanatory information, both of which are signaled in square brackets. In case (a combination of) information could jeopardize the anonymity of the research participant, I leave out identifying information or replaced it by a generic term such as “a friend” or “a city,” again identified by the use of square brackets.

## PRINCIPLES OF ANALYSIS

### *Triangulation*

Triangulation is a method that qualitative researchers use to check and establish validity by analyzing a research question from multiple perspectives. Most often, “triangulation” is used in the sense of *methodological triangulation*: the use of different methods to increase the validity of the research results (Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2011). Several authors consider the use of more than one method first and foremost as a vehicle for *cross-validation*: when two or more methods yield similar results, this supports the assumption that the results are valid (Flick, 1992; Guion et al., 2011; Jick, 1979). But triangulation can also be used to get a more “complete, *holistic*, and contextual portrayal” of the phenomenon under study (Jick, 1979, p. 603)

In my own research project, I combined in-depth interviews with focus group discussions and fieldwork, both in order to enhance the validity of my findings and come to a holistic image of the phenomenon I was studying. The in-depth interviews were the main source of the data, but given that many of my interview topics were sensitive issues, I felt it was important to also engage in fieldwork in order to contextualize the information obtained during interviews. This was especially the case for the study on partner choice, given that transnational marriages were a sensitive and even stigmatized issue.

### *Coding in Grounded Theory*

Qualitative data analysis is essentially about *coding* – a process that consists of a series of operations through which data are broken down, conceptualized and put back together in new ways. Wishing to stay close to the respondents’ own lived experiences, I adopted a Grounded Theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to my data analysis, using a combination of open-ended and axial coding. *Open coding* is “the part of the analysis that pertains specifically to the naming and categorizing of phenomena through close examination of data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 62), making it essentially about *data management*. *Axial coding* refers to “a set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 96), and is hence all about the *generation of findings*.

In general, researchers alternate between these two modes of coding throughout the process of data analysis. I did the same, starting with very broad open coding as soon as I had done a couple of interviews, identifying an initial thematic framework. I *inductively* identified themes (and in some cases, sub-themes as well), by reading through my interviews and field notes and coding recurrent or interesting themes. This resulted in descriptive codes (including “family characteristics,” “cultural differences,” “exclusion,” “social network,” “partner choice” and “social control”) that often



reflected the main topics and questions I had listed in my topic list and addressed during the in-depth interview. After I had read through the interviews and marked the themes, I applied them to the data, systematically indexing (coding) the data in the software package NVivo, based on the selected themes, making sure I did not fragment the data too much.

Once the first interviews were analyzed this way, I read through the raw data again and used an iterative approach to turn the rather crude initial thematic framework into a more refined and inductively generated tree structure (See Appendix 10). As I read through the raw data, transcript by transcript, I added more themes and subthemes, asking myself what any particular statement or story was referring to, and assigned an appropriate code in NVivo either based on technical literature or making use of research participants' own concepts. Once this was done, I returned to the evolving tree structure and refined it, removing duplication, amending labels, merging sub-themes that fragmented the data too much and splitting too-broad themes into more focused ones. I used several of the Grounded Theory techniques to enhance theoretical sensitivity in order to group the different codes in a meaningful way. For example, I used basic questions that denote a type of relationship (who, when, where, what, how, why?) to group together different codes into one category. I grouped all the *reasons* (why?) for engaging in a transnational marriage into a category, all the *ways* (how?) in which ethnic boundaries manifested themselves to the research participants and all the different *meanings* (what?) people gave to the label "Turkish."

After this first phase of data management, I singled out one particular theme that would be the focus of an empirical article (for instance ethnic conformity pressure, partner choice or ethnic and national self-identification) and moved on to the second phase of the data analysis, namely the generation of findings. I started looking more closely at the different codes and tried to establish links between the different categories, using principles of *axial coding*. I looked for a description of the phenomenon, causal conditions, context, intervening conditions (structure), action/interactional strategies (agency) and consequences. In the case of ethnic conformity pressure, for example, I explored what it is, under what conditions it is manifested and the different ways in which people react to it, as well as its potential consequences. Given that Grounded Theory is essentially an action-oriented model, the focus on agency was always particularly important, as well as attention to the mechanisms or reasons that can account for little or minimal change. Whenever I looked for an explanation for a particular situation, phenomenon or action, I paid attention to both intentional and situational factors, as well as explicit (accounts given by the participants themselves) and implicit reasons (based on the co-occurrence of themes/linkages in the data, an explanatory concept or process or a structure of evidence).

After having established links between the several codes, I started writing a first draft of my findings, linking them to existing research, in order to enhance my theoretical sensitivity and identify gaps in my data. I then refined my coding structure again, in some cases replacing my initial codes with existing theoretical concepts.

Once I had established a solid coding structure, I went back to the field to collect more data in order to fill in gaps (by sampling different types of people or asking the same kind of people new questions that seemed relevant, but had yet to be addressed) and validate statements and established relationships, hence *grounding* the theory. After I had filled all the gaps and decided that my statements were valid and grounded in the data, I made detailed annotations to the coded fragments: all pertinent text fragments were condensed and rephrased more theoretically. In a final phase, these annotations were analyzed on paper and synthesized for the empirical part of a particular article.



# CHAPTER 6

# MARKING THE BOUNDARIES OF TURKISHNESS

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## *The Importance of Group, Gender and Religion*

Klaartje Van Kerckem, Bart Van de Putte & Peter Stevens

Submitted to *Ethnicities*

This article describes how Turkish Belgians construct Turkishness in opposition to Belgianness and explores how their boundary markers relate to those constructed in mainstream public discourse. Based on 50 in-depth interviews with Turkish Belgians, we identify two important boundary markers, namely the primacy of the group over the individual, and female chastity. In putting “group” central in the definition of what it means to be Turkish, our research participants use a boundary marker that is similar to the one used in mainstream discourse, but give a more positive meaning to it. The mainstream construction of Muslims as oppressive towards women is partially reproduced in the narratives of the female research participants, who contest gender inequality in terms of freedom but simultaneously legitimize virginity and stress their agency. Unlike in dominant discourse, Islam does not feature as a boundary marker in our research participants’ narratives. Our findings demonstrate that also the less powerful group in a boundary system actively engages in boundary work, explicitly or implicitly contesting mainstream boundary markers. In assigning a positive meaning to their “group-oriented culture,” our research participants offer a counter discourse that delegitimizes the Western superiority feeling, which is based on individual autonomy.



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## INTRODUCTION

Until now, most studies describing ethnic boundary dynamics in Europe have focused on how members and institutions of the dominant group mark symbolic boundaries (Davis & Nencel, 2011; Foner & Alba, 2008; Korteweg & Yurdakul, 2009; Razack, 2004; Zolberg & Woon, 1999) and how they police those boundaries through social closure. Oversimplifying the findings of these studies, we could say that in Europe, religious boundaries function in the same way as racial boundaries in the United States, in the sense that it is religion which marks Muslim immigrants and their descendants as “the others” (Foner & Alba, 2008; Zolberg & Woon, 1999).

But groups on both sides of the boundary do not necessarily agree over what marks a boundary and to the best of our knowledge, no studies in Europe have focused on how boundaries are also constructed by members of the group on the other – less dominant – side of the boundary. In order to get a complete understanding of boundary dynamics in a particular society, it is important to study how members of groups on *both* sides of the boundary mark the boundary, and to analyze the power struggles they engage in to have their mode of categorization and identity respected and recognized.

In this study, we examine how Turkish Belgians mark the boundary between their own group and ethnic Belgians, drawing on in-depth interviews with members of the second and third generation. We believe that this method of data-collection is best suited in order to get a full understanding of how Turkish Belgians draw the boundaries between their own ethnic group and the majority group, because it allows the researcher to create a context of minimal power imbalances. Participant observation is interesting to study the power dynamics in boundary marking (Duemmler et al., 2010), but it is less useful to study how the less powerful group marks the boundary. Power relations in society are reproduced in interaction (Foucault, 2012), and consequently, in natural settings, the discursive intervention of members of minority groups is often restricted to counter discourses, because they have less power to introduce their own vision. By studying boundary work through in-depth interviews, we aim to minimize the power imbalances, and come to a thorough understanding of how the minority group defines itself-vis-à-vis the dominant group.

The aim of the study is twofold: first, we want to give a detailed discussion of what Turkish Belgians see as the most important boundary markers between themselves and ethnic Belgians. Second, we examine to what extent their boundary markers and perceptions of difference resemble or differ from how the mainstream marks the boundaries. To put it differently: we discuss to what extent Turkish Belgians – just like individuals and institutions in the center – construct religion, patriarchy and female oppression as *contrasting cultural diacritica* – cultural differences that are



used to mark the boundaries between themselves and ethnic Belgians. We start this article with an introduction into the literature on the marking and making of ethnic boundaries. Subsequently, we discuss symbolic boundaries between Turks/Muslims and Europeans as marked by the mainstream. After having outlined our data and methods, we present our analysis of how Turkish Belgians mark the boundaries between their ethnic group and ethnic Belgians. We subsequently discuss the importance of the “group versus individual” dichotomy and female chastity as boundary markers, as well as the marginal position of religion as boundary marker.

### **MARKING SYMBOLIC BOUNDARIES.**

Most students of social and ethnic boundaries agree that a first step towards the construction of a boundary is the continuous dichotomization and marking of a symbolic boundary between insiders and outsiders (F. Barth, [1969] 1998; Lamont & Molnar, 2002; Wimmer, 2008). This process of *boundary marking* consists of the categorization of others as members of another group, as well as the identification of particular contrasting *cultural diacritica* that help to define one’s group identity in opposition to the other group. In the past decade, several empirical studies (Chong, 1998; Duemmler et al., 2010; Espiritu, 2001; Korteweg & Yurdakul, 2009) have studied how members of dominant and ethnic minority groups engage in *boundary work* – “the process of defining oneself by opposition to others and to traits associated with others” (Lamont, 1995, p. 351). The study of boundary work basically involves the identification of the conceptual distinctions that are used in everyday interaction and discourses to construct notions of “us” and “them” (Min, 1992). These “cultural contents of ethnic dichotomies” are not the sum of “objective” differences, but rather those which actors themselves regard as significant (Barth, 1969).

Both dominant and subordinate groups actively take part in the construction of ethnic difference to achieve particular ends and preserve itself in opposition to the other (Wallman, 1978). The observation that also ethnic minority groups engage in boundary work is compelling, given that they seemingly have more to gain from the disappearance of boundaries. They as well however, often have something to gain from marking the boundaries, most particularly the preservation of their own ethnic distinctiveness and a sense of moral superiority in the context of exclusion and stigmatization (Chong, 1998; Espiritu, 2001). The fact that groups on both sides of the boundary engage in boundary drawing does not mean that they necessarily agree over these boundaries. Sometimes, the majority group boxes non-whites into categories of “otherness” which bear no relation to the minorities' own sense of identity (Wallman, 1978). In other cases, members of the minority do agree

on the cultural diacritica that mark the boundary, but not on the meaning or evaluation that majority members attach to it (See for instance Duemmler et al, 2010).

## **SYMBOLIC BOUNDARIES BETWEEN “EUROPEANS” AND “MUSLIMS” AS CONSTRUCTED BY THE CENTER**

Both in Belgium and Europe at large, anti-immigrant hostility and xenophobia are particularly strong with regard to the Muslim population (Spruyt & Elchardus, 2012; Strabac & Listhaug, 2008). This strained relationship between the European Muslim population and its dominant center can best be described as one characterized by bright ethno-religious boundaries. In European immigration debates and public discourse, Islam is the focus of attention, because European identity, despite national variations, remains deeply embedded in Christian tradition in which Muslim immigrants constitute a visible “other” (Zolberg & Woon, 1999). The boundary is bright in the sense that there is no ambiguity over who belongs where (Alba, 2005): Islam and the culture of Muslims are presented as essentially different from Western values, and more often than not they are essentialized and represented as monolithic and unchangeable.

Given the perception of Islam and Muslim culture as unchangeable, it has been argued that in Europe, culture and religion (more particularly Islam) have acquired the characteristics of race (Zolberg & Woon, 1999). Correspondingly, *cultural racism* (Foner, 2005; Modood & Werbner, 1997) has emerged, which distances itself from harsh notions of biological inferiority and instead focuses on cultural or religious incompatibility and inferiority. This new racism defines the nation as a unified cultural community (Gilroy, 1993, p. 10) and draws on discourses of national belonging and national identity (Hall, 1992, p. 298). Within this conception of the nation as a homogeneous cultural community, Muslims are considered as essentially different and therefore un-European and “the alien within” (Saeed, 2007).

The contemporary perception of Muslims and Islam can be seen as an example of *neo-orientalist thinking* (Saeed, 2007) in the sense that it homogenizes and essentializes the Muslim population, and represents Muslim culture and religion as essentially different from Western identity. According to Goldberg (2006, p. 345), the image of Islam in “the dominant European imaginary” is one of “fanaticism, fundamentalism, female suppression, subjugation and repression.” Muslim societies and culture are represented as overly patriarchal, and characterized by tribal or feudal values and a culture of honor in which the status of women is low (Razack, 2004). Honor killings, forced marriages, headscarves and genital mutilation are all seen and addressed as cultural problems and signs of the oppressiveness of the traditional Muslim family (Razack, 2004; White, 1997).

In addition to being described as essentially incompatible with European/Western values, Islam is often represented as a threat, both to its own women and to Western society (Auslander, 2000; Kunst, Tajamal, Sam, & Ulleberg, 2012; Saeed, 2007, Zemni, 2011). In a Belgian survey carried out in 2007, 81 per cent of the respondents agreed that Muslim men dominate their wives too much; 42 per cent believed Islamic culture and history is more violent than others; and 47 per cent agreed with the statement that Islamic values pose a threat to Europe (Billiet & Swyngedouw 2010). The headscarf in particular is central to contemporary concerns about Muslim women and has become the quintessential symbol of their oppression (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Auslander, 2000). In contrast with the pre-modern, tribal, misogynist Muslim, the prototypical European is conceived of as modern, tolerant, equality-minded and individualist (Razack, 2004). The European superiority feeling is based on individualism and the fact that culture and community do not come before the autonomy of the individual.

## **STUDYING TURKISH BELGIANS**

This paper is mainly based on semi-structured interviews with 50 Belgian-born (grand)children of Turkish immigrants in Flanders, Belgium, conducted by the main researcher between October 2007 and December 2012<sup>1</sup>. In focusing on Turks in Belgium, we study members of Europe's largest non-EU immigrant group, who are living in the Western-European country with one of the highest levels of anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiments (Quillian, 1995; Strabac & Listhaug, 2008; Zick et al., 2008).

Our sample includes people belonging to both the second generation (both parents are first or 1.5 generation migrants) or the third (at least one parent is second generation – i.e. born in Belgium or moved there before the age of six). It was our aim to realize a sample that was heterogeneous with regard to gender and the family's region of origin, because boundary markers are gender-related (De Vries, 1995) and because cultural differences in Turkey are said to run along the lines of region of origin (Lindo, 1996). All respondents were between 18 and 49 years old at the time of the interview. The sample is about equally divided between men (n=22) and women (n=28), and between the second generation (n=28) and the third (n=22).

Considering that the main researcher – who was also the interviewer – is ethnically Belgian, careful consideration was given about self-presentation, especially because we wanted to create a

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<sup>1</sup> Our understanding of Turkish Belgian lives is also based on the many conversations the first author had with Turkish friends, colleagues and acquaintances, and on the fact that she has spent a great deal in Turkish areas in Gent, where she lived herself.

setting in which power imbalances were minimized and interviewees would feel confident to freely express their own views and possibly negative opinions on ethnic Belgians. In line with feminist theorizing, which emphasizes the importance of a non-hierarchical interview setting (Oakley, 1981; Stanley & Wise, 1993), the main researcher/interviewer adopted a democratic interview approach, reducing the distance between herself and the research participant. She created an informal, non-hierarchical setting by presenting herself as an easy-going yet engaged researcher, rather than as an experienced and detached one, something which came naturally given her age (late twenties) and personality. She tried to stimulate trust and rapport through self-disclosure whenever interviewees requested it, and by signaling commonality based on shared interests, age, gender or educational experiences whenever possible. She also displayed her knowledge of the Turkish language and particular cultural practices, in order to signal her genuine interest and knowledge about the ethnic group she was studying, and she adopted certain practices that Turkish Belgians identified as being “typically Turkish”<sup>2</sup>.

All research participants were told about the purpose of the research and promised confidentiality. They were given the opportunity to choose the location of the interview and their own pseudonym. The majority of the participants were interviewed once. The interviews were digitally recorded, conducted in Dutch, lasted from 36 minutes<sup>3</sup> to 2h45 minutes, and were transcribed verbatim. Considering that we wanted to stay close to the research participants’ personal world, the interview was guided by what topics seemed most relevant and subjectively important to him/her. Overall however, we tried to cover at least three major topics: (1) social and ethnic identification and ethno-cultural practices<sup>4</sup>, (2) characteristics of their place of residence and its Turkish population and (3) conformity pressures and social control, both in their ethnic community and Belgian society at large.

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<sup>2</sup> During the interviews for instance, she offered the respondents different types of cookies and a wide choice of drinks. Although this was something she would do at home as well, she realized that this might be beneficial because many Turkish Belgians tended to label ethnic Belgians as “stingy” and “not generous.” At one point in an interview, an informant even made the surprised remark ‘I really am offered a lot this time!’ when she discussed the assumed stinginess of ethnic Belgians.

<sup>3</sup> Some of the really short interviews were second interviews with people we had spoken to before

<sup>4</sup> About half of the interviews was set up around the topic of identity, offering people a set of label cards and asking them to pick those that they thought applied to them. The labels included – among others – “man/woman,” “Turk,” “Belgian,” “Muslim,” “Turkish Belgian,” “student,” “brother/sister” etc. Subsequently, they were asked to explain why some had been chosen and others not, to try and put them into a hierarchy, based on how important these labels were for, their overall identification, and to explain what the label meant to them. This way, we not only gained insight into how they identified or did not identify, but also into what specific (ethnic) designations meant to them. In addition to the identity- and meaning-oriented questions, we also asked them questions about the other two main topics at a moment that their discourse opened up a way to discuss these matters.

We adopted a Grounded Theory approach to our data analysis, using mainly open coding – a process of naming and categorizing phenomena through close examination of the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). We started by reading through the entire interviews, assigning the code *boundary marker* whenever people talked about cultural differences between Turks and Belgians or about what the labels “Turkish” or “Belgian” meant to them. We also assigned this code to text passages in which people talked about behavior that was considered unacceptable for Turks, because we assumed boundary markers and group pressures to be closely related. In a second stage of our analysis, we further analyzed the hence coded fragments, identifying different boundary markers. Finally, we made detailed annotations to the coded fragments, describing the different boundary markers, zooming in on how narratives and experiences differed between interviewees (focusing particularly on gender), and how their discourses revealed similarities and differences with regard to how boundaries are marked by the center .

### **“TURKS ARE LOYAL AND BELGIANS ARE STINGY.” THE “GROUP VERSUS INDIVIDUAL” DICHOTOMY**

A first cultural diacritic that is used to contrast “Turkish culture” with the “Belgian culture” is the former’s group-orientation versus the latter’s individualism. Many research participants constructed “Turkish” culture as warm-hearted, generous and family- and group-oriented, and “Belgian” culture as less sociable and more individualist. This distinction mirrors to a certain extent how the center draws the boundary between “European” and “Muslim,” but with this difference that our research participants give a much more positive meaning to the superiority of group over individual.

If we unravel the interviewees’ narratives, we find that there are at least three dimensions to this “group versus individual” distinction. First of all, the distinction manifests itself in the characterization of how people emotionally relate to each other. Our research participants characterize Turkish people as warm, sociable, welcoming people who highly value family relations. In contrast, Belgians are depicted as “cold”, “less welcoming”, and as people who do not value their families enough.

I think that we... being Turkish in between parentheses... that we attach more importance to family values. That I pay my family a visit more often. Visit my uncle, my cousins, or when my grandma is back [from Turkey], I pamper her more than I would normally do. I notice that my Belgian friends visit their grandmother on a Sunday. So I tell them “maybe tomorrow, she is no longer around, go and see her during the week as well, she will enjoy that”. (Ayhan, male)

The warm-heartedness is depicted as specifically strong regarding other family members. Many people stress that they love spending time with family, and they contrast it with Belgians, who for instance only pay older family members a visit very occasionally or ‘because they have to’. Turkish parents – especially mothers – are also depicted as much more caring and protective, compared to Belgian parents, and as more emotionally attached to their children. Belgian parents in contrast are believed to ‘kick their children out of the house’ once they turn 18 or finish school. In a study among Turkish and German families in Germany, Nauck (1989) indeed found that Turkish parents have higher scores for protectiveness, compared to German parents, for whom this was the least important aspect in their parenting style.

Second, the group/individual distinction is reflected in the depiction of Turks as “helpful” and “generous”, and Belgians as “selfish” and “stingy”.

I personally think that Turks are friendly, social. And I think they spend more. They do not make the bill (...) We borrow a lot from each other, but no one really asks that money back. But a Belgian will come and knock on your door and ask for the money. We are more giving. When someone enters, we will immediately ask ‘what do you want to eat or drink’. But when I went to my Belgian friend, and they were having dinner, I had to wait [until they finished]. (Hatice, 31F)

Turkish means getting together. Sharing a lot with each other. Eat and drink. We can share a lot, we have each other, we cover more for each other and help each other out more when needed. The Belgians are more like... you have to manage on your own. But from Turks, you can get a lot of support, also in terms of money. (Armageddon, 33M)

In many interviews, Belgians were described as being stingy and conscious and strict about money. In the above narrative, Hatice strengthens her narrative about the stinginess and lack of sociability of Belgians by recalling a real-life experience: when she entered the house of her friend while they were having dinner, she was not invited to join them – as would happen in a Turkish family – but had to wait to until they had finished. In recalling this experience, she not only illustrates her point but also legitimizes her claim: the distinction she makes is not based on prejudices but on actual, lived experiences. Different interviewees also made fun of the fact that Belgians offer to pay in exchange for a cigarette, or that they ask or give back little amounts of money that has been lent or borrowed. They contrast these practices with the fact that Turks lend and borrow money without the expectation of return, especially if it is a small amount. The support not only includes financial help but basically solidarity of any type. Whereas it is assumed that “Belgians have to manage on their own”, the interviewees claim that Turkish people can always count on the support of family members and even other members of their Turkish community.

These first two sub-dimensions of the group-versus-individual dichotomy, are strongly related to Kağıtçıbaşı's (2005) distinction between *relatedness* and *separateness* – two extremes of the dimension *interpersonal distance*, which reflects the degree of connection with others. Building on the idea that there are different aspects of relatedness (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2005), we can label our first dimension as *emotional relatedness* and our second as *material relatedness*. Emotional relatedness refers to close interpersonal relations and strong connections with others in an emotional sense. Material relatedness can be defined as the degree of material and practical assistance one can expect from one's family or other group members. The latter echoes the idea of *generalized reciprocity* that has been identified as typical for the Turkish population: "Someone who shares time, attention, information, and assistance, a person whose 'door is always open' and from whom one can borrow money on trust is 'one of us' either a Turk or 'like a Turk' " (White, 1997).

A third aspect of the individual/group dichotomy is the expectation of loyalty and respect towards older family and community members.

We are loyal vis-à-vis each other, vis-à-vis our parents. When you get married or you live your own life, still we expect you take [external opinions] into account for choosing a partner; that you take your parents into account, what they think about it. If they say it is not good, you are in a bad situation. Also... you know... loyalty... vis-à-vis family... I mean, you cannot do anything that harms your family. It is not tolerated. Than you have the whole family against you and not just the person that you have harmed. (Ali, 26M)

Taking everything together, Flemish people are much more open to change, to adapt your life to what you want yourself. Like "I am going to feel happier that way, so I am going to live like that from now on". While in Turkish families it is like: if I do this, what will the other say? Or what reaction will follow? The first focus is this, not the individual, not one's own wish, one's own needs but always... you know, the society, the environment (Burak, 24M).

Among Turks, our research participants argue, disregarding one's parents' or grandparents' wishes or opinions is considered unacceptable and labeled as being or becoming "too Belgian." This finding is supported by Nauck (1989), who demonstrated that compared to German families, Turkish families show higher commitment to intergenerational obligations. The expectation to take one's parents' wishes into account is especially strong when it concerns partner choice, and most specifically for girls. Recent research among Turkish Belgians has demonstrated that although forced and arranged marriages are on the decline, children still feel the need to take their parents' wishes regarding partner choice into account (Van Kerckem, Van der Bracht, Stevens, & Van de Putte, 2013). Not doing so is considered as being disloyal to one's family, which in turn is labeled as

“becoming too Belgian.” The idea lives that in contrast with Turkish children, Belgian children have less respect for their parents. On the positive side, several informants characterized intergenerational relations among Belgians as less hierarchical and more equal, with more room for the children to express their opinions and desires.

This third dimension of the group-versus-individual dichotomy echoes Kağıtçıbaşı’s distinction between *autonomy* and *heteronomy*, the former referring to “the state of being a self-governing agent,” the latter to “the state of being governed from the outside” (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2005, p. 404). Although it would be an overstatement to say that our research participants depict their ethnic group as characterized by complete heteronomy, they do suggest that it is closer to that pole of the dimension, than to *autonomy*; being a *self-governing agent*, without taking the opinions of others into account was repeatedly discussed as being unacceptable and a sign of *belgification*.

Our data confirm the finding that *interpersonal distance* (relatedness/separateness) and *agency* (autonomy/heteronomy) are two separate dimensions (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2005), especially because all interviewees evaluated relatedness as positive, which was less so for the relatively high degree of heteronomy. Although most people have internalized the idea that it is important to respect one’s elders, some (although not many, and always carefully) do object against the strong expectation of taking the wishes and opinions of others, specifically elders, into account. Some respondents even express a certain degree of envy towards “the Belgian way of life” because it gives people more autonomy to carry out their own choices and desires.

When our interviewees put the group/individual distinction central in defining *Turkishness* vis-à-vis *Belgianness*, they are basically using the same boundary marker as ethnic Belgians do, but they give a different – much more positive – meaning and value to it. First of all, rather than stressing a lack of autonomy, they focus on emotional and material relatedness as typical for Turkish culture, presenting it as the reason why they are proud to be Turkish. The observation that members of the second and third generations still highly value relatedness supports the finding that Turkish parents are successful in transmitting collectivism values to their children (Phalet & Schönplflug, 2001).

Second, compared to the mainstream discourse, our research participants convey a much more positive image of the relatively high heteronomy, even if they themselves sometimes take a critical stance towards it. By talking about “respect for elders” rather than “oppressiveness,” the participants present heteronomy as morally valuable, and contrast it with what they consider the morally inferior “selfishness” and “impoliteness” of Belgian adolescents. Even those who tend to be less positive about the limited autonomy still present it as legitimate, considering respect for elders and family as a positive aspect of their culture.



## **“TURKISH VIRGINS” AND “BELGIFIED SLUTS.”**

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF FEMALE CHASTITY**

The second cultural diacritic that Turkish Belgians use to construct Turkish identity is the expectation of female chastity, which is contrasted with the almost limitless freedom Belgian girls are thought to have in terms of relationships, sexuality and movement. Like in many other immigrant groups (See for instance Espiritu, 2001; Orsi, 2010; Yung, 1995) women’s sexuality and behavior is central to the group’s identity. As such, it is primarily the women who carry the burden of preserving the group’s identity, and whose whereabouts are closely monitored. Several research participants – especially females – referred to the taboo on premarital relationships and sexuality, explaining that it is considered “indecent” for a Turkish girl to be seen hand in hand with a man in public, and even more so to kiss in public or to go to bed with someone:

There still is a difference you know. You can never compare me with a Belgian family. You [Belgians] can have a boyfriend, bring him home. Unfortunately that is not the case for us. We cannot come home with a boyfriend and introduce him and say ‘look I have a relationship’ and bring another one home a couple of months later. That is taboo among us. (Yeliz, 22F)

It all has to do with the influence of our religion. Because Islam says, no sex before marriage, and that is what makes our identity a little. If you start doing that, it will not be accepted. Then you are known in the community. Then you are a bad girl, bad girl (laughs) (Selda, 24F).

I think that if you are kissing in the middle of the city center, as a Turkish girl, that it is a sufficient ingredient to cause gossip. But no one is going to do that because you know, everybody knows it is not done. If you do that, it is like putting your own head under the guillotine and saying ‘go on and drop [the knife]’. It is like you have no respect for elders, because it is impolite to express your sexual needs in public. And I think you cannot even HAVE sexual needs, as long as you are not married. They would completely slander your name, and they will start looking for reasons why you do it. Maybe you are a prostitute, or on drugs or alcohol, what has gotten into you? (Dilek, 27F)

The above narratives demonstrate that girls who lose their virginity or display behavior which hints at loose sexual morals are considered as “bad Turkish girls,” with a loss of honor, social exclusion and difficulties in finding a partner as a result. Because female chastity is so central to Turkish identity, disregarding gender norms comes at a high cost: young women who do not act according to the group’s strict gender norms are at risk of social exclusion and in case of severe norm violation even repudiation by their families. Consequently, many young women feel they have to

take virginity and the expectation of chastity into account if they value their membership in the community and want to safeguard their own and their family's honor.

Although there is a shared understanding among women that it is not fair that rules are stricter for them than for men, this does not result in a devaluation or rejection of the idea of virginity. Many young women have actually internalized the idea that premarital virginity is legitimate and valuable in itself.

I really do not have problems with [the expectation of virginity]. You know why I think it is good? You have to think about the man you are going to marry. If I put myself in the position of a man, and I am going to marry a girl who is still a virgin, I am going to be so proud about that. I am going to grant that woman everything, really. If that woman would no longer be a virgin, then why did I marry her? She has already been someone else's... Once she is no longer a virgin, you have no idea how many people she has had sex with. (Ayse, 18F)

In explaining why virginity is important to them, some young women appropriate the dominant (male) discourse which associates virginity with pride, respectability and self-worth. The conviction with which this young woman speaks about the value of virginity, and the fact that the meaning she gives to it is so male-oriented, illustrates the power that men have to not only enforce but even legitimize their norms, meanings and moral value standards. Several women also legitimize the taboo on premarital sex, by claiming that it is forbidden based on religious grounds and that it is "something they do for God." When people link chastity and virginity to Islam, female chastity becomes a double and hence stronger boundary marker: not only does it mark the boundary between Turks and no-Turks but also between Muslims and non-Muslims – which makes it more resistant to change.

The fact that virginity is expected from women but not from men illustrates that women are central in defining and perpetuating the group's identity. Many women have no problems with the expectation of virginity *per se*, but they do object against the gender inequality in this respect. Several female participants – and even a couple of male ones – considered it unfair that premarital virginity is only expected from women and not from men. Because in Islam, premarital virginity is an obligation for both men and women, many women argue that the expectation of virginity is only legitimate if the men follow the same rules, i.e. if they stay virgins until marriage just like girls do. By drawing on a linkage between virginity and Islam, women enable themselves to define virginity as something valuable, while simultaneously contesting gender-inequality in the expectation to save oneself for marriage.

“Being Turkish” is for women not only associated with virginity, but also with restrictions in terms of dress, going out and cross-gender interaction. Because girls are considered as not being able to safeguard their virginity themselves, their freedom is restricted and their whereabouts and actions are constantly being controlled and closely monitored. In line with what Espiritu (2001) has found among Filipino Americans, we find that Turkish Belgians construct the idea that “girls are different,” in the sense that they are weak and cannot protect themselves against “men with bad intentions.” Implicit in the reasoning that girls cannot protect themselves, is the idea that they are too emotional, too much driven by passion and too unreliable to control themselves. Previous studies have labeled such an attitude as *benevolent sexism* – a set of beliefs that are subjectively favorable but reinforce the notion that women are the “weaker sex” and therefore require protection, affection and provision (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Sakalli-Ugurlu & Glick, 2003). The following narratives demonstrate that throughout their young lives, girls are closely monitored and implicitly and explicitly reminded that “decent” Turkish girls dress demurely, do not go out, and do not talk to unrelated men:

In Turkish families it is like everything – they have more discipline, I mean, they are more strict in any way; After ten o’clock or after nine o’clock, Turkish girls cannot hang out outside anymore. Or after eight o’clock, the father is already calling the daughter like ‘where are you, do come home’. (Enise, 19F)

But as soon as there is another Turkish boy or man present, without [my brother] or someone else of the family being there, they seem to be scared. It is like ‘What are people going to think? What are people going to say? They will consider you bad girls’. That is one of the things [my brother] is afraid about I sometimes notice. (Leyla, 28F)

The fact that female chastity is seen as a boundary marker between Turks and Belgians is reflected in the fact that women who do not conform to this image of what a Turkish woman should be like, are labeled as “sluts”, “whores” or “belgified:”

My boyfriend wanted me to paint my hair blonde, so I did. But people really think it is a color for sluts. They say ‘she is a slut and she wants to look like a Belgian’ (...) But his friends said: ‘That girl, she is so easy, she has blonde hair, she can meet you every time. Why is she so free?’ I was too open. So the relationship ended (...) We, girls who study, are considered sluts because we are outside too often. (Elif, 22F)

The observation that both the designation “slut” and “Belgian” are used to describe the same type of behavior, carries the idea that Belgian girls are considered slutty and sexually immoral. It happens very infrequently however that words such as “slutty” or “whore” are assigned to Belgian girls. Unlike what was found among Filipinos and Koreans in the United States (Chong, 1998; Espiritu,

2001), the research participants do not use this dichotomy to demonize Belgian girls or to present themselves as morally superior vis-à-vis Belgians. Rather they use the dichotomy to refer to a distinction between those Turkish girls who are considered morally superior – and hence “decent Turkish girls” – and those who are seen as immoral and untrustworthy<sup>5</sup>.

To what extent now does female chastity as a boundary marker overlap with the dominant idea that Muslim communities and men are oppressive towards their women? Based on our interviews and field work, we would argue that females to a certain extent agree with the dominant idea, at least when it comes to premarital sexuality and freedom in terms of going out. They particularly object to the gender inequality within their families in terms of going out, or the general gender inequality in terms of premarital virginity. Unlike what is the case in public discourse, however, our female research participants deconstruct the idea that they are completely at the mercy of “oppressive men” and instead emphasize their agency, for instance by stressing that many girls find creative ways to circumvent the rules or hide the consequences of their deviant behavior.

In addition, several interviewees – both male and female – deconstruct the link between gender inequality and Islam, arguing that gender inequality is not intrinsic to Islam but rather an aspect of the Turkish macho-culture. In fact, several women even constructed Islam as a religion that supports their feminist struggle for more gender equality:

I know that everybody has a wrong idea about Islam, regarding women, but in fact it is completely the opposite. If you go back to the essence, if you look in the Koran or the Hadith of our prophet, then you will see that the basic principle is that man and woman are equal. (...). If you see how many rights we [women] have acquired – inheritance rights, family law, marriage rights; Islam is even the first religion that has said ‘if a woman is not happy, she can get divorced.’ We have the right to get divorced, that was a huge step forward. So it is the only religion that has given us so much, so I do not see why [Islam and feminism] do not go together. (Berfin, 21F)

In reaction to the dominant image of Islam as a source of oppression of women, many of our research participants – in particular the women – explicitly decoupled Islam and gender inequality. As such they made it possible for themselves to contest gender inequality in their own ethnic group while at the same time fighting the dominant image of Islam as misogynistic and patriarchal. Instead of linking gender inequality to Islam, they attributed it to aspects of a macho-culture, often simultaneously claiming that it is important to make a distinction between religion and culture:

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<sup>5</sup> On a cautionary note, the fact that the interviewees did not refer to Belgian women as being slutty, might be related to the fact that the interviewer herself is a Belgian woman, so it is highly likely that the interviewees refrained from making such comments, in order not to offend the interviewer

Actually, what I said before, about Islam, it is also about a macho-culture among the guys I think. I rather use the term ‘culture’ than ‘Islam,’ because Islam in its pure form is absolutely not [misogynistic] – you have to treat a woman with respect. The Koran thinks highly about women. So I would rather attribute it to the macho-culture. (Zehra, 27F )

Finally, extreme practices that take center stage in dominant public discourse as signs of the oppression of women – such as honor killings, forced marriages, forced veiling – remain unmentioned as boundary markers in all of the interviews. Clearly, neither men nor women consider these practices as typical for the Turkish population in Belgium. The veil as the dominant symbol of female oppression was never mentioned as such – in fact, most female research participants did not wear one and said that if one day they would, it would be their own choice. Some people also explicitly deny the gender inequality in couples, by demonstrating that in many families, the mother holds the power, something which has also been found among Turkish migrant families in the Netherlands (Huls, 2000; Risvanoglu-Bilgin, Brouwer, & Priester, 1986).

### **“I AM A MUSLIM BUT NOT A VERY GOOD ONE.”**

#### **THE MARGINAL POSITION OF RELIGION AS A BOUNDARY MARKER**

If we examine the boundaries between Turks and Belgians from the viewpoint of the Belgians, religion is the quintessential boundary marker that separates “secular,” “modern” Belgians from “religious” – if not “fundamentalist” – and “traditional” Turks. If we study boundary work among Turkish Belgians however, religion is a lot less prominent as a boundary marker. Surely, different people do mention that they differ from Belgians in terms of their religion, but not nearly as frequent as would be expected based on the attention it gets on the other side of the boundary.

First of all, some interviewees react against the dominant perception of Muslims as terrorists.

When there is a bomb attack or something similar, they say ‘It’s the Muslims.’ And they generalize. And then they come to us and they say like ‘You are a Muslim, so you are a terrorist.’ But the difference is... if an Iraqi or an Arab commits a bomb attack, it is not because of their religion that they do it. It is just because they say ‘this is how we live’ and they get certain kinds of information and people make them believe certain things and so they say ‘Ok I will do it.’ But that has nothing to do with the religion. (Apo, 19M)

Just like Apo, several interviewees object against the negative image of Islam that is dominant in public and everyday discourse. We have already demonstrated above that some of our research participants deconstruct the link between Islam and gender inequality, and the same is true for the

link between Islam/Muslims and terrorism. The image of Islam as a violent religion and a threat is replaced by a vision of Islam that focuses on “being a good and just person.”

Secondly, our research participants do not seem to consider themselves as essentially different from ethnic Belgians in terms of religion. When asked what they saw as the most important differences between themselves and ethnic Belgians, very few people mentioned religion or religiosity. Moreover, those people who do mention religion as one of the main differences, often also blur that boundary to at least some extent:

A lot of Belgians are not religious, I mean, there are some who are, for instance my neighbors are religious. But not that many. A lot of the friends that I know are not religious. And the Turks here in Belgium, the majority I mean, they are. So that is a difference too. (Seyid, 16M)

Actually, the only thing that differs is religion you know. More and more... between me and another ordinary Belgian you will not see any difference anymore I think. Religion and the values of religion, that's it, nothing more. And then not everybody even follows the rules. (Ayhan, 31M)

I think that for Turks religion is stronger than for Belgians. But I think that with the years, Turks have attached less importance to religion, because, if you look at it this way, there are less girls with a veil compared to before. But the elders still attach a lot of importance. (Azra, 26F)

The symbolic boundary that these participants draw between Turks and Belgians, based on religion, can be characterized as “blurred” (Alba, 2005), because they present the distinction in a way that people do not neatly fall into one of the two constructed categories: the interviewees point out that some Turks are not that religious in the sense that some do not “follow the rules” or “attach less importance to religion,” and that some Belgians are in fact quite religious too. Ayhan’s claim that many people do not follow the rules is supported by our data: many people label themselves as Muslim but immediately add that they are “not good Muslims” or “mediocre Muslims”:

I am a Muslim. I mean if you ask me, I believe in God. But practically, I do not do anything that Islam asks of me. So, praying five times a day, I cannot do it. What I can do is, when it is the Feast of the Sacrifice, I can give some money to my parents to slaughter a cow, or let us say a sheep. According to the Islam, you also cannot drink. But I dare to go out every weekend, to eat, to drink. So in my heart, I am a Muslim. But actually I am not a good Muslim. (Can, 26M)

Many people identify as Muslim but do not necessarily practice Islam (For similar results among Turks in the Netherlands, see Maliepaard, Lubbers, & Gijsberts, 2010; Phalet, Fleischmann, & Stojčić, 2013). Because of the discrepancy they experience between self-identifying as Muslim and not practicing the religion, many people redefine Islam and “being Muslim,” putting less emphasis

on rules and more on good intentions and a set of quasi-universal values that center around “being a good person.”

These are values that your religion passes on: being clean, develop intellect, being honest, those values are universal, right? You also find them in Christianity, in Judaism and also in Islam. (Damla, 28F)

In defining religion as such, they basically deny – sometimes even explicitly – the boundaries that separate people from different religions. The observation that many do not observe the religious rules, and that many people have a conception of Islam as a quasi-universal value system that does not differ much from other religions or value systems, explains why religiosity or Islam is not often mentioned as a boundary marker that separates Turks from ethnic Belgians.

However, although many people do not observe all the rules, there are nevertheless a number of religious taboos that are being upheld, and used as boundary makers, including being atheist, drinking alcohol, being homosexual and eating pork. When it comes to these practices, Turkish Belgians do make a link between not observing the rules and *belgifying*:

There are a couple of rules, things you cannot do. Like drinking alcohol and stuff; if you do that, they will immediately say ‘he is more like a Belgian,’ that person will be given the evil eye. Or if you do not believe [in God]. Then you will get the evil eye as well. (Leyla, 28F)

The fact that drinking alcohol is not accepted in Islam, but nevertheless a very common practice among men, once more illustrates that the burden of preserving the culture and maintaining the boundaries mainly rests on the shoulders of women. As long as men do not drink excessively, or are drunk in public, they are not condemned or considered *belgified*. Women however are not granted this leniency: merely going to places where alcohol is served is already enough to be labeled as deviant and stigmatized as “too Belgian.”

## DISCUSSION

The finding that there is a bright ethnic boundary between Europe’s mainstream and its Muslim population is well-established and documented, but so far, most studies have focused on how members and institutions of the mainstream mark and police ethnic boundaries (Davis & Nencel, 2011; Foner & Alba, 2008; Korteweg & Yurdakul, 2009; Razack, 2004; Zolberg & Woon, 1999). Building on the idea that both dominant and subordinate groups actively take part in the construction of ethnic boundaries (Wallman, 1978), and that they do not necessarily agree over these boundaries, this study turns its lens to the other, less dominant side of the boundary. Drawing on in-depth

interviews with second and third generation Turkish Belgians, we focus on (1) how Turkish Belgians define “the boundaries of *Turkishness*” in opposition to what they see as “typically Belgian” behavior and on (2) how their boundary markers relate to those prominent in dominant public and private discourse.

Based on 50 in-depth interviews, we have identified two important boundary markers, namely the primacy of the group over the individual, and the importance of female chastity. The importance of “group” in defining Turkishness manifests itself in three different dimensions, which we have labeled emotional relatedness, material relatedness, and relative heteronomy – based on similar concepts identified by Kağıtçıbaşı (2005). *Emotional* and *material relatedness* refer to, respectively, low interpersonal distance in emotional terms and the various forms of assistance that people can expect from each other; *relative heteronomy* to hierarchical intergenerational relations and the expectation to respect one’s elders, take care of them when needed and take their opinions into account. “Being Turkish,” then, means to be emotionally attached to one’s family and friends, to help them out when needed, and to take the wishes, opinions and needs of older family members into account.

The second boundary marker that is used to construct Turkish identity in opposition to *Belgianness* is *female chastity*, more particularly in terms of premarital virginity, going out and clothing style. Several interviewees – most specifically females – talked extensively about the taboo on premarital relationships and sexuality, and about how this taboo includes a disapproval of any type of behavior that signals “loose morals.” Turkish identity is to a large extent defined by how women behave, and, consequently, those who do not behave “appropriately” are labeled as “too Belgian.”

In putting “family” and “group” central in their definition of what it means to be Turkish, our research participants use a boundary marker that is similar to the one used in dominant public and everyday discourse, but they give a much more positive meaning to it. Instead of talking about patriarchy and oppression, they stress the positive aspects of having a group-oriented culture, such as emotional and material support, solidarity and warm-heartedness and contrasting these values with Belgian’s selfishness and lack of sociability and generosity.

The dominant construction of Muslims as patriarchal and oppressive towards women is partially reproduced in the narratives of the female research participants, albeit in a more nuanced way. Women do not represent themselves as being oppressed by fathers and brothers, or as forced to do things against their will, as is often assumed in public discourse. The prototypical symbols of the oppression of women that feature in public discourse – such as honor killings, forced marriages,



forced veiling – remain unmentioned as boundary markers in all of the interviews. What women do mention is the gender inequality in terms of freedom and premarital virginity. Women do not object as much against their limited freedom per se as they do against the inequality between the genders. In their narratives, they present the freedom of men as unlimited, and their own as very restricted, especially before marriage. Although many women see gender inequality as real, some actively deny that this is linked to Islam, as is often done in public discourse (See for instance Korteweg & Yurdakul, 2009). Several interviewees deconstructed Islam as a religion that is misogynistic and oppressive towards women, and some even present it as supporting their struggle for more rights and equal treatment.

Unlike in dominant discourse, Islam does not feature as a boundary marker in our research participants' narratives. Hardly anyone mentions religion or religiosity as a cultural diacritic that distinguishes Turks from Belgians. Many people self-identify as Muslim, but rather than constructing a boundary based on their religion, they implicitly deconstruct it by saying that they are only “mediocre” Muslims. Some also explicitly deny the existence of a boundary between Muslims and Christians, for instance by claiming that they are all “people of the book” or that they hold common universal values. Several participants also actively deconstruct the dominant idea that Islam is synonymous for “fanaticism, fundamentalism, female suppression, subjugation and repression” – to put it in the words of Goldberg (2006). The idea that Islam is a threat clearly does not mirror how most participants see their religion, and our findings hence confirm Wallman's (1978) claim that sometimes, the majority group boxes non-whites into *categories of otherness* which bear no relation to the minorities' own sense of identity.

Our findings demonstrate that also the less powerful group in a boundary system actively engages in boundary work, and that in doing so, they explicitly or implicitly contest the way in which boundaries are marked by the center. In stressing the positive aspects of a group- and family-oriented culture, and presenting them as morally superior, our research participants offer a counter discourse that delegitimizes the Western superiority feeling, which is based on individual autonomy.

Our study once more demonstrates that females are often considered the “keepers of culture” (Billson, 1995) and that their behavior is of specific relevance for marking and maintaining ethnic boundaries. The observation that female chastity is central in defining Turkishness, that their behavior is more closely monitored than that of men, and that different standards apply – for instance when it comes to premarital virginity and drinking alcohol – supports the claim that women are both cultural transmitters and cultural signifiers of ethnic collectivities (Yuval-Davis, 1997). The finding that women symbolize national and collective honor, and that their behavior is of specific relevance

for marking and maintaining ethnic boundaries is not unique for the Turkish case. Several ethnic groups – most particularly those who tend to be identified as family- and group oriented, such as South-East Asians or those of Mediterranean origin – draw the boundaries between themselves and other ethnic groups based on the sexual behavior of the women (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1989; Dasgupta & Dasgupta, 1996; Espiritu, 2001). Consequently, the behavior of women is more closely monitored and in many ways restricted, compared to that of men.

The value of our study lies in the fact that it turns its attention to how boundaries are defined by the less powerful group in the boundary system. Our case study of how Turkish Belgians draw their own boundaries and contest existing boundary markers is important for two reasons. First, as we have argued in the introduction, studying boundary work by members of groups on both sides of the boundary is important in order to better uncover power relations between different groups in society. One method to study power struggles is to focus on boundary work in interaction (Duemmler et al., 2010). However, because power dynamics in society tend to be reproduced in discursive interaction, members of the less powerful group do not always get an equal chance in expressing their view of the world. We argue therefore that it is important to study their point of view in a context where power imbalances are minimized<sup>6</sup>. Based on our overview of how Turkish Belgians mark the boundaries between themselves and Belgians, and hence construct their own identity, future research can focus on the extent to which this view is reflected in public and everyday discourse. Taking a Foucauldian perspective, such a study could explore the extent to which Turkish Belgians or Muslims in general get the power to represent their vision of reality as legitimate, and how this changes over time.

Second, the value of our study lies in the fact that it gives academic voice to those who often remain unheard. Voices of Muslims are not only underrepresented in public but also in academic discourse. European studies on ethnic boundaries have mainly focused their attention on the dominant discourse, discussing how members and institutions of the European center define themselves vis-à-vis “the essential other.” Those studies that do zoom in on the experience of European Muslims are often quantitative, which means that participants have to express their views in terms of pre-defined categories. Our study, in contrast, has tried to stay as close as possible to our research participants’ life world. Consequently, it offers a powerful public counter discourse as well as an academically novel way of studying the Muslim experience.

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<sup>6</sup> One criticism of our study could be that interviews were carried out by an ethnic Belgian, and that hence the power inequality in society has been reproduced in the interview situation. We believe however that we have been fairly successful in establishing a non-hierarchical interview setting in which interviewees felt free to disclose whatever opinion they held, even if this was negative about ethnic Belgians or contrary to established ideas.



# CHAPTER 7

## ON BECOMING “TOO BELGIAN”

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### *A Comparative Study of Ethnic Conformity Pressure through the City-as-Context Approach*

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While considerable research has shown that coethnic communities exercise pressure on their members to conform to certain normative patterns, there is little research that explains variability within coethnic groups regarding ethnic conformity pressure. Drawing on fieldwork and semistructured interviews with children and grandchildren of Turkish immigrants living in Ghent and five mining towns in Belgium, we explain differences in ethnic conformity pressure through a comparative examination of how macrostructural characteristics of cities shape community-level ethnic conformity pressure. We demonstrate that a city's migration history and social geography are related to the degree of network closure and normative consensus within an ethnic community, and that its ethnic heterogeneity and interethnic relations impact how much people depend on their coethnic community for social support. These in turn shape the internal sanctioning capacity of the community and its power to enforce normative patterns, especially of gender roles. The study shows that locality matters in the integration, assimilation, and acculturation of migrants, even disadvantaged ones who share the same national background.



**CONTRADICTIO IN TERMINIS (2)**

*by Fatih*

Tis door piçler lijk ulder dak mij voel gelijk da mij voel  
mensen stempels opplakken is al wa da ge doet  
ons blijven focken blijven ons in een kot steken  
Ge blijft maar onwetendheid in uw kop steken  
De Turken zien mij als een Belg, behandelen mij als een Belg  
Door hen ging mijn ma door een hel, want ja ze was een Belg  
Agzini kapat wijs nooit naar mij met uw vinger  
Voor ge scheef kijkt, bekijk eerst uw eigen kinderen



## INTRODUCTION

Research on various immigrant groups has revealed strained relationships between children raised with the values and norms of the “new” world and parents who try to pass on premigration cultural norms and practices (Espiritu, 2001; Stepick et al., 2001; Zhou, 2001). Few recent studies, however, focus on how the coethnic community at large affects processes of ethnocultural change within immigrant groups and the intergenerational transmission of premigration cultural patterns (for the classic studies, see Gans, 1982; Whyte, 1943). This limited attention among today's immigrant groups is surprising, given the central role attributed to the coethnic group in structural adaptation (Portes & Zhou, 1993) and the importance of communities in shaping the normative order and creating the boundaries within which individuals are expected to act (Durkheim, 1933).

This study addresses this shortcoming through a comparative analysis of ethnic conformity pressure exercised by the coethnic community of Turkish Belgians in two different regions of Belgium (the city Ghent and five mining towns in the province of Limburg). We define ethnic conformity pressure as the pressure not to assimilate too much but to conform to those norms, values, and cultural practices that are deemed central to the ethnic group's identity. We see it exerted either directly and explicitly through discourse (direct ethnic conformity pressure) or indirectly through social control (indirect ethnic conformity pressure). Ethnic conformity pressure has mainly been studied within the boundaries of (nuclear) families, in which case it is largely expressed directly (see, e.g., Espiritu, 2001; Kibria, 1993; Wolf, 1997). In this paper, we focus on conformity pressure stemming from the coethnic community, which manifests itself mainly indirectly, through social control. Our analysis starts from the observation that the extent of ethnic conformity pressure experienced by Turkish Belgians differs between the two selected regions. Drawing on fieldwork and semistructured interviews with children and grandchildren of Turkish immigrants living in Ghent and the mining towns, we explain these differences through a comparative examination of how each region's macrolevel sociostructural characteristics shape the occurrence and enforcement of ethnic conformity pressure.

By taking cities as the starting point for our comparative approach and examining how their characteristics explain differences within a particular ethnic population, we move beyond “methodological nationalism” (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002) and highlight the fact that “locality matters” (Caglar & Glick-Schiller, 2010): the observed differences in ethnic conformity pressure between Turkish communities in different places can be traced back to the migration history,



sociospatiality, and interethnic relations of the city or town in which the particular community is embedded.

We focus on the role of the coethnic community in cultural incorporation within a European rather than the usual American setting. Furthermore, we concentrate on an ethnic group with high levels of ethnic social capital, but low levels of socioeconomic integration and social mobility (Phalet & Heath, 2011), a combination absent from the segmented assimilation model (Portes & Zhou, 1993), which was formulated mainly for the U.S. context. Studying the Turkish population in Belgium is significant not only theoretically, but also empirically and politically: Turks make up Europe's largest immigrant population (Manco, 2004) and are one of its socioeconomically worst-off and most stigmatized immigrant groups. Their "integration" is hotly debated in both public and academic discourse. So far, however, even though Turks are a major immigrant group in Belgium, both numerically and sociopolitically (Kaya & Kentel, 2007), relatively little academic attention has been paid to Turkish Belgians. Moreover, Belgium has been determined to have the highest levels of Islamophobia and antiimmigrant sentiment in Western Europe (Strabac & Listhaug, 2008), so studying immigrant incorporation there is of particular interest.

Starting with an overview of the role of ethnic communities in immigrant incorporation generally, we draw attention to the importance of the city as context when studying cultural incorporation processes. After discussing our methods and data, we present our informants' experiences of ethnic conformity pressure through gossip and social control and show how experiences in Ghent differ from those in the mining towns. We then demonstrate how these different experiences are linked to the sociostructural characteristics of the two areas and their Turkish populations. Finally, theoretical implications for the study of cultural incorporation of immigrant groups are discussed.

## **IMMIGRANT INCORPORATION: THE ROLE OF CO-ETHNIC COMMUNITIES**

The American literature on immigrant incorporation identifies many benefits of strong ethnic communities. In segmented assimilation theory (Portes & Zhou, 1993), cohesive ethnic communities protect against downward assimilation and therefore are considered advantageous. Tightly knit ethnic communities are considered an asset that promotes upward social mobility. High network closure increases social capital and enables social control that prevents downward assimilation (Zhou, 1997), because it helps to slow down cultural change and to maintain ethnocultural boundaries. This positive evaluation of strong ethnic communities draws upon Coleman's (1988) social capital theory, which posits that communities high in network closure provide the necessary

social structure to produce social capital. Closure should not be understood here in the Weberian sense, but rather refers to the degree to which parents know their children's friends and their friends' families. In a community high in closure, the whole community looks after members' children, with the consequent benefits of lower criminality and other forms of deviancy and better school performance.

But community closure and social control go beyond advantageous parental or community strategies to prevent downward assimilation; they can also serve as constraints in processes of cultural incorporation and change. The same social mechanisms that create economically or socially beneficial resources can also restrain individual freedom (Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993) and lead to acculturative stress or other psychological problems (Espiritu, 2001; Rumbaut, 1994; Wolf, 1997). Studies in Europe and the United States have shown that the positive effects of social cohesion and control go hand in hand with pressure to conform to group norms and resist assimilation. In the United States, pressure to avoid “Americanization” has been reported among Vietnamese (Zhou & Bankston, 1998), Filipino (Espiritu, 2001), and Punjabi adolescents (Gibson, 1989). In the United Kingdom, Zontini (2010) showed how control and pressure to conform to strict norms were by-products of family and ethnic solidarity. Her analysis of the everyday experiences of young people in Italian families in the United Kingdom and Italy led her to conclude that “strong ethnic groups can preserve community cohesion and shared norms at the expense of the individuals in them” (Zontini, 2010, p. 829).

We refer to these constraining processes as *ethnic conformity pressure* – the pressure not to assimilate too much but to conform to those norms, values, and cultural practices that are deemed central to the ethnic group's identity. The notion draws upon theories of social control of group deviance through gossip, ridicule, and other sanctions of norm violations (De Vries, 1995; Merry, 1997; Parsons, 1951). In this study, we focus specifically on ethnic conformity pressure by the coethnic community, which manifests itself mainly indirectly, through social control. We use social control in the narrow Parsonian sense—namely, as a set of mechanisms to insure compliance with norms (Parsons, 1951). Building on Durkheim (1933), Parsons defined social control as a group's ability to react against deviance with social sanctions, including: (1) broad structural influences, or expressions of official group sentiment (formal sanctions); and (2) interpersonal influences, or evaluations of conduct (norms) related to group membership (group sanctions).

A widely studied example of interpersonal sanctioning is gossip, or more specifically, judgmental gossip. According to Merry (1997, p. 49), “gossip is not simply ‘idle talk,’ but also performs signification functions in maintaining the morals, values, and unity of social groups.” Gossip, she

argues, flourishes most in close-knit social networks with a high degree of connectedness, and its effectiveness in enforcing group norms depends on four factors. First, gossip has more impact in social systems in which the costs of desertion or expulsion are higher and the availability of alternative social relationships less. Second, its effectiveness is higher when group members are more interdependent for economic help, jobs, protection, and social support, something which has empirically been demonstrated among Turkish girls in the Netherlands (De Vries, 1995). Third, the impact of gossip increases when it can result in collective actions such as public shaming, ridicule, expulsion, or death. Finally, the impact is greater when normative consensus about the behavior in question is more extensive.

Merry's gossip theory can easily be extended to other forms of social sanctioning such as the loss of honor, social exclusion, or ridicule. The four factors that she has outlined shape the group's *internal sanctioning capacity*—a term coined by Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993, p. 1337) to refer to the group's “ability to monitor the behavior of its members and its capacity to publicize the identity of deviants.” Like Merry, Portes and Sensenbrenner believe that a high internal sanctioning capacity requires a high degree of network closure, as well as normative consensus about what is “good” and “bad” behavior.

Empirical research among Turkish youth in the Netherlands has demonstrated that this group experiences strong social control: people literally keep an eye on each other's children and gossip or talk to the children's parents about what they have seen (De Vries, 1995; Lindo, 1996). Among Turks in the Netherlands and Belgium, social control and sanctions of norm violation are especially strong for girls: many of them feel surrounded by compatriots keeping an eye on their behavior and making sure they do not assimilate too much (De Vries, 1995; Timmerman, Balli, Lodewyckx, & van der Heyden, 1999). According to Lindo (1996), social control in Turkish immigrant groups operates within moral communities defined by region of origin. Respondents link these “region of origin networks” (in Dutch *streekgroepnetwerken*; Lindo, 1996) to cultural differences between different regions in Turkey, which makes them not only regional but also moral communities.

## **CITY AND COMMUNITY CONTEXTS OF ETHNIC CONFORMITY PRESSURE**

Our study builds on existing research on ethnic conformity pressure through social control by focusing on how macrolevel sociostructural characteristics of the city shape the social structure of the ethnic community and the occurrence and enforcement of ethnic conformity pressure. This focus is informed by the “city-as-context” approach (Brettell, 2003; for examples, see Foner, 2007; Foner,

Rath, Duyvendak, & Van Reekum, 2014), which draws attention to the importance of the city as context when studying processes of immigrant adaptation. Brettell (2003) outlines four aspects of cities that can shape immigrant incorporation: (1) the history and spatial distribution of immigration, (2) the social context, including the ethnic heterogeneity of the city and intergroup relations, (3) the structure of labor markets, and (4) the city's cultural ethos, in particular the extent to which it sees itself as multicultural or immigrant-friendly.

In discussing the characteristics of the Turkish population in Ghent and the mining towns, we reserve the term “community” to refer to a group of people linked together through personal ties, a common set of norms and values, or a combination thereof. Our conceptualization of community is hence less strict than Durkheim's “moral community,” although still not so broad as to include all Turkish people in a given area, which we will refer to as the “population.”

Our approach sees cultural incorporation as an ongoing process of negotiating one's own preferences while being part of certain social structures that create boundaries and opportunities. We do not have a deterministic conception of social structure, nor are we advocates of voluntarism, but stress the interconnectedness of social structure and individual agency and see individuals as agents who negotiate alternative forms of behavior within structural and cultural constraints (Alba & Nee, 2003; Bourdieu, 1995).

## INTRODUCING THE TURKISH POPULATION IN BELGIUM

Turkish migration to Belgium offers a classic example of the labor migration typical in Western Europe in the 1960s and early 1970s (Reniers, 1999). It consisted mainly of migrants from rural areas in Turkey with little or no formal education (Phalet & Heath, 2011). In 1961, as few as 320 Turkish nationals resided in Belgium, but by 1970, that number had risen to 20,000 (All numbers based on Schoonvaere, 2013). No longer seeking to attract foreign workers, the Belgian government stopped granting visas to low-skilled workers in 1974, but migration from Turkey continued through family reunification and family formation. By 1994, Belgium reached the record number of 92,272 people with Turkish nationality. By 2004, the number of residents in Belgium with only Turkish nationality<sup>1</sup> had declined to 40,000 in the wake of a great increase in naturalizations.<sup>2</sup> Since then, it

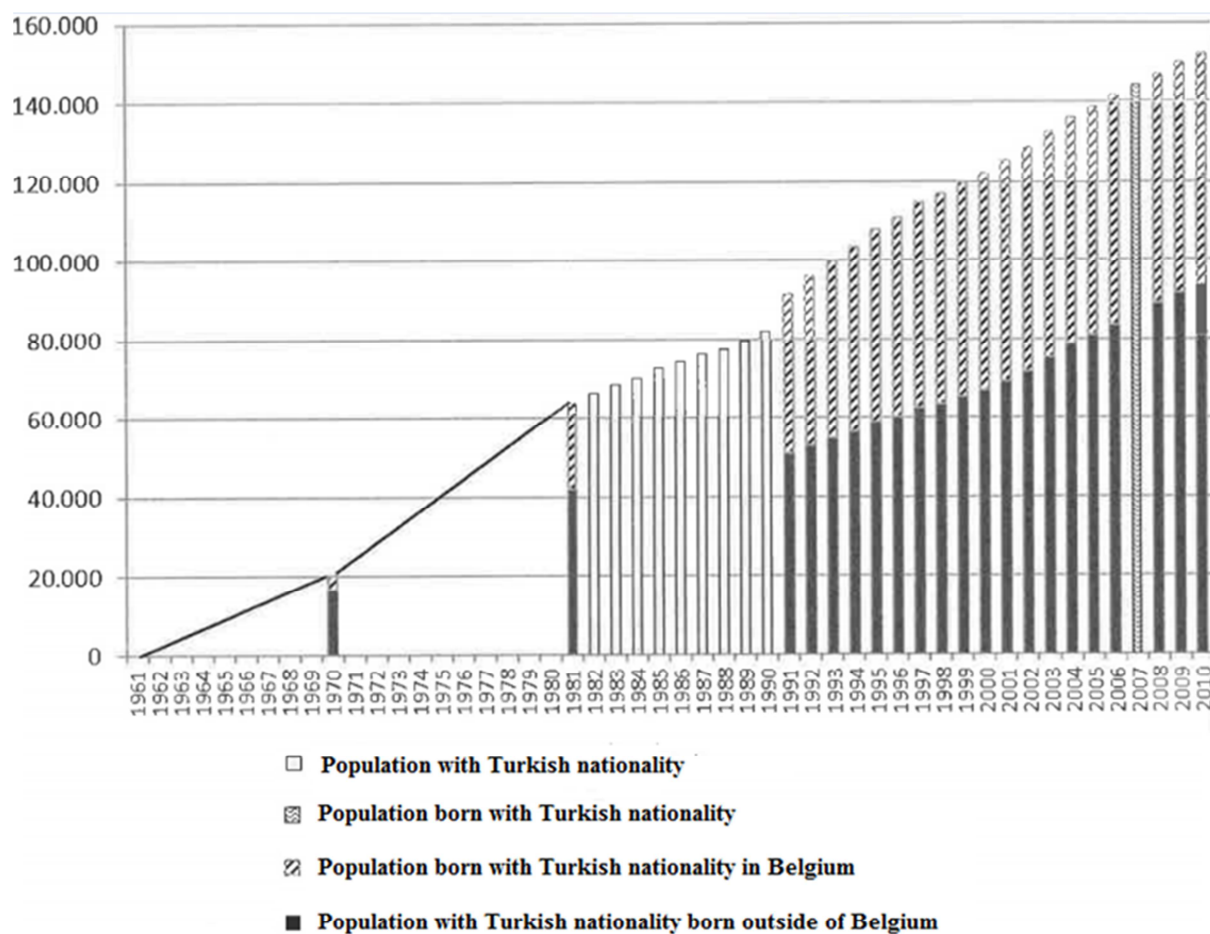
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<sup>1</sup> We say “only Turkish nationality” because Belgium allows dual citizenship: naturalized citizens may retain their Turkish nationality.

<sup>2</sup> Based on a mixture of principles of *ius sanguinis* and *ius soli*, Belgian citizenship is not acquired by birth until the third generation (see note 3). However, new legislation regarding nationality acquisition in 1985, 1991 and 2000 made it easier to acquire the Belgian nationality (for a detailed discussion see Schoonvaere, 2013). This resulted in a marked increase in naturalizations within the Turkish population (see Figure 6).

has remained relatively constant. In contrast, the number of people of Turkish ancestry<sup>3</sup> has continued to grow, largely as a result of continuing migration through marriage. As shown in Figure 6, Belgium now counts about 155,000 people of Turkish ancestry, over 90,000 of whom were born outside of Belgium. The Turkish population is thus the fifth largest population in Belgium with foreign roots, ranking after the Moroccan, Italian, Dutch, and French populations.

**Figure 6** Evolution of the Turkish population in Belgium (*Source: Schoonvaere, 2013*)



In the first phase of Turkish migration to Belgium, the Turkish population settled mainly in mining and industrial regions in the provinces of Limburg, Hainaut, and Liège. By the 1980s, relatively more Turks were found in larger cities such as Brussels, Ghent, and Antwerp. By 2006, 25.2 percent of those born with Turkish nationality were living in Brussels, 16.1 per cent in East Flanders, 20 percent in Limburg, 12.3 percent in Antwerp, and 10 percent in both Hainaut and Liège.

<sup>3</sup> This includes migrants as well as their children, but not the third generation, which is legally defined as those born in Belgium to at least one Belgian-born parent. Because the Belgian national register records only nationality at birth, those belonging to the third generation are no longer identifiable through national statistics and are therefore not included in the statistics presented here.

Ethnic boundaries between native Belgians and Turkish Belgians are “bright” (Alba, 2005), both in social and symbolic terms. Turks are “at the bottom of the ethnic hierarchy” (Phalet & Heath, 2011, p. 162). Both the migrants and their offspring are among the most disadvantaged members of Belgian society in terms of educational attainment (Timmerman et al., 2003). Additionally, throughout the years and across the country, unemployment rates for Turkish Belgians have far exceeded those of natives, and Turkish Belgians have been much less likely to enter professional, administrative, and managerial careers (Phalet & Heath, 2011; VDAB, 2009). As Muslims, the Turkish population faces a high degree of antiimmigrant sentiment and discrimination (Vandezande et al., 2009) and they are often portrayed in public discourse as the essential other. These social and symbolic boundaries are reflected in the low rate of marriage between Turkish and native Belgians. In 1991, 7 percent of all married Turkish men and 3.8 percent of Turkish women had a Western-European spouse (Lievens, 1999). A more recent study documents an increase in intermarriage over the past two decades, but numbers still remain relatively low: 14.3 percent of the Turkish men who got married in 2008 – but only 8.2 percent of the women – married an EU citizen (Van Kerckem, Van der Bracht, et al., 2013).

## METHODS AND DATA

The data in this paper come from a combination of fieldwork and semistructured, in-depth interviews conducted by the author with 50 Belgian-born children and grandchildren of Turkish immigrants between October 2007 and December 2012. The data collection was carried out by the first author of this article, an ethnically Belgian female in her late 20s/early 30s. Being a young woman eased access: it allowed her to interview females in the privacy of their homes (which would be very difficult for male researchers), and did not pose an obstacle to interviewing men (for whom gender segregation norms are much less strict). The fact that she was an outsider in terms of ethnicity was beneficial rather than negative: had she been Turkish, respondents would have been less open about their opinions and behavior for fear of gossip.

The first phase of the project (2007–2010) took place in Ghent. Fieldwork consisted of going to events in the Turkish community as well as to Turkish restaurants, shops, mosques, and other places frequented by Turkish Belgians. After each event, the main researcher, who has notions of Turkish, wrote down a report in her field notes, including information about interactions, people encountered, and the sociostructural characteristics of the places visited. This fieldwork provided an opportunity to gain access to and build rapport with possible informants, as well as to study the social structure of the city and its Turkish community. This was necessary, since not all information could be obtained

from secondary sources and because the informants' knowledge was always partial and possibly subjective.

In a second phase, the main researcher started collecting data through in-depth interviews in five mining towns in the province of Limburg – Beringen, Heusden-Zolder, Maasmechelen, Genk, and Houthalen-Helchteren – in the northeast of Belgium.<sup>4</sup> Supplemental background information about these towns was gathered largely during interviews and from local agencies and government workers rather than through fieldwork. All interviews were carried out in Dutch, since all respondents were born and raised in Belgium. The only primary data gathered apart from the in-depth interviews were notes about the main researcher's impressions of the social structure of the neighborhoods where the informants lived. These notes, which were double-checked with people at local organizations or through secondary sources, were mainly used as a starting point for talking about the neighborhood during the in-depth interviews.

For each area, we designed a purposive sample of Belgian-born children and grandchildren of Turkish immigrants. The defining criteria for inclusion in our sample were: (1) Turkish ancestry and (2) Belgian birth. Therefore, our sample could include people belonging to either the second generation (both parents are first or 1.5 generation migrants) or the third (at least one parent is second generation—i.e., born in Belgium or moved there before the age of 7). Because ethnic conformity pressure is gender-related (De Vries, 1995) and occurs mainly within moral communities delimited by region of origin (Lindo, 1996), it was our aim to realize a sample that was heterogeneous with regard to gender and family's region of origin. All respondents were between 18 and 49 years of age at the time of the interview. Men and women are equally represented in both the total sample and the subsamples. The second generation ( $n = 28$ ) is slightly overrepresented compared to the third ( $n = 22$ ).

All participants in the study were told about the purpose of the research and promised confidentiality and privacy. Each was given the opportunity to choose the interview location and his or her own pseudonym. Most respondents were interviewed only once; interviews lasted from 36 minutes to 2 hours 45 minutes, and were transcribed verbatim. During the interview, people were asked to reflect on: (1) their positionality in terms of culture and identification, (2) the characteristics of their place of residence and its Turkish population, and (3) their experience with conformity pressure, both in their ethnic community and in Belgian society at large. We made sure not to

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<sup>4</sup> The decision to group together the different mining towns into one unit of analysis is informed by the observation that all of the towns are very close to each other and share similar characteristics in their history of immigration, spatial patterns and social structure. Social networks rarely extend beyond the boundaries of a single town, however; in most cases, the town border also constitutes a social border, so each town should be seen as a single spatial entity.

introduce this last topic too soon in the interview, in order to see whether or not informants would raise the issue on their own. If they did not, the interviewer offered participants two vignettes toward the end of the interview, one describing a situation of social control and one illustrating the idea of ethnic conformity pressure (see Appendix 11). After the informants had read the vignettes, the interviewer asked if they recognized the situations and encouraged them to reflect upon them.

Wishing to stay close to the respondents' own lived experience, we adopted a Grounded Theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to our data analysis, using a combination of closed and open-ended coding. We used NVivo to attribute codes to the documents, based on relevant concepts identified in other studies and concepts and issues raised by respondents themselves. In an initial read-through of the entire interviews, we marked all references—explicit or implicit—to ethnic conformity pressure, gossip, or social control. We then printed out the coded text fragments and analyzed them in depth on paper. This second stage involved axial second-level and substantial third-level coding as well as the identification of interrelationships between different codes. For instance, the first-level code “ethnic conformity pressure” was subdivided into second-level codes such as “description,” “focus” (i.e., group codes), “consequences of violation” (i.e., social sanctions), and “negotiation.” Some of these were then subdivided even further into substantial codes. For easier reference, we subsequently transferred this coding to NVivo, creating a tree structure (see Appendix 10). We also made detailed annotations to the coded fragments: all pertinent text fragments were condensed and rephrased more theoretically. In a third phase, these annotations were analyzed on paper and synthesized for the empirical part of this paper.

## **“DO NOT BELGIFY.”**

### ETHNIC CONFORMITY PRESSURE DESCRIBED

Our study confirmed the hypothesis that many children and grandchildren of Turkish immigrants experience group pressure not to lose their Turkish culture and identity:

Turks say things like: “Assimilation... watch out for this, don't do that. Try to stay Turkish.” In fact, that's the biggest um...contradictory point of view. The Flemish want you to renounce your whole culture of origin, you know, to say: “I don't have anything to do with that, I'm Belgian now.” If you're in a situation like that [...], you won't be socially accepted by the Turks. (Ali, 26M, Ghent)<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> All quotes used are translated from Dutch as literally as possible. Where anonymity or understanding was jeopardized, we made minimal changes to the text, signaled by square brackets. Unless otherwise stated, the quotes used to illustrate particular points represent remarks that were frequently made. A particular quote was usually chosen



What Ali is pointing to here is pressure not to renounce his culture of origin, but to instead “stay Turkish.” Ali uses the scientific term “assimilation,” but most often the more colloquial words “verbelgen” (in Dutch) and “gavurlaşmak” (in Turkish) are used. The verb *verbelgen* can best be translated as *to belgify* or *to become like a Belgian*. The newly created verb *gavurlaşmak* can similarly be translated as “to become a gavur,” a concept one of the informants explained as follows:

“Gavur” is an umbrella term for everyone who is not Turkish [...]. It isn't really an insult, but it for sure has a negative connotation [...]. It's like this: gavur comes from “kafir”—which is definitely a non-believer and that is not positive. But nowadays gavur is used more to indicate that someone is an assimilo, so it has very little to do with religion. (Berfin, 21F, Ghent)

Because *verbelgen* (to become Belgian) and *gavurlaşmak* (to become a gavur) are used interchangeably, the label “Belgian” can be considered just as stigmatizing as “gavur.” Since this pejorative label can lead to social exclusion, a Turkish Belgian feels pressure not to become too much like a Belgian – or “an assimilo,” as Berfin puts it – but to conform to the codes of the ethnic community.

Our data demonstrate that ethnic conformity pressure is not necessarily explicitly expressed, but that it manifests itself through social sanctions in the case of “inappropriate” behavior. The following quote, for instance, shows that gossip is a socializing mechanism that informs people about group norms and the consequences of their violation:

They never explicitly said anything like “you can't do this and you can't do that.” But you see them saying: “My God, just look at how those [kids] are dressed!” And then you know you can't walk around like that. (Pinar, 49F, Ghent)

Rather than being instructed directly and explicitly about what is unacceptable behavior, Pinar has learnt it indirectly through derogatory remarks about others. In this case, identification of norms is “a post hoc exercise”: one observes the application of sanctions and infers the existence of a norm (Meier, 1982, p. 46).

Ethnic conformity pressure exerted by the coethnic community helps parents transmit their premigration cultural beliefs, but at the same time, it also limits their own freedom to move away from these premigration patterns. Both in Ghent and the mining towns, parents sometimes pressured their children to behave according to the group norms only because they feared the sanctions associated with nonconformist behavior. One of the clearest indications of the impact of group

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for its richness of information on a given topic. We tried to give voice to as many different informants as possible, and not only to the most eloquent ones.

pressure on parenting is the increased freedom some females acquire when the family moves to a city with no strong Turkish community:

At one point in the interview, [the informant] asks me to switch off the recorder because she is afraid people will recognize her in her story. After I did, she tells me that in her teens, her family moved from Ghent to [Town X], which had no Turkish community. In the period that she lived there, she could do anything she wanted. It was an amazing time, she says, because her father allowed her to go out, since no one would know about it anyway. When they moved back to Ghent, however, everything changed back again: she and her sisters could not go out, and when they did, they often kept it secret from their father.

*(Field notes, 11 January 2011, taken during an interview when recorder had to be switched off—certain details left out to ensure anonymity.)<sup>6</sup>*

This quotation strongly illustrates the impact of city context on the enforceability of ethnic group norms. As with previous studies (De Vries, 1995; Espiritu, 2001), we also found that ethnic conformity pressure centers on gender roles and is stronger for women than for men:

[People in the Turkish community] will more easily slander a girl's name than a guy's. That is what I want to fight against. Because you often notice it when it comes to virginity and having a partner.... If a guy has a girlfriend—Turkish or Belgian, it doesn't matter—his father will be very proud. Hold the girl tight, you know. But if a girl has a boyfriend, it's a disaster. (Kubra, 27F, Mining Town)

The finding that pressure to conform to traditional gender norms is stronger for women than for men is far from unique to the Turkish population. Young women the world over—among others Filipina-American women (Espiritu, 2001), Indian-American women (Dasgupta & Dasgupta, 1996), and Turkish women in Belgium (Timmerman et al., 1999) and the Netherlands (De Vries, 1995)—have reported strong ethnic conformity pressure and restricted freedom due to strict parental and social control. In most of these cases, a girl's freedom is restricted through close monitoring of her whereabouts, enforced sex segregation, and taboos against staying out late, out-of-town trips, premarital relationships, and the loss of virginity. Women's greater subjection to ethnic conformity pressure is related to their symbolic role as “designated keepers of culture” (Billson, 1995) and as “cultural transmitters” and “cultural signifiers” of national or ethnic collectivities (Yuval-Davis,

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<sup>6</sup> In light of the informant's fear of being identifiable from her story and her request that we stop recording, the ethics of including this excerpt are open to debate. The story seemed so telling for the point we wanted to make that we decided it was important to include, but only after making sure no one reading it would be able to identify her. Specific information regarding her age, occupation, family composition and the city they moved to was removed. Since we heard similar stories during our research, we are confident that the phenomenon was not so unique that this discussion would jeopardize her anonymity.

1997). In most societies and ethnic groups, the task of transmitting cultural traditions, maintaining racial boundaries, and marking cultural difference rests mainly on the shoulders of women (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1989; Espiritu, 2001), so pressure for them to conform is especially strong. Turkish women experience similar control: close monitoring and a set of restrictions focused on maintaining virginity and chaste behavior. Expectations include not going out in the evening, not socializing with men who are not relatives, and wearing appropriate, demure attire.

Although gender norms appear much less strict for men, certain expectations are associated with the male gender role as well. First of all, men are supposed to protect the family honor carried by their sisters and to ensure that their wives and daughters behave according to the appropriate gender codes. In many families, this obligation falls to the oldest brother, whether or not the father is present:

My brother protests sometimes, just because, let's say, the social control thing again. "What if people are going to see you there?" I tell him, "We're not going to do anything wrong, you know." [...] The oldest [takes up the father role]. When we go to the movies or for a drink or out to eat, it's not a problem. But as soon as there are Turkish boys or men around, without him or anyone else from the family being there, they're like afraid.... Like, "What are people going to think? What are they going to say? They'll think you're bad girls." Things like that—I mean, for sure, he's afraid. (Leyla, 27F, Ghent)

The observation that Leyla's brother is "afraid" of people's judgment is linked to his role as guardian of his sisters'—and therefore his family's—honor. Especially since their father is absent (the parents are divorced), as older brother, he has the task of protecting the family's honor by controlling his sisters' behavior.

Second, men also face conformity pressure in the domain of relationships and sexuality. Indeed, the expectation of premarital virginity for women is mirrored in peer pressure among men to marry a virgin:

My buddies were like, "When are you going to get married?" And I answered: "I don't know. Maybe when I'm thirty." And... they say things like: "The good ones will all be gone." I say: "I'll probably get stuck with a secondhand woman." They were all laughing, but I was kind of serious. (Laughs nervously.) A secondhand woman is someone who, you know, who already belonged to someone else. And they were like: "you gotta be kidding, right?" "Come on, dude," [one of them] says. I say: "Come on what? I can't offer it [virginity]. I mean, you can't [expect it] from another human being.... I mean, she's a human being too, and you're a human being, so you can't..." (Quoting the other): "But you're a man." (Ali, 26M, Ghent)

This narrative shows that ridicule is a form of peer pressure on men who are relatively unconcerned about virginity in a girl. In this case, ethnic conformity pressure is not felt indirectly through gossip, but directly through ridicule. When Ali jokingly says he would be stuck with a secondhand woman, his friends react with disbelief and disapproval. Ali defends himself by saying that gender inequality regarding virginity is unfair; no longer a virgin himself, he feels he cannot expect his future wife to be a virgin. His friend, however, reaffirms the legitimacy of gender inequality, implicitly conveying the message that Ali is not conforming to the group's idea of Turkish masculinity.

Gender roles might be the most important boundary markers between “being Turkish” and “being Belgian” but they are not the only ones. Some informants said that having a high degree of contact with native Belgians, speaking more Dutch than Turkish, drinking alcohol, and not being loyal to one's family and friends could be seen as signs of “becoming too Belgian.” Very few, however, cited examples of this, so we conclude that these behaviors are less important than gender roles in defining the boundaries between “being Turkish” and “being Belgian.”

Contrary to what assimilation theories led us to expect (Alba & Nee, 2003), we did not find the experience of ethnic conformity pressure to differ by generation: there was no clear difference between the second- and third-generation informants. This lack of a generational pattern may be due to the continuing influx of immigrants from Turkey, which potentially keeps alive the “old patterns” and corresponding ethnic conformity pressure even among the third generation.

The pressure to conform stems from the fear that contact with *gavurs* could lead the younger generation to stray from the right track or lose their religion and culture. As such, ethnic conformity pressure may prevent downward assimilation, but at the same time, also creates and maintains boundaries between the ethnic minority and the majority population. As a counterforce against progressing assimilation, it focuses on those codes of conduct considered to be the “boundary markers” (Wimmer, 2013) between the ethnic minority and the majority group, thereby reinforcing ethnic and social boundaries. When community members label violations of Turkish group norms as “Belgifying,” they are referring to the unacceptability of *boundary crossing* (Alba, 2005): someone who does something thought of as “Belgian” runs the risk of being socially excluded from the Turkish community.

## **CONTEXT MATTERS: DIFFERENCES IN ETHNIC CONFORMITY PRESSURE BETWEEN GHENT AND THE MINING TOWNS**

Our analysis shows that ethnic conformity pressure is not experienced by everyone to the same extent. Compared to our informants from the mining towns, those in Ghent more often initiated the topic and also expressed a greater sense of frustration about it. The following two quotes are illustrative of the difference between Ghent and the mining towns in terms of the social control creating by gossip, as experienced by men:

Ghent:

[I once took my sister with us when we went clubbing] and she liked it, but on the other hand, she didn't like it. "It's not for me, every weekend going out and stuff." She thought it was...—in the end she didn't think it was fun. But I said, well, at least she's seen it once; she knows what it is now. And whether she likes it or not, it's her choice. (Hesitates.) Come on, it's wrong in the upbringing itself. And you've got to know, it's all the Turkish families, all from the same village. And they're dirty scandalmongers. Extreme scandalmongers. And it's because of that. In fact, it's beyond your control. (Adem, 28M, Ghent)

Mining Town:

Interviewer: I'm going to give you two text fragments [See Appendix 11], and then we're done. Can you comment on these two fragments? Whether it happens here [in this mining town] as well?

Achmed: (After reading the vignettes) I never experienced it myself, my dad saying, "You've been seen there with a girl." (Thinks hard.) No, I never experienced that myself.

Interviewer: And the gossip in itself—is that recognizable?

Achmed: The gossiping... I know it. I never experienced it myself. But I do know it. Like from... (Stutters.) In our neighborhood. (Achmed, 27M, Mining Town)

The first informant brings up the topic of gossip on his own. His choice of words ("dirty" and "extreme scandalmongers") signals that he is not talking about a one-time event, but about a repeated occurrence that makes him angry. He attributes his sister's ambivalence about going out to the prevalence of gossip and her fear of the local ethnic community's disapproval. In the second quotation, not only is the context different – the topic had not yet come up 90 minutes into the interview, so the interviewer had to introduce it – but also the reaction. First of all, he never personally experienced people gossiping. Upon further questioning, he grants that gossiping does exist, but seems to suggest that it is not widespread. One could argue that these differences in perception relate to individual-level differences between these two men, but our analysis shows a

rather consistent pattern among most of the male informants: those in the mining towns know that social control and gossip exist but cannot give concrete examples and have seldom experienced it themselves. Men in Ghent, on the other hand, can give examples – either from their own experience or their sisters’ – and are often very critical and angry about the topic.

Differences between the narratives of women and girls from Ghent and those from the mining towns also exist but are less pronounced. Although most girls recognize that they are subject to gossip and social control, this seems less of an issue in the mining towns than in Ghent. Several girls in Ghent had the impression that mining town girls were freer to do what they like. It also seems that in Genk – the biggest of the mining towns – gender norms are less strict than in Ghent and the smaller mining towns. One of the girls explained it as follows:

There are also lots of things people can gossip about, so you can't even see the forest for the trees anymore. You can't gossip anymore (laughing) because so much is going on. You can't keep an eye on all of that anymore, so it kind of faded away. Also because there are people marrying Belgians now, moving abroad. One ran away from home, another got pregnant before she got married. And this one girl has a huge tattoo, and so on and so forth. It is like, “where to start?” (Dilek, 27F, Genk)

This quote illustrates how gossip decreased as more and more young people in Genk started breaking the “rules.” It does not explain, however, why this occurred more often in the mining towns than in Ghent.

## **EXPLAINING THE DIFFERENCES: THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MACROLEVEL SOCIAL STRUCTURE**

In order to understand these differences in ethnic conformity pressure at the mesolevel of the coethnic group and the experience of it on the microlevel, it is necessary to look at macrolevel sociostructural differences between Ghent and the mining towns. Using Brettell's (2003) four-part framework, we successively discuss the history and spatial distribution of immigration, the structure of the urban labor markets, and the social context and cultural ethos of the city, focusing on how these factors have contributed to the differences between the two regions.

### **MIGRATION HISTORY AND SETTLEMENT PATTERNS**

The migration history and settlement patterns of Ghent and the mining towns share some similarities. Both areas started attracting Turkish migrants—most of them uneducated and from rural areas—in the early 1960s. Most of those who came to Ghent were recruited to work in the cotton industry, while the mining towns in the Limburg Charcoal Basin needed them to work in the mines. Historical

research (Beyers, 2005; De Gendt, 2014) shows that employers in both areas provided workers with housing near their workplace. In Ghent, Turkish migrants were assigned to a house close to the factory where they worked, in the so-called 19th-century belt around the city center. In the mining towns, all mineworkers were given a house in the so-called *cités* – towns constructed near the mines along the model of the English garden cities, full of open green spaces, including private gardens and public parks.

When it comes to migration history, the one important difference between the two areas lies in the composition of their Turkish populations by region of origin. In Ghent, the Turkish population's high degree of uniformity in terms of region of origin stands out: a large majority there hail from just one small district, Emirdağ in Central Anatolia. More than half of Ghent's labor migrants arriving between 1960 and 1980 came from there (Verhaeghe et al., 2012) as a result of nominative recruitment by the factories and great willingness to migrate on the part of the Emirdağlı (inhabitants of Emirdağ; De Gendt, 2014). In later years, this overrepresentation only increased as families were reunified, and as many transnational marriages between Emirdağlı families took place. Together, these factors have resulted in the creation of a “transplanted community” (Reniers, 1999) of Emirdağlı in Ghent. Fieldwork made clear that the transplantation goes so far that certain streets in Ghent correspond with particular villages in Emirdağ. Some streets are even jokingly named after a family, because of its dominant presence in that particular street. In contrast, informants from the mining towns indicate that their Turkish population is much more diverse than Ghent's in terms of region of origin. Some regions are better represented than others, but no single region is dominant.

Local homogeneity by region of origin increases the ability to enforce ethnic conformity. First, it has resulted in a different sense of community and corresponding differences in the normative system within these communities. Informants from Ghent often portrayed the Emirdağ community there as an example of what Lindo (1996) has called “a region of origin network”: a community with a high degree of network closure as well as its own values and codes of conduct. Social interaction is often organized within region-of-origin networks, and parents often prefer their children to choose a marriage partner from the region of origin, because “it is closer to them” in terms of culture.

In the mining towns, the sense of community is not shaped by a shared region of origin, but by common life and work conditions. Because everyone working in the mines lived together with their families in the *cité* nearby, the mines shaped the towns' social structure and sense of community:

Achmed:      Everybody who worked in the mines knows each other. They know each other by last name, first name, and region of origin. And this is how people are [categorized]: “Which [last name] are you? Oh, the one from Eskişehir...” And then they make the link to your grandfather, father: “Oh yes, that family.”

Interviewer: So the connecting element is in fact the mine?

Achmed: Absolutely. (27M, Mining Town)

The power of the mine as a meaning-giving and organizing institution and diversity in region of origin in Turkey have together resulted in fewer region-of-origin networks and fewer social boundaries between people from different regions:

In bars and places like that, everyone sits together. There are people from Yozgat, Kayseri, Aksaray, Ankara, Konya, you know—everyone sits there together. But I never heard my dad say: “That guy over there is from Ankara and he really can't be trusted” or anything. He's... you know, he's as good a friend of his as someone who comes from Aksaray. No one ever says: “We're from the same region, so let's stick together.” That's not how it is. (Aleyna, 27F, Mining Town)

Because social interaction in the mining towns is not structured along the lines of region-of-origin networks, the normative system there is less uniform and strict. Residents' diverse origins are reflected in a range of different premigration cultural patterns. This gives rise to something of a local “melting pot”:

In Genk, the population is very heterogeneous, so you have people from Central Anatolia, but you also have people from the north, the east, from the south. And that brings diversity, because those people have their local habits, and they've imported them. And it's like a melting pot of everything. And, for instance, you have people who were already open-minded back home, let's say in their hometown, and they just bring that with them. And if you see that their children can do certain things—in terms of clothes or piercings or a tattoo or a way of dressing, where they go or what they eat—then we imitate that a little, we play along, and it's like acceptable. Because people [in Ghent] come from the same region, certain rules are accepted for everyone and everyone obeys. While in our case, we look to the group that we want to belong to. (Dilek, 27F, Mining Town)

This quote shows that, in the mining towns, diversity in region of origin has weakened the local normative consensus, an important factor in the enforcement of ethnic conformity through the pressure of gossip (De Vries, 1995; Merry, 1997). With less agreement concerning what it means to be Turkish, the community is less able to sanction deviant behavior. The Emirdağ community in Ghent has a more uniform normative system, which enhances its power to sanction deviant behavior. In contrast, there is less normative consensus in the mining towns, so the internal sanctioning capacity of the community is low: instead of being socially excluded by the entire community, people may join the particular subgroup they “want to belong to.”

Second, composition by region of origin has implications for the degree of *network closure* (Coleman, 1988) or degree of *connectedness* (Merry, 1997), which is a prerequisite for widespread



social control. In Ghent, many respondents told us that “everybody knows everybody.” Among the first generation, people who migrated at roughly the same time are generally acquainted, but the younger generations also know who's who because this knowledge is passed down from parents to children. In Ghent, social control provides an effective means of enforcing conformity because as long as people stay in Ghent, there are “eyes everywhere”:

I always had the feeling that I'm not free here. You get it. Always these eyes on you. Even if those eyes aren't there, you know..., in that case... in fact, those eyes are there. I mean they're always there. Everything you do, everywhere you go, wherever you come from, they see everything. (Burak, 24M, Ghent)

Consequently, people feel they have to take ethnic community norms into account, because they know that the possibility of getting caught and being subject to social sanctioning is high.

In the mining towns, network closure is low outside one's immediate neighborhood, and social control is, therefore, weaker: as soon as people venture out of their small *cit *, they have much less chance of being “caught” or spied upon. This is especially the case for Genk, a bigger city than the other mining towns:

Maybe it's because Genk is bigger and there are more Turks there. And... in Genk you don't know everyone. If you talk about Beringen, there are only a couple of neighborhoods where all the Turks live. While you know, Genk: lots of neighborhoods, lots of Turks, and there really are a lot of Turks who don't know each other. So the social control is a lot less. (Dilek, 27F, Mining Town)

This quote echoes Merry's claim that gossip (and by extension, other mechanisms of social control) flourishes most in close-knit, highly connected networks, but atrophies in loose-knit, unconnected ones (1997, p. 52). If people do not know one another, or only know one another to a limited extent, social control ceases to be an effective way to enforce ethnic conformity. In these places, social norms may lose their hold, and the crucial link between the violation of social norms and group sanctions may break.

Finally, we want to point out the possible relevance of transnational activities and “immigrant replenishment” (Waters & Jimenez, 2005) for the presence and enforcement of ethnic conformity pressure. The second and third generations' participation in transnational activities can best be described—to use a pattern identified by Levitt (2002, p. 139)—as periodic yet repeated, occurring over an extended period of time, as specific events or family circumstances arise. In general, the transnational activities of the second and third generation are limited to homeland visits over the summer holidays and what I would refer to, following the notion of *symbolic ethnicity* (Gans, 1979),

as *symbolic transnationalism* – cheering for the Turkish national football team, watching Turkish television, and going to Turkish movies or concerts in Belgian cultural centers.

The extent of this symbolic transnationalism does not seem to differ between Ghent and the mining towns, but what does differ is the strength of transnational ties through transnational marriage. In 2001, the percentage of those marrying a partner from Turkey was 34.8 percent in the mining towns, whereas it was 66.8 percent in Ghent.<sup>7</sup> Much more than a snapshot, these figures represent a sustained difference between the two regions, at least between 2001 and 2008. Because transnational marriages most often involve a partner from one's own region of origin, “immigrant replenishment” not only refreshes ethnic identity and ethnocultural norms and practices (Waters & Jimenez, 2005), but may also reinforce already strong ethnic ties, closure, and the ability to enforce homogeneous normative systems. Consequently, the high rate of transnational marriage in Ghent strengthens the community's network closure and revitalizes traditional norms. This is much less the case in the mining towns.

### **STRUCTURE OF THE URBAN AND IMMIGRANT LABOR MARKET**

Both Ghent and the mining towns had labor markets in which most early migrants could easily find jobs, but because of deindustrialization, the second and third generations could no longer work in the sectors where their parents were employed. All the mines in Limburg had closed by 1992; employment in Ghent's textile industry declined drastically in the 1970s and 1980s (De Bruycker, 1988). Growth in the metal, automobile, and chemical sectors initially provided employment for many second- and third-generation workers and initially helped to compensate for the job losses in mining and textiles. In economic downturns, however, Turkish Belgians in both Ghent and the mining towns have always been at greater risk of unemployment than native Belgians (VDAB, 2009). Ethnic inequalities in the labor market are widespread.

Although the Turkish communities in both Ghent and the mining towns certainly boast some family-based entrepreneurship, neither place offers ample employment opportunities. The community remains, however, an important source of social support and identity in a context of unemployment and socioeconomic exclusion, which means—based on Merry's theory—that people will be more likely to conform to social control (through gossip and other social sanctions). Since the labor markets in Ghent and the mining towns are similar nowadays, this factor cannot account for the differences in ethnic conformity pressure between the two places.

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<sup>7</sup> These results are based on our own analysis of data in the Belgian National Register covering all partnerships legally registered between January 1, 2001 and December 31, 2008, in which at least one partner held Turkish nationality at birth and either was born in Belgium or immigrated there prior to the age of seven.

## SOCIAL CONTEXT AND CULTURAL ETHOS

Ghent is a fairly large city with a total population of about 240,000 people, 12.5 percent of whom were not born in Belgium. Within this group of migrants, the Turkish population of about 15,000 (not including the Belgian-born) dominates, far outnumbering all other nationality groups since the mid-1960s (De Gendt, 2014). In comparison, the mining towns have much greater ethnic heterogeneity, largely because of their longer history of labor migration from all over Europe. The city of Genk, for instance, also has large Italian and Moroccan populations and is known for its multicultural character. Smaller towns such as Beringen and Heusden-Zolder are ethnically diverse as well, but the dominance of their Turkish population is more pronounced.

Work arrangements in Ghent's factories limited the likelihood of interethnic contact. Native Belgians were unwilling to work nights. Some tasks required communication, and Turkish labor migrants did not speak Dutch. Some shifts, therefore, were entirely “Turkish” (De Gendt, 2014). In the mining towns, the situation was completely different. When Turkish guest workers arrived in the 1960s and 1970s, these towns were already multicultural. In 1930, one in four of the 20,000 mine workers was foreign (Beyers, 2005). Because of language differences, interethnic contact may have been superficial and limited, but with everyone working together, there was nevertheless a sense of connection:

In Waterschei, there are really a lot of Turks. But also—here in [my neighbor-hood]—there are a lot of Italians. Because of the mine, you know. Before, all the immigrants came here to live. And they all get along really well with one another, because, you know, together, they couldn't speak the language. You know, even if it's an Italian, or a Greek ... maybe they're not able to talk, but they still had respect. (Fatos, 24F, Mining Town)

The word “together” is central to understanding what Fatos is getting at here: because of similar life and work conditions, people respected one another. They all worked together in the mines, lived together in the nearby cités, and shared a sense of connectedness across ethnic groups. It seems that parents have passed these patterns on to their children, who report more positive interethnic contact than their counterparts in Ghent. Friendships with native Belgians are relatively uncommon, but superficial contact—with neighbors and teachers, for instance—is viewed more favorably here than in Ghent. Both in the past and the present, the pattern of interethnic relations comes close to what has been described as “interactive pluralism”: a situation of common understanding across ethnic boundaries and differences through mutual recognition and sustained interactions between groups (Grasmuck & Kim, 2010). This pattern is not only found on the level of everyday interactions, but also in the region's cultural ethos: the province of Limburg has always explicitly identified itself as

immigrant-friendly and open to multiculturalism. This positive attitude might be related to Limburg's long-standing tradition of migration and “the vital collective memory of the city's immigrant past” (Caglar & Glick-Schiller, 2010). Also, nowadays, local governments and businesses alike strive to promote the integration of the different ethnic groups. Ford Genk, for example, the most important employer in the region, offers new employees diversity training and makes sure that teams on the conveyor belt are ethnically mixed. By contrast, Ghent can be labeled neither immigrant-friendly nor immigrant-unfriendly. Migration is a more recent phenomenon there, and the city has lagged behind the mining towns in promoting diversity. Interethnic relations there can be described as a case of *fragmented pluralism* (Grasmuck & Kim, 2010): there are no clear conflicts between ethnic groups, but interethnic contact is limited or superficial and most people are what Grasmuck and Kim (2010) label *in-groupers* – people who mix mostly with their own ethnoracial group.

Following Merry (1997), we argue that these differences in social context are important for the enforcement of ethnic conformity, because they make people more or less dependent on their coethnic community for social support. Where ethnic boundaries are bright and interethnic contact limited – as in Ghent – people are more dependent on their ethnic group for social support and cannot ignore conformity pressure. Where these boundaries are blurred, ethnic groups influence each other culturally and provide alternative sources of support.

In summary, with its uniform region of origin and strong ethnic boundaries, the Turkish community in Ghent has a very high sanctioning capacity. Deviant behavior and the violation of norms lead to social sanctions such as gossip and the loss of honor. Concern for one's honor and the felt need to rely on the community for social support reinforce ethnic conformity. By contrast, the heterogeneous composition of the different mining towns and their blurred ethnic boundaries create a local context in which enforcement of ethnic conformity is more difficult. Community-wide conformity pressure is less strong. Without a social structure allowing for widespread social control, its impact is slight. As a result, young people are freer and better positioned to negotiate or escape pressures to conform to premigration patterns. In contrast with Ghent, where the community can be metaphorically represented as a rock, the Turkish population in the mining towns can be compared to a mound of coals: a loosely structured collection of people from different regions, each with their own premigration cultural practices. Just as its internal structure makes the mound of coals much more susceptible to external forces of change, so too does the higher degree of interethnic contact in the mining towns make these ethnic communities more open to change.

## CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This comparative study explores ethnic conformity pressure by the coethnic community and how it is shaped by city context – the place's migration history, spatial characteristics, ethnic heterogeneity, and interethnic contact. Drawing on fieldwork and in-depth interviews with second- and third-generation Turkish Belgians in Ghent and five mining towns in Limburg (Belgium), we show that many of them experience group pressure to conform to what are considered to be the core norms and values of their Turkish community. We find that ethnic conformity pressure focuses on gender roles, and that it is stronger for women than for men. Other behaviors unrelated to gender may also be denounced as *belgification* (i.e., too much interaction with Belgians, drinking alcohol, disloyalty to family), but these seem to be less important than gender roles in defining what it means to be Turkish.

From the urban sociological perspective, our analysis shows that the extent to which ethnic conformity pressure is experienced differs by place: informants from Ghent talk much more about social control and gossip. Using the city-as-context approach, we demonstrate that: (1) these differences are related to cities' migration history and spatial distribution of immigration, (2) ethnic heterogeneity of the city and intergroup relations, (3) structure of labor markets, and (4) the city's cultural ethos. In particular, we find that: (1) uniformity of region of origin enhances network closure and normative consensus within a particular community and (2) less ethnic heterogeneity and interethnic contact increase people's dependence on their own community for social support. These in turn promote effective ethnic conformity pressure. In Ghent, where network closure and normative consensus are higher, and ethnic heterogeneity and interethnic contact lower than in the mining towns, the Turkish community has a greater internal sanctioning capacity and more power to enforce ethnic norms.

Our study shows that coethnic communities use social control mechanisms, including gossip, ridicule, social exclusion, and the threat of losing one's honor or reputation, to consolidate norms and values and maintain ethnic boundaries. In addition to the effect of gossip in its own right, it also interacts with parental socialization practices. First, it is an asset for parents who want to transmit premigration cultural patterns to their children, because it helps them control what their children do outside the house. As such, ethnic conformity pressure exerted through mechanisms of social control can help explain why some parents are successful in transmitting premigration cultural practices, while others – Moroccan families in Belgium (Phalet & Heath, 2011), for instance – are not. Second, because the nonconformist behavior of one family member affects the social status of the whole

family, parents take ethnic conformity pressure into account in their parenting practices, even if they do not value the norms it enforces.

The scope of our research is limited in two ways. First, we have only briefly hinted at the fact that ethnic conformity pressure is not inescapable, but rather something that individual actors can negotiate. Even where network closure, normative consensus, and social control are high, individuals seem able to negotiate the pressure. More research is needed to understand how individuals do so and what factors can account for differences in this respect. Second, our study demonstrates that pressure to conform to ethnic community norms can be a powerful force in individual-level cultural incorporation processes, but so far, it remains unclear what the precise effect is. Following Gans (1997, pp. 878-880), we hypothesize that ethnic conformity pressure might result in “involuntary retention of ethnic traits” and slow down assimilation. By expecting conformity to their values and rules of conduct, and sanctioning cases of nonconformity, ethnic minority groups can make assimilation a very unattractive acculturation strategy. Ethnic conformity pressure is a way of reinforcing bright boundaries and forcing group members to choose between the ways of the ethnic group and the ways of the host society. We want to highlight the importance of taking community-based ethnic conformity pressure into account in studying cultural incorporation of immigrant groups. Future studies – preferably quantitative – can provide us with deeper insights regarding this relationship by linking people's attitudes toward ethnic retention as well as their cultural practices with the perceived degree of ethnic conformity pressure and the city context factors identified here.

The theoretical implications of this study are threefold. First, our data show that there are downsides to ethnic cohesion, social capital, and pressure to conform. They can give rise to frustrations when they are experienced as limiting individual freedom. Although we agree that membership in a cohesive ethnic community can serve as a protective factor in the face of perceived out-group threats, we call attention to the possible negative psychological consequences that ethnic conformity pressure can have. Several studies among Asian Americans (see, e.g., Espiritu, 2001; Rumbaut, 1994; Wolf, 1997) support our claim that ethnic conformity pressure can cause acculturative stress and psychological problems, especially among women. Restricted freedom and the inability to live up to expectations have been shown to give rise to deep emotional pain, suicidal thoughts, and even actual suicide attempts (Rumbaut, 1994; Wolf, 1997).

Second, our findings highlight the fact that ethnic community social control does not necessarily always prevent downward assimilation. While not denying that conformity pressures and processes of slower, “selective” acculturation can be beneficial for the adaptation of immigrant children (Rumbaut & Portes, 2001), we point out that this is not always the case. Our data suggest that ethnic

conformity pressure also potentially reinforces existing ethnic boundaries, reduces opportunities, and thereby widens the socioeconomic gap between natives and immigrant groups. Another line of reasoning attributes the positive effects of tightly knit communities to the fact that they help pool and magnify resources.<sup>8</sup> Where the coethnic community has much to offer its members in terms of entrepreneurial, human, and cultural capital, members can enjoy social mobility and prosper – like Cubans and Indians in the United States, for instance. Turkish communities in Europe, however, have very few human and material resources; in such a context, a high degree of ethnic social capital does not seem to pay off (Phalet & Heath, 2011). The fact that the coethnic community has little to offer in terms of employment or educational support can help explain why the group's social control does not lead to upward social mobility for Turks, but rather coincides with a “Turkish disadvantage” (Phalet & Heath, 2011) in the labor market. Thus, the segmented assimilation model does not fully account for the adaptation path that combines high ethnic control and selective acculturation with limited social mobility.

Third – and this is our most important point – we argue that in order to fully understand processes of immigrant incorporation and assimilation, sociologists should focus not only on differences between ethnic groups, but also on differences within ethnic groups and how these are shaped by the national and local context. We agree with Wimmer (2013) that the focus on differences between ethnic groups reflects a Herderian worldview, treating ethnic groups as bounded entities – a worldview which tends to be reproduced in many of the currently dominant theoretical paradigms, including assimilation theory and segmented assimilation theory. Such a focus on national/ethnic origin obscures underlying social processes, and should be replaced by a focus on social contexts and processes (Stepick & Stepick, 2010). This study confirms Alba's (2005) criticism that the segmented assimilation model takes the structural features of American society for granted, making it difficult to apply the theory to European contexts. It demonstrates the value of linking differences in immigrant incorporation to macrolevel migration processes and to the city as context for that process.

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<sup>8</sup> We would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for drawing our attention to the importance of the group's resources in explaining the impact of ECP and pointing out the difference between Turks in Europe and Indians in the U.S. in this respect.

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# CHAPTER 8

## PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES

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### *Responses to Ethnic Conformity Pressure in Two Turkish Communities in Belgium*

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Previous research has demonstrated that ethnic communities try to maintain ethnic boundaries through group pressure to conform to premigration cultural patterns, which mainly happens indirectly, through social control. So far however, little attention has been given to how group members respond to this indirect ethnic conformity pressure, as well as to the factors that shape these responses. Drawing on in-depth interviews with second and third generation Turkish Belgians, we examine and explain different responses to ethnic conformity pressure and link these to ethno-cultural change and boundary change. We distinguish three negotiation strategies, namely conformity, creativity and disregard, and find that the choice for a particular strategy is first and foremost shaped by the agents' gender, and their embeddedness in the Turkish community and the availability of an alternative support network, both of which are shaped by exclusion in the larger society. In addition, also the severity of the norm violation, the social structure of the community and parental expectations play a role. Findings are interpreted in terms of ethnic boundary dynamics, and implications for ethno-cultural change are discussed.





In uw achterhoofd is er altijd zo iets van: als ik dat doe... dat zijn de gevolgen en dat dat dat kan gebeuren. En euh... als ge dan dat stemmetje niet hebt, dan zijt ge volledig vrij he. Dan ga je u niet afvragen van “Zou diene da gehoord hebben morgen?” of “Zou den diene da gaan vertellen aan den andere?”

SONGÜL, 23F



## INTRODUCTION

In an attempt to preserve particular premigration cultural practices and remain distinctive as a group, immigrant communities often try to maintain ethno-cultural boundaries by exerting *ethnic conformity pressure* – a pressure not to assimilate too much but to conform to those norms, values, and cultural practices that are deemed central to the ethnic group's identity. Pressure can be exerted either directly and explicitly through discourse (*direct ethnic conformity pressure*) or indirectly through social control and social sanctioning when norms are violated (*indirect ethnic conformity pressure*)

In the past, different studies have documented the phenomenon of ethnic conformity pressure, both among immigrant groups in the United States (Chavez & French, 2007; Espiritu, 2001; Gibson, 1989) and Europe (De Vries, 1995; Lindo, 1996; Timmerman et al., 1999; Zontini, 2010), but as far as we know, very few have documented the different responses to this pressure, nor explored the factors that underlie these different responses. In other words: little is known about why in some cases, pressure to conform is effective, why in other cases it is not or less so.

Drawing on in-depth interviews with second and third generation Turkish Belgians, our study documents the various ways in which Turkish Belgians deal with indirect ethnic conformity pressure and explores the factors that underlie the different responses. We discern *conformity*, *creativity*, and *disregard* as the three main responses to conformity pressure, and demonstrate that what strategy is followed is shaped by a number of interacting factors. The first aim of this study is to examine what these factors are; to find out under which conditions ethnic conformity pressure is effective – in the sense that people actually conform – and under which conditions this is not the case. Simply put, our contribution focuses on the question of why some people are more inclined to conform than others, or why ethnic conformity pressure is more effective in some contexts than in others.

The second aim of the study is to translate the different responses to ethnic conformity pressure into dynamics of ethnic boundary change and ethno-cultural change. Given that ethnic conformity pressure is a way of maintaining the social boundary between an immigrant/ethnic group and the mainstream population, knowledge about the conditions under which it is effective can provide insight into dynamics of *boundary change*. Our paper builds on the agency-rich approach to the study of ethnic boundaries (Duemmler et al., 2010; Lamont & Molnar, 2002; Wimmer, 2013) by focusing on how boundaries are constructed on the meso-level through a continuous effort of the ethnic group, and on how they are negotiated on a micro-level by members of that group, who have the potential to change the symbolic and social boundaries in the process.

In focusing on how the second and third generation negotiate pressures to conform to premigration cultural norms and practices, we zoom in on individual-level processes of ethno-

cultural change. In contrast with the first generation, the second and third generation are in much closer contact with cultural patterns of the host society, and hence have a higher chance of experiencing a conflict between “the old” – the cultural legacy of their ethnic group and family – and “the new” (Foner, 1997). Being more embedded in the host society than the first generation also comes with possibilities, however, in the sense that they have options to choose from, and the ability to understand and deal with the limitations of ethnic boundaries and conformity pressures. Examining how they negotiate expectations held by other members of the community – most typically but not necessarily the first generation – with their own desired lifestyle choices, provides insight into their socio-cultural incorporation, which is most typically a hybrid mix of the old and the new.

We start this article by introducing ethnic conformity pressure as a mechanism of ethnic boundary maintenance and as something that can be negotiated in an active way. Subsequently, we introduce the Turkish population in Belgium and discuss the data and methods used. The presentation of the results is split up in three parts: first, we briefly discuss how members of Turkish communities in Belgium draw boundaries between themselves and ethnic Belgians and try to maintain them through indirect ethnic conformity pressure. Second, we shed light on the different responses to conformity pressure in the Turkish population and discuss what these responses mean in terms of ethno-cultural and boundary change. Finally, and most importantly, we zoom in on the different factors that explain the variation in negotiation strategies.

## **ETHNIC CONFORMITY PRESSURE AS AN INTROSPECTIVE DIMENSION OF ETHNIC BOUNDARY MAINTENANCE**

Strong ethnic groups provide nurturing, security and warmth, but are at the same time no “costless communities” in the sense that they demand conformity and can be “stifling and constricting” (Waters, 1990, pp. 153-154). Several studies in Europe and the United States have shown that the positive effects of social cohesion and control in strong ethnic communities go hand in hand with pressure to conform to group norms and resist assimilation. In the United Kingdom, Zontini (2010) shows how control and pressure to conform to strict norms are by-products of family and ethnic solidarity. Her analysis of the everyday experiences of young people in Italian families in the United Kingdom and Italy leads her to conclude that “strong ethnic groups can preserve community cohesion and shared norms at the expense of the individuals in them” (Zontini, 2010, p. 829). In the US, pressure to avoid “Americanization” has been reported among Vietnamese (Kibria, 1993), Filipino (Espiritu, 2001; Wolf, 1997), Korean (Chong, 1998) and Punjabi adolescents (Gibson,

1989). In many of these cases, “appropriate conduct” is defined in opposition to the cultural traits of the “ethnic other”: what it means to be Filipino, Korean, Turkish is defined in contrast with the in-group’s definition of what it means to be “American,” “Western” or “Belgian.”

We refer to these constraining processes as *ethnic conformity pressure* – the pressure not to assimilate too much but to conform to those norms, values, and cultural practices that are deemed central to the ethnic group's identity. In this study, we focus specifically on ethnic conformity pressure by the coethnic community, which manifests itself mainly indirectly, through *social control*. We see indirect ethnic conformity pressure as a specific form of the general process of social control, which Durkheim (1933) has identified as the social glue that holds groups together. We use social control in the narrow sense—namely, as the group's ability to ensure compliance with norms through the use of formal (legal) or informal (interpersonal) sanctioning (Parsons 1951; Paternoster & Iovanni 1986; Tittle 1980). In this paper, we focus on social control through informal sanctioning mechanisms such as gossip, loss of honor, social exclusion or ridicule.

Empirical research on ethnic conformity pressure shows clear gender differences regarding the expectation of conformity and corresponding social control. In as good as all cases documented, the task of protecting the community culture mainly rests on the shoulders of women, who are often regarded as the designated “keepers of culture” (Billson, 1995) and “responsible for holding the cultural line, maintaining racial boundaries and marking cultural difference” (Espiritu, 2001, p. 431). Consequently, conformity pressures and control are stronger for women, and family restrictions are often “blatantly gender biased” (Dasgupta & Dasgupta, 1996, p. 229), with daughters facing more restrictions on their autonomy and mobility.

The idea that immigrant or ethnic groups pressure their members to conform traces back to sociological and anthropological classics such as Durkheim (1933), Whyte (1943) and Barth (1969). In this paper, we follow in the footsteps of Barth, by framing ethnic conformity pressure as a dimension of *ethnic boundary maintenance*. According to Barth, the persistence of ethnic groups does not depend on enduring ethno-cultural differences, but rather on the maintenance of ethnic boundaries by one or both groups. The first step towards the maintenance of a boundary is the *marking* of a *symbolic boundary* through continuous dichotomization between insiders and outsiders (Barth, 1969; Lamont & Molnar, 2002; Wimmer, 2013). This process consists of the categorization of others as members of another group, as well as the identification of particular *boundary markers* - cultural traits that help to define one’s group identity in opposition to the other group.

But in order to truly create and maintain a social boundary, this symbolic dimension needs to coincide with a *behavioral dimension*. On a micro-level, the behavioral dimension is reflected in

both externally- and internally-oriented rules and processes. The *externally-oriented dimension* includes practices, obligations and restrictions which are directed at making valued resources within the group unavailable to outsiders, and at keeping them at a distance, both structurally and socially. The *internally-oriented dimension* then, includes (1) *scripts of action* (Wimmer, 2013) - rules and expectations regarding how to behave appropriately as a group member and relate to out-group members, as well as (2) mechanisms directed at maintaining or enhancing group cohesion and identity.

Ethnic conformity pressure should be regarded as such an internally-oriented mechanism of ethnic boundary maintenance. The expectation of conformity in exchange for membership and support comes with a system of social control which negatively sanctions non-conformity, hence producing adherence to group-specific norms. The rules and expectations regarding how to behave are essentially linked to the symbolic dimension of the boundary – to how the group defines its identity vis-à-vis the out-group. In order then to study the *content* of ethnic conformity pressure, it is important to look at the *boundary markers* – the cultural differences that are used to set the group apart from other groups it is in contact with.

### **AGENCY-CENTERED APPROACH: RESPONDING TO ETHNIC CONFORMITY PRESSURE**

Although revolutionary for his time, Barth's approach to the study of ethnic boundaries has been criticized for being rather static, focusing too much on the properties and maintenance of boundaries (Wimmer 2013). In contrast, the newer research on ethnic boundaries is agency-rich, focusing on how individuals engage in boundary work in everyday interactions (see, i.e., Duemmler et al., 2010; Lamont, 1995) or on "the making and unmaking of boundaries" (Wimmer, 2013). In line with the current agency-rich approach to the study of ethnic boundary dynamics and the idea of *bounded rationality* (Alba & Nee, 2003; Esser, 2004), we see immigrants and their descendants as rational social actors that are not just passive recipients of what happens around them but rather weigh the costs and benefits of "ethnic" strategies versus mainstream" ones, and engage in rational "situation-logical actions geared to the prevailing circumstances" (Esser, 2004, p. 1139).

A focus on individual agency not only includes a focus on how individuals negotiate, redraw, reposition or reinterpret the symbolic boundaries they encounter, but also how they actively deal with boundary maintaining mechanisms such as ethnic conformity pressure. How people respond to normative expectations can be conceptualized as a form of *impression management* (Goffman, 1959). According to Goffman, within any type of *social establishment*, actors – which are essentially

*performers* – engage in impression management, aimed at giving the observer the impression that they are living up to the standards by which they and their products are judged. Individuals are not necessarily concerned with the moral issue of realizing these standards, but with “engineering a convincing impression that these standards are being realized” (Goffman, 1959, p. 251).

Goffman sees *social establishments* as relatively closed systems, which can be studied from five different perspectives: they may be viewed *technically* – in terms of their efficiency in obtaining predefined objectives; *politically* – in terms of the actions which each participant can demand of others, and the kinds of social controls which guide this exercise of command and use of sanctions; *structurally* – in terms of the horizontal and vertical status divisions and the kinds of social relations; *culturally* – in terms of the moral values which influence activity; and finally, from a *dramaturgical perspective* – one that describes the techniques as well as problems of impression management. Applying this framework to our research objectives, the social establishment we focus on is a Turkish community, which has a set of *normative expectations*, which are enforced through social control and social sanctioning by particular actors (political perspective); a certain *capacity* to enforce normative expectations (technical perspective); a particular *social structure* (structural perspective), and a set of *moral values* (cultural perspective). The dramaturgical perspective finally, focuses on how members of the community respond to these particular conformity pressures through various impression management strategies.

If ethnic conformity pressure is a mechanism that *maintains* ethnic boundaries, knowledge about how people respond to it teaches us something about the extent to which symbolic boundaries and boundary maintaining mechanisms are contested and how this, in the long run, changes social boundaries between different ethnic groups. Knowledge about which factors incite people to disregard conformity pressure then, provides insight into the conditions under which boundary change is more likely to happen. Zolberg and Woon (1999; based on Bauböck, 1994) have introduced a typology of boundary-related changes, which distinguishes between *boundary blurring*, *boundary shifting* and *boundary crossing*<sup>1</sup>. *Boundary crossing* refers to the individual-level process of moving from one group to another, without any real change to the boundary itself. *Boundary blurring* implies a process in which the social profile of a boundary becomes less distinct: “the clarity of the social distinction involved has become clouded, and individuals’ location with respect to the boundary may appear indeterminate” (Alba, 2005). *Boundary shifting* finally involves “the

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<sup>1</sup> Wimmer (2013) introduces a more elaborate typology of boundary-related changes but for our discussion, the simpler typology of Zolberg and Woon suffices.



relocation of a boundary so that populations once situated on one side are now included on the other.”

Although not much is known about the negotiation of ethnic conformity pressure specifically, there is a large body of knowledge on the effectiveness of social control – one of the mechanisms through which ethnic conformity pressure operates. Several studies have shown that the power to enforce normative patterns through social control varies with the characteristics of the community. First, it is shaped by the extent to which the community is the sole source of certain rewards (Barth, 1969; De Vries, 1995; Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993). Consequently, in case minority group members are denied access to certain societal rewards through discrimination, observance of community norms and expectations becomes more likely (Barth, [1969] 1998, p. 37). Second, the enforcement of ethnic conformity pressure depends on the group’s *internal sanctioning capacity*, i.e. “its ability to monitor the behavior of its members and its capacity to publicize the identity of deviants” (Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993, p. 1337). To put it differently: in order to enforce ethnic conformity pressure, a community needs a high degree of network closure<sup>2</sup>, so it can monitor its members, and a set of social sanctions to punish those who violate normative expectations.

A widely studied example of social sanctioning is gossip, or more specifically, *judgmental gossip*. According to Merry (1997, p. 49), gossip “performs signification functions in maintaining the morals, values, and unity of social groups.” Gossip<sup>3</sup>, she argues, flourishes most in close-knit social networks with a high degree of connectedness, and its effectiveness in enforcing group norms depends on four factors. First, gossip has more impact in social systems in which the costs of desertion or expulsion are higher and the availability of alternative social relationships less. Second, its effectiveness is higher when group members are more interdependent for economic help, jobs, protection, and social support, something which has empirically been demonstrated among Turkish girls in the Netherlands (De Vries, 1995). Third, the impact of gossip increases when it can result in collective actions such as public shaming, ridicule, expulsion, or death. Finally, the impact is greater when normative consensus about the behavior in question is more extensive.

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<sup>2</sup> Closure should not be understood here in the Weberian sense, but rather refers to the degree to which parents know their children's friends and their friends' families.

<sup>3</sup> Merry's theory focuses on gossip, but can easily be extended to other forms of social sanctioning such as the loss of honor, social exclusion, or ridicule.

## INTRODUCING THE TURKISH POPULATION IN BELGIUM

Turkish migration to Belgium is a classic example of the labor migration that was typical for Western Europe in the 1960s and early 1970s (Reniers, 1999), and consisted mainly of migrants from rural areas in Turkey with little or no formal education (Phalet & Heath, 2010). Most Turkish migrants who migrated to Belgium settled in the large urban centers (Brussels and Ghent) and in the mining towns in the Charcoal Basin in Limburg. Despite the government's attempt to stop migration in 1974, it continued through family reunification and family formation, resulting in chain migration that continues even now.

Ethnic boundaries between native Belgians and Turkish Belgians are “bright” (Alba, 2005), both in symbolic and social terms. Being Muslims, Turkish Belgians are often portrayed in public discourse as “the essential others” who fail to integrate and hold on to a conservative, patriarchal culture. These stereotypes, combined with islamophobia (Billiet & Swyngedouw, 2009), and discrimination (Vandezande et al., 2009), give rise to social boundaries in the field of education, employment and interethnic contact. Turkish migrants and their offspring are among the most disadvantaged members of Belgian society in terms of educational attainment and employment (Phalet et al., 2007; Phalet & Heath, 2010; VDAB, 2009). The social boundary also manifests itself in a low degree of interethnic marriages between Turkish and ethnic Belgians. In 1991, 7 per cent of all married Turkish men and 3.8 per cent of the women was married to a Western-European partner (Lievens, 1999). A more recent study shows an increase over the past two decades, but numbers remain relatively low: 14.3 per cent of the Turkish men who got married in 2008, married an EU-citizen, compared to 8.2 per cent of the women (Van Kerckem, Van der Bracht, et al., 2013).

## STUDYING TURKISH BELGIANS IN GHENT AND THE MINING TOWNS

This paper is mainly based on semi-structured interviews with 51 Belgian-born (grand)children of Turkish immigrants, conducted by the main researcher between October 2007 and December 2012. We chose to collect data in Ghent and the mining towns of Limburg, because of both similarities and differences. As a result of active recruitment of Turkish manual workers in the sixties and seventies, both regions have a large Turkish population that has a strong visual presence. Not taking Brussels into account, Ghent and the mining towns were the two most important destinations for Turkish immigrants in Belgium<sup>4</sup>. Ghent is a fairly large city in the North-East of Belgium (around 250,000

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<sup>4</sup> Based on the national register, Schoonvaere calculated that in Ghent, the proportion of Turks (operationalized as people born with Turkish nationality) is between three and five times as high as in Belgium overall, and in the mining

inhabitants), which attracted Turkish migrants to work in the textile industry. Nowadays, the city has a sizeable Turkish community, most of whom live in the so-called *19<sup>th</sup> century belt* around the city, where the textile factories were once located. The mining towns are a collection of smaller towns (with population sizes ranging from 30,000 to 65,000) in the province of Limburg in the North-East of Belgium, who owe their large Turkish population to the presence of the coal mines.

An important reason why we chose these communities are their differences in terms of social structure of the Turkish population and the region it is embedded in. The Turkish community in Ghent stands out in its uniformity in terms of region of origin: an overwhelming majority comes from the city of Emirdağ in Central Anatolia. As a result of the establishment of migratory paths, nominative recruitment by the textile factories in the sixties and transnational marriages with relatives and friends from the same village, the Emirdağ community in Ghent can be characterized as a *transplanted community* (Surkyn & Reniers, 1997) that is characterized by a very high degree of network closure. In addition, it is also a clear example of what Lindo (1996) has called a *region of origin network* within which there is a widespread agreement on norms and values and a uniform set of premigration cultural practices.

In contrast, the Turkish population in the mining towns is much more diversified. People come from all over Turkey, and those who do come from the same region do not necessarily flock together. Consequently, network closure is not as high as in Ghent, and there is more diversity when it comes to premigration cultural beliefs and patterns. A second difference is that the mining towns are much more ethnically diverse and have a longer migration history, compared to Ghent. Unlike in Ghent, the Turkish population is not the only significant ethnic minority group: in many of the mining towns, there is a large Moroccan and Italian population, and other smaller (mainly European) groups. Correspondingly, the province of Limburg is known for its multicultural character, not only in terms of ethnic diversity, but also in its ideology and attitude towards minorities (Van Kerckem, Van de Putte, & Stevens, 2013).

For each area, we designed a purposive sample of second and third generation Turkish Belgians. Following Lievens (1999), we define the second generation as those who were socialized primarily in Belgium (born in Belgium or moved there before the age of 6). The third generation then includes those people who have at least one second generation parent. The sample is heterogeneous with regard to gender and the family's region of origin, because ethnic conformity pressure and social

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towns more than five times as high. Based on back-of-the-envelope calculations, this means that if about 1.5 per cent of the Belgian population had Turkish nationality at birth, between 4.5 and 7.5 per cent of people in Ghent have Turkish ancestry (not including the 3rd generation), compared to more than 7.5 cent in the mining towns.

control are gender-related (De Vries, 1995) and mainly occur within moral communities delimited by region of origin (Lindo, 1996). Research participants were recruited through a *multiple start snowballing approach*. In Ghent, the main researcher started by contacting the people she already knew, either by telephone, email or through Facebook, asking them if they were willing to participate and help finding other respondents. She found additional participants during fieldwork, as well as by contacting well-networked people in the Turkish community. Respondents from the mining towns were found with the help of three intermediaries that the main researcher had gotten to know during her research in Ghent. Table 1 gives an overview of the realized sample in terms of gender, place of residence and generation. All respondents were between 18 and 49 years old at the time of the interview. The sample is about equally divided between men (n=21) and women (n=30), and between the second generation (n=27) and the third (n=24).

**TABLE 8: REALIZED SAMPLE**

(Figures represent number of interviewed people)

	GHENT			MINING TOWNS			TOTAL
	Men	Women	Subtotal	Men	Women	Subtotal	
2 <sup>nd</sup> generation	5	9	14	4	9	13	27
3 <sup>rd</sup> generation	8	8	16	4	4	8	24
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>51</b>

All respondents who participated in the study were told about the purpose of the research and promised confidentiality and privacy. They were given the opportunity to choose the location of the interview and their pseudonym themselves. The majority of the respondents were interviewed only once; the digitally recorded interviews, conducted in Dutch, lasted from 36 minutes<sup>5</sup> to 2h45 minutes, and were transcribed verbatim. The questions asked were open-ended and covered three major topics: (1) social and ethnic identification and ethno-cultural practices, (2) characteristics of their place of residence and its Turkish population and (3) conformity pressures and social control in Turkish community. We made sure not to introduce this last topic too soon in the interview, in order to see whether or not informants would raise the topic themselves. In case they did not, the interviewer offered participants two vignettes towards the end of the interview, one describing a situation of social control, and the other ethnic conformity pressure (see Appendix 11). After the informants had read the vignettes, the interviewer asked if they recognized the situations, and spurred them to reflect upon it.

<sup>5</sup> Some of the shorter interviews were follow-up interviews with people who had already been interviewed before.

Wishing to stay close to the respondents' own lived experience, we adopted a Grounded Theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to our data analysis, mainly using open coding. We used NVivo to attribute codes to the documents, based on relevant concepts identified in other studies and concepts and issues raised by respondents. After we had read through the interviews and marked the interesting themes, we applied them to the data, systematically indexing the data in NVivo based on the selected themes. Once the first interviews were broken up this way, we read through the raw data again, and used an iterative approach to turn the rather crude initial thematic framework into a more refined and inductively generated tree structure. After this first phase of data management, we started looking more closely at the different codes and tried to establish links between the different categories. We looked for a description of the phenomenon (in this case ethnic conformity pressure), causal conditions, context, action/interactional strategies (how people respond to it), intervening conditions, and consequences. Once we had established a solid coding structure, and had generated a set of preliminary findings, the main researcher went back to the field to collect more data, in order to fill in gaps and validate statements and established relationships, hence grounding the theory. In a final phase, we made detailed annotations to the coded fragments, analyzed them on paper and synthesized them for the empirical part of this article.

## **MARKING AND MAINTAINING BOUNDARIES THROUGH INDIRECT ETHNIC CONFORMITY PRESSURE**

Different studies demonstrate that the dominant population in Europe draws a bright symbolic boundary between themselves and Muslims as “the essential others” (R. Alba, 2005; Allen & Nielsen, 2002; White, 1997), but our data show that the marking of symbolic boundaries is no prerogative for the dominant population alone: Turkish Belgians also draw symbolic boundaries between themselves and native Belgians, and police that boundary through mainly indirect ethnic conformity pressure.

*Boundary markers* can be regarded as part of the cultural dimension of Goffman's *social establishments*. They not only define who belongs to the in-group and who does not, but also how members of the in-group are supposed to behave. The first and probably most important boundary marker that Turkish Belgians use to construct their identity is the expectation of *female chastity*, which they contrast with the almost limitless freedom Belgian girls have in terms of relationships, sexuality and movement. A Turkish woman is supposed to have no premarital sex, should not be seen in the company of non-related men, and spends most of her time at home, especially in the evening. Women who do not conform to this image of what a Turkish woman should be like, are

labeled as “sluts” or “too Belgian.” Like in many other immigrant groups then (See, for example, Dasgupta & Dasgupta, 1996; Espiritu, 2001; Orsi, 2010), women’s sexuality and behavior is central to the group’s identity and status. As such, it is primarily the women who carry the burden of preserving the group’s identity, and whose whereabouts are closely monitored.

Other boundary markers that are used to contrast “Turkish culture” with the “Belgian culture” are the former’s group-orientation versus the latter’s individualism, as well as the observance of certain religious rules, in particular the taboo on declaring oneself an atheist, drinking alcohol, and eating pork. Practices associated with “the other side” of the symbolic boundary – such as being disloyal to one’s family, drinking alcohol or going out too often – are frowned upon and labeled by many as “becoming like a Belgian.”

In order to prevent the blurring of this ethnic boundary and the loss of cultural distinctiveness, members of the Turkish community exert ethnic conformity pressure:

Turks say things like: “Assimilation... watch out for this, don't do that. Try to stay Turkish.” In fact, that's the biggest um...contradictory point of view. The Flemish want you to renounce your whole culture of origin, you know, to say: “I don't have anything to do with that, I'm Belgian now.” If you're in a situation like that [...], you won't be socially accepted by the Turks. (Ali, 26M, 3rd generation)<sup>6</sup>

The pressure to not assimilate involves conforming to the above described boundary markers, as well as limitations on interethnic contact, particularly regarding partnership and union formation. Just like in non-ethnic groups, conformity pressure often happens indirectly through *social control*, which includes both *monitoring* of people’s behavior, and *social sanctions* such as gossip when norms are violated. Ethnic conformity pressure is part of the political dimension of social establishments: it is a mechanism that is used by particular people and subgroups in the community to control and sanction others, often for their own benefit (See also Patterson, 1977). Given that “Turkish culture” tends to be patriarchal, with a high respect for elders, it is generally men and the older generations (who have the power and hence most to lose and defend) who define and police the boundaries, and women and younger generations who are expected to conform.

In the Turkish communities we studied, gossip seems to be the most frequent social sanction for deviant behavior. Considering the value Turkish people place on family honor, gossip is a strong social sanction, because it stains the reputation of the entire family. Gossip can also have real-life consequences, especially in the marriage market, as the following narrative demonstrates:

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<sup>6</sup> All quotes used are translated from Dutch as literally as possible. Where anonymity or understanding was jeopardized, we made minimal changes to the text, signaled by square brackets. Unless otherwise stated, the quotes used to illustrate particular points represent remarks that were frequently made.

I could bring my boyfriend home. I could walk hand in hand on the street with my boyfriend, or I could go to the city hand in hand with my boyfriend... [Waves her finger to indicate that this is impossible] [...] My brother is going to be mad, my mother is going to be mad, but that passes, after a while. But what remains? 'Ah, [Ayse] once went to the city center with a boy.' [...] And if I were to marry someone else, that boy would tell me all the time 'you know, you once went with a boy to the city center, and so you are not a good person, and you are this and you are that'. So that is why it is bad. (Ayse, 19F, 3rd generation)

In case Ayse were seen with her boyfriend, the network closure in Ghent would make it possible for this news to spread around the community. In case this relationship ended and she eventually wanted to marry someone else, the knowledge that she was once seen with a different boyfriend could affect her chances to marry this other partner, because in the face of marriage, mothers-in-law use the gossip network to find out about the reputation of a future daughter-in-law.

But gossip is not the only mechanism used to sanction deviant behavior. The most extreme measure that is used to sanction non-conformity is *excommunication* from the community or *repudiation* by the family. In case of extreme or repeated norm violation, people run the risk of no longer being considered members of the Turkish community and consequently lose all social support. When a girl decides to marry a non-Muslim for instance, she runs the risk of becoming an outcast to the community as well as being repudiated by her family:

There are also Turkish girls who became Belgian. Who married a Belgian. And are in every way Belgian. They are not even counted any more. The name is not even mentioned any more. I know parents whose daughter married a Belgian. For them it is over. That girl has not lived. (Selda, 25F, 2nd generation)

In many cases, a girl who "leaves the community" is considered dead, and the family goes through a true mourning process, supported by other members of the community: people visit them to pay their respects as if the girl actually died. The taboo on intermarriage does not hold for Turkish men, because within Islam, religion is passed on through the father, so in interreligious marriages involving a non-Muslim woman, children will not be lost to another religion (Al-Ati, 1977).

## **CONFORMISTS OR AGENTS OF CHANGE? RESPONSES TO ETHNIC CONFORMITY PRESSURE**

The second and third generation Turkish Belgians we interviewed were no cultural dopes who willingly conformed to what was expected of them, but rather contested and negotiated the conformity pressure and social control in their daily lives. Broadly speaking, we distinguish three

different negotiation strategies, namely *conformity*, *creativity* and *disregard*. How people deal with normative expectations in their community is a form of *impression management* and part of the study of the *dramaturgical* perspective of social establishments. What distinguishes these three strategies from each other is whether or not people try to maintain the impression that they are living up to the standards by which they are judged, and whether or not they actually realize these standards or just engineer a convincing *impression* that these standards are being realized.

## CONFORMITY

A first way of dealing with indirect ethnic conformity pressure by the coethnic community is by conforming to the normative expectations. We subdivide this first option into *voluntary* and *involuntary conformity*, following Gans (1997, pp. 878-880) who distinguishes between voluntary and involuntary retention of ethnic traits. People who voluntarily conform do not experience social control as negative because they have completely internalized the “Turkish” norms and values and made them their own. Consequently, they do not consider ethnic conformity pressure an issue and are not subject to gossip:

You know, I was someone who always, in fact I never went to bars. I grew up in kind of a bit an Islamic, Muslim family. But I had freedom, so... But going out [to party], I maybe did that once or twice in my life. Like for me it was – smoking I did not do. Alcohol was something unknown to me... So I had fewer problems. Not that I had to, but you know... (Mehmet, 35M, 2nd generation)

This informant did not do any of things that are considered morally wrong, not because he felt obliged by others (“not that I had to”) but simply because – being a member of a Muslim family – these were his own values. People who voluntarily conform tend to agree on the location and meaning of the symbolic boundary between Turks and Belgians and do not attempt to redefine that boundary, nor their own position vis-à-vis the social dimension of the boundary. Strikingly, all informants who claim to voluntarily conform to “Turkish” norms and values are men. This should not surprise, considering that men have much more freedom of behavior and movement, and that it is mainly the women, who carry the burden of maintaining the boundary.

Most informants in our sample however, especially the women, experience a discrepancy between their own desired way of life and what other members of the Turkish community expect. In cases of strong social control, some people feel the need to *involuntarily conform* to the expected behavior because they fear the consequences:

Özge: We cannot go out for instance. Or stay out late. I do not know why this is the case, but it has stayed like that, and it will continue like that. People here have their own taboos, and it never changes and it will never change I think.



Interviewer: And do you do those things on the sly then?

Özge: One or two times, but it was discovered. So after that I did not do it anymore. Because it is impossible. There are so many people you know here. Because it is a small village and everyone knows each other. That is very negative here. And people talk behind your back. There is a lot of gossip such as ‘Hey, did you hear this, Özge went to that place.’ (21F, 3rd generation)

Because of a rather high degree of network closure in Özge’s village, her “unacceptable behavior” was discovered, and she decided to not do anything on the sly anymore, in order to avoid gossip.

The strategy of involuntary conformity is an example of how an ethnic group can slow down group-level cultural assimilation and keep its ethnic distinctiveness alive, even if individual people would rather adopt cultural practices that are associated with the other side of the symbolic boundary. In the case of involuntary conformity, a disconnection arises between attitudes on the one hand, and behavior on the other hand, especially concerning practices that mark the ethnic boundary. In the case of Turkish Belgians, practices such as the retention of premarital virginity or co-ethnic marriages do not necessarily indicate that there is no generational change in the domain of relationships and sexuality, but rather reflect that the hold of the group over the individual is rather strong.

By conforming involuntarily, people choose not to contest the boundary markers, and hence keep the symbolic boundary and its corollary cultural differences unchanged. This in turn reduces the chance that social boundaries will become blurred through dynamics *from within*, especially given the observation that several normative expectations concern interaction with non-Turkish Belgians. The taboo on intermarriage is a straightforward example, but some people also experience family and peer pressure to not interact too much with non-Turkish Belgians:

That social pressure that I could not get rid of has shaped who my friends are (...) I am... going back ten years now (thinks). I had more Africans and Belgians among my friends. And my family did not like that. Like... ‘You belong with Turks. You have family, you have cousins. Hang out with them’ First I was really stubborn and I kept on keeping... my black friends (laughs). After a while, five six months later, people I did not know approached me, saying ‘I am your cousin,’ (...) And so I did not have time anymore for my other friends. So then I started interacting more with the Turks. (Ahmet, 26M, 3rd generation)

This quote shows that social boundaries (in this case friendship patterns) not only result from exclusion by the majority group, but that also members of the minority group have the power to

consolidate social boundaries through ethnic conformity pressure, at least as long as people conform (voluntary or involuntary) to the ethnic group's expectations.

## CREATIVITY

The second negotiation strategy is *creativity*: finding creative solutions that manipulate the system of control, such as lying or hiding one's behavior, in an attempt to avoid negative consequences of norm violation:

I did try to do it, really on the sly, really... in a way that you (laughs) – a place where there were no Turks. Really as far as possible... I did it for my parents' (Azra, 26F, 2nd generation)

I and one of my friends went out one night and had both been drinking alcohol. A couple of days later, we went out for dinner with some other girls and started talking about alcohol and my friend claimed in front of the whole group that she never drank alcohol and that she never would. For me, that kind of behavior is unacceptable but apparently, she suffers more from social control. (Aleyna, 27F, 2nd generation)

In terms of impression management, creativity is an example of how people can engineer the *impression* that standards are being realized, without actually realizing them. *Creativity* is essentially about conforming *front stage*, and relegating non-conformist behavior to the *back stage*, where no audience is present. As such, *creativity* refers to a sort of *code switching*: most children of immigrants, who are exposed to multiple cultural outlooks, are aware of normative expectations in each "cultural group" and have the capacity to behave appropriately in each of those – emphasizing certain values and characteristics in one setting and hiding them in others, in an attempt to create beneficial ties and we-relations (See also Kasinitz, 1992).<sup>7</sup>

The strategy of lying and hiding one's behavior was by far the most common strategy used by women, as a way of negotiating their own desires with the expectations from the community. It was especially used in order to be able to go out more, and in case they had a premarital relationship. One of the most extreme, and non-exceptional cases of hiding one's unacceptable behavior is hymen reconstruction (or *sewing together* as they call it) after premarital sex. Young women who eagerly want to hide their loss of virginity, sometimes have their hymen operatively restored, in an attempt to cover up previous sexual intercourse.

In some cases, entire families resort to the more or less permanent "hiding strategy" of moving to another city. The following narrative illustrates the benefits of moving from a town with a large

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<sup>7</sup> We are indebted and grateful to one of the reviewers of this article for drawing our attention to the parallel between our strategy of creativity and *code switching*.

Turkish population, to a city with virtually no Turkish people (here referred to as “Satellite city” to ensure confidentiality):

I wanted to stay in Satellite City. It’s a lot more quiet. You don’t have – there is no more social control. [In my previous neighborhood], when you come home at a certain hour in the evening or at night for instance, there you go! If you have Turkish neighbors, they see it immediately, like ‘oops, where is she coming from at this hour’. [But in] Satellite City, you have your freedom, you can go somewhere for a drink. You know, no one sees you, in fact. (Leyla, 27F, 2nd generation)

Rather than living in a town with a high degree of network closure and monitoring, this informant prefers living in Satellite city, because it gives her more freedom to do the things she likes. Similarly, many female informants express a wish to move out of the community once they are married, so that their children do not have to experience what they have experienced.

Hiding unacceptable behavior is a strategy through which people hope to combine the best of both worlds: it enables them to move away from the premigration cultural practices they are expecting to conform to, while simultaneously avoiding social sanctions. As long as they succeed in keeping their non-conformist behavior hidden, they are not labeled as deviant or “too Belgian” and do not suffer the social consequences (which is difficult in communities with strong network closure, as we will discuss further on).

When this strategy is used, people cross the symbolic boundary between Turks and Belgians, without crossing the social boundary. In terms of long-term boundary dynamics, this strategy has the potential of blurring the symbolic boundary between Belgians and Turks. The best example of this is the gradual acceptance of premarital relationships. A decade ago, being seen in public with someone of the opposite sex was unthinkable (especially for young women). Nowadays, however, there is a growing awareness that hidden encounters are so widespread that it is becoming hypocrite to gossip about what others are doing, because chances are high that it happens within one’s own nuclear family as well. In general, as an increasing number of people “secretly” violate the norm, the normative pattern itself begins to shift, and previously unthinkable behavior begins to be accepted.

## **DISREGARD**

A last way of dealing with conformity pressure is by simply ignoring it – a strategy that we refer to as *disregard*. In this case, unacceptable behavior is not hidden, as is the case in the following quote:

Interviewer: Did you have the feeling that people from the neighborhood kept an eye on what you were doing?

Damla: Yes, but I did not care.

Interviewer: How do you react then, when someone says something or is watching you?

Damla: If someone is watching me, I pretend I have not seen it, and if they say something, you know, I say ‘what are you doing here?’ If they say ‘I have seen you there’, then I say ‘Yes, what were you doing there? If you saw me there, it means you were there too.’  
(28F, 2nd generation)

Although Damla knows about the normative patterns she is supposed to conform to, she refuses to do so and does not care about the resulting gossip. The reason why she does this is simple: she does not see herself as part of the Turkish immigrant community, and can hence disregard all expectations that come with membership. Both in her own eyes and those of the community, Damla is not “one of them”: she is on the other side of the boundary, both in symbolic and in social terms.

The observation that these people feel outsiders to the Turkish immigrant community does not mean that they do not identify as Turkish. Several of the people who disregard, identify with urban Turks in Turkey, claiming that immigrant communities are much more traditional compared to young people in cities such as Istanbul, Ankara or Izmir. By comparing themselves to urban Turks in Turkey, they enable themselves to still identify as Turkish, even though they do not conform to how Turkish Belgians define “Turkishness.”

In case people completely disregard normative patterns and ethnic boundaries, the potential for boundary blurring is less. Because they usually become outcasts to the community, or they never were insiders in the first place, they do not have the opportunity to change it from within. In some cases, however, there is a potential for change when rebellious pioneers who value their membership in the community ignore the pressure, while at the same time fighting for acceptance:

When I was wearing some kind of hat, or my necklaces, accessories and the like, [my aunts] said: ‘What are you dressed like! Off! Off! Off!’ And I said like: ‘I’m not taking anything off! I am going to wear it!’ [...] My dad thought the same way. He said: ‘Everyone thinks that you are a slut’. But I always did what I thought was right. And I am really proud of myself that I did that. Because now in my environment there is this idea ‘Ah, if [Emine] has done it, it will be ok’. But you have to like constantly prove yourself, and it costs a lot. (Emine, 26F, 3rd generation)

Emine fought hard to do what *she* thought was right, even if this violated certain expectations, while still remaining accepted in the community. By showing that it is possible to be a decent Turkish girl while displaying behavior that is associated with the other side of the boundary, she helped redefining what it means to be Turkish and made it easier for other girls to also contest the symbolic boundaries. Pioneers such as Emine are necessary in order to blur the symbolic boundary because a number of pioneers together have the power to make previously unacceptable behavior

gradually more common and more acceptable. As Emine herself indicates, however, the fight is not easy, and therefore only a few people have the potential to push for changes.

## **EXPLAINING RESPONSES TO INDIRECT ETHNIC CONFORMITY PRESSURE**

In this final part of our analysis, we turn our lens to the *technical dimension* of social establishments, studying under which conditions Turkish communities are successful in enforcing their normative expectations upon their members. How people respond to indirect conformity pressure is the outcome of a negotiation process in which people weigh their own values and desires against the potential consequences of norm violation. The latter in turn are shaped by four sets of factors, namely the severity of the act, the social structure of the ethnic community, the expectations of close family members, and finally, characteristics of the actors themselves.

First, how people respond to conformity pressure through social control depends on the severity of the norm violation and associated social sanctions. This implies that people can use a combination of strategies depending on the severity of the sanctions. Based on interviews, informal talks and media reports, we would argue that the strongest taboo rests on homosexuality— one of the only cases in which sanctions for men are as severe, or even more so, as for women. Second in line, at least for women, would be a relationship with a non-Muslim. Both homosexuality and interethnic marriages (for females) result in strong social sanctions, including not only gossip but in many cases even repudiation by the family. Logically, the stronger the sanction, the more people will refrain from disregarding the pressure to conform, even if it strongly violates their own desires. Depending on the other factors involved, they will either circumvent the system of social control through a creative strategy, or they will conform involuntarily, out of a fear for sanctions. The two lesbian women in our sample, for example, frantically tried to hide their sexual orientation for fear of repudiation. None of the male respondents identified as homosexual, but based on our fieldwork and media sources, we are confident to say that many do not even think about *coming out* as a result of the strong taboo and the possibility of severe sanctions.

A second factor that shapes how people deal with social control is the social structure of the Turkish community – in particular the degree of heterogeneity in terms of region of origin, which shapes the degree of network closure as well as the degree of normative consensus. In areas with high network closure, monitoring is widespread because most people know each other. In a city such as Ghent, where most people come from the same town in Turkey, there is a high chance that deviant behavior will be discovered:

I always had the feeling that I'm not free here [in Ghent]. You get that. Always these eyes on you. Even if those eyes aren't there, you know..., in that case... in fact, those eyes are there. I mean they're always there. Everything you do, everywhere you go, wherever you come from, they see everything. (Burak, 24M, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation)

Because the Turkish community in Ghent has a higher network closure, and an effective gossip network, its internal sanctioning capacity is a lot higher compared to what is the case in the mining towns. In the mining towns, network closure is low outside one's immediate neighborhood, and social control is weaker because they have much less chance of being “spied upon.” This is especially the case for Genk, a bigger city than the other mining towns:

Maybe it's because Genk is bigger and there are more Turks there. And... in Genk you don't know everyone. If you talk about Beringen, there are only a couple of neighborhoods where all the Turks live. While you know, Genk: lots of neighborhoods, lots of Turks, and there really are a lot of Turks who don't know each other. So the social control is a lot less. (Dilek, 27F, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation)

This quote echoes Merry's claim that gossip flourishes most in close-knit, highly connected networks, but atrophies in loose-knit, unconnected ones (1997, p. 52). If people do not know one another, or only know one another to a limited extent, social control ceases to be an effective way to enforce ethnic conformity. In these places, social norms may lose their hold, and the crucial link between the violation of social norms and group sanctions may break.

Also, because people in the mining towns come from different regions in Turkey, the normative system there is less uniform and strict. Residents' diverse origins are reflected in a range of different premigration cultural patterns, which gives rise to something of a local *melting pot*:

In Genk, the population is very heterogeneous, so you have people from Central Anatolia, but you also have people from the north, the east, from the south. And that brings diversity, because those people have their local habits, and they've imported them. And it's like a melting pot of everything. And, for instance, you have people who were already open-minded back home, let's say in their hometown, and they just bring that with them. And if you see that their children can do certain things—in terms of clothes or piercings or a tattoo or a way of dressing, where they go or what they eat—then we imitate that a little, we play along, and it's like acceptable. Because people [in Ghent] come from the same region, certain rules are accepted for everyone and everyone obeys. While in our case, we look to the group that we want to belong to. (Dilek, 27F, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation)

In the mining towns, diversity in region of origin has weakened the local normative consensus, an important factor in the enforcement of ethnic conformity through the pressure of gossip (De Vries, 1995; Merry, 1997). With less agreement concerning what it means to be Turkish, the community is

less able to sanction deviant behavior: instead of being socially excluded by the entire community, people may join the particular subgroup they “want to belong to.”

Third, seeing that respect for one’s parents is usually very strong in Turkish families, people often take social control into consideration in order not to damage the family’s honor and hurt their parents:

Mm... What I would do? ... For, for me it would not be a big deal, it is especially for my parents. They are going to be humiliated... like: ‘Yeah, your daughter is like this, your daughter is like that.’ I would not like it that my parents have difficulties with that. (Azra, 26F, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation).

How parents think about social control seems to depend mainly on their own position in Turkish community. The more they are embedded in the community network, the more they value a good reputation. Those parents who did not care too much about social control and gossip, were often themselves outsiders vis-à-vis the Turkish community in a particular area, as the following quote by Damla – one of the *disregarders* – demonstrates:

My parents were isolated. [...] Because we came from another region, I think we were excluded a little bit and that we benefited from it. [...] Especially my sisters, and also myself – because that social control was not there. [...] My cousins, they did make contact with those people. But we did not do that. I mean, my parents did not do that. I think my father did not feel the need to. And... thank God, really. (Damla, 28F, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation)

Damla’s parents did not come from Emirdağ, and decided to not socialize with the other Turkish people in their neighborhood, most of who came from Emirdağ. As a result, Damla and her sisters did not experience as much social control. Their cousins in contrast, “did make contact with those people,” and were therefore subject to the same social control as those who came from Emirdağ themselves.

When parents urge their children to take social control into account, this does not necessarily mean that they value the normative patterns themselves. Both in Ghent and the mining towns, parents sometimes pressured their children to behave according to the group norms, only because they feared the sanctions associated with non-conformist behavior. One of the clearest examples of the impact of group pressure on parenting is the increased freedom that some females acquire when the family moves to a city with no strong Turkish community:

At one point in the interview, [the interviewee] asks me to switch off the recorder because she is afraid people will recognize her through her story. After I did, she tells me that in her teens, her family moved from Ghent to [another town], which had no Turkish community. In the period that she lived there, she could do anything she wanted. It was an amazing period she says, because her father

allowed her to go out because no one would know anyway. When they moved back to Ghent however, everything changed again: she and her sisters could not go out and when they did, they often kept it a secret from their father.

*(Field notes, 11 January 2011, taken during an interview when recorder had to be switched off – certain details left out to ensure anonymity).*<sup>8</sup>

This narrative illustrates that parenting practices are to a large extent influenced by the presence of social control and the danger of social exclusion, and that they as well can *involuntarily conform*: when there is social control, they urge their children to hide boundary-transgressive behavior; when there is no social control, they give their daughters a lot more freedom, because chances are low that this will result in gossip and a negative reputation.

When it comes to the characteristics of the actors themselves finally, three different factors are important, namely the individual's gender, the extent to which people value their membership in the Turkish community and the availability of an alternative support network. Gender matters in the sense that for the same behavior, sanctions are always stronger for women than for men<sup>9</sup>. For instance, a woman who marries a non-Muslim will most likely be considered an outcast and possibly even repudiated by her family, whereas men will only experience some verbal disapproval. Considering that sanctions are less strong for men, they ignore the pressures to a much larger extent than women do:

My mother thinks social acceptance is important. But I don't. I am someone who likes to have fun and I do it. There was a wedding of family (...) My whole family is there, I drink, I take a cigar and I smoke it. I am more than tipsy, I am drunk, so I go the dance floor and I dance... and my mother sees it and she goes crazy. 'Aren't you embarrassed in front of all these people? You are really making a fool of yourself.' What do I care? I tell her: 'In a house where someone died, you have to cry, at a party, you have to dance.' (Ali, 26M, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation)

In contrast with men, women feel they cannot ignore the social pressure, especially if they value their membership in the community. Most of them seem to resort to the strategy of *creativity*, as a way of finding a way out of their restricted freedom, without being stigmatized or excluded from the

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<sup>8</sup> It is debatable whether or not it is ethical to include this excerpt, considering that the informant asked to have the recorder switched off before telling what is reflected here, because she was afraid people would be able to identify her through her story. Given that the story is so telling for the point we wanted to make, we thought it was important to include it, but only after being sure that no one would be able to identify her through it. Therefore, we left out specific information, such as her age, occupation, the city they moved to and her family composition. Considering that we had heard similar stories during our research, we were confident that the phenomenon was not so unique that it would jeopardize her anonymity.

<sup>9</sup> The only exception here maybe is homosexuality



Turkish community they belong to. The use of this strategy has become so widespread nowadays that women are often labeled as “hypocrites” who behave like “angels” when they are *front stage*, but become “sluts” when they believe nobody sees them.

A second individual-level factor that affects the impact of the sanction is how much people value their membership in the Turkish community and orient their life towards it, something which is reflected in their partner preferences. A negative reputation is a lot worse for people who want to find a partner within their own ethnic community than for those who want to find a partner outside of it. Our data confirm this interconnectedness between how people deal with social control, and the type of partner they prefer: those who want to marry a local co-ethnic (in contrast to a transnational or interethnic marriage) almost always need to consider their reputation, seeing that mothers tend to use the gossip network in order to find out about the reputation of her child’s possible future spouse. Conversely, most of those who said to ignore conformity pressure and social control (especially the females) were married to or in a relationship with a non-Turkish Belgian.<sup>10</sup>

Why some value their membership more than others seems to be related to lifestyle: those who do not feel the need to belong, often have a *sense of outsidersness* in terms of how they live their lives. In some cases, this sense of outsidersness is related to their parents’ social background: those who grew up with parents who are more liberal (for instance because they come from an urban area in Turkey) often feel disconnected from other members of the Turkish population, most of whom come from the countryside. But also education plays a role: people who have studied often feel different and more liberal, compared to those who have not studied.

Finally, the consequences of norm violation are affected by the individuals’ access to an alternative support network outside of the Turkish community, which is strongly related to the above described sense of outsidersness, educational level and broader social structure. An analysis of our data shows that those people who disregard social control altogether, were the ones who have a lot of non-Turkish friends as well as other Turkish “outsiders” in their social network. As a result, they were not dependent on the approval of the larger Turkish community for social support or a marriage partner, which allowed them to not care about the negative consequences of norm violation. These people were a minority however, and most people did not have a large network outside of the community.

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<sup>10</sup> Ten people out of the 51 research participants were in a long-during relationship with an non-Muslim. Given that for men, interreligious marriages are not much of an issue, there is no clear relationship with how they deal with social control. For women however there is: those who tend to disregard, were all single or in a relationship with a non-Turkish person.

The fact that many participants do not have a large social network outside of the Turkish community can be linked to Turkish Belgians' experiences of exclusion and discrimination in the larger society. Exclusion and discrimination are important for understanding responses to conformity pressure, as they set the context in which conformity pressure is more easily enforced through the need of access to co-ethnic resources (including subjective resources such as a sense of belonging and emotional support). According to Esser (2004), structural disadvantages shape whether immigrants and their descendants choose "assimilative action" or "ethnic alternatives." In general, he argues, immigrants should have an objective interest in assimilative action, but because disadvantages can produce gaps and delays in the achievement of prevailing cultural goals, investing in the less efficient ethnic capital can be a better and/or safer option. In a study among Muslims in Edinburgh, for example, Wardak (2002) shows that the social, cultural and political exclusion of its members, and associated feelings of alienation and exclusion, creates the need for a sense of belonging and inclusion, which in turn shapes the revival of traditional cultural and religious institutions.

In such situations, where security outside of one's own group is low and people need to rely on their ethnic capital, explicit self-identification of membership and overt conformity become essential to avoid internal sanctions and ensure community support. Conforming to group-pressure can therefore be seen as a consequence of a lack of available opportunities and resources in mainstream society. Not doing so, and running the risk of being repudiated or socially excluded, can make ethnic minority members into marginal men (Stonequist 1937) who are no longer part of their ethnic community, nor completely accepted by the dominant society. Conversely, when there is greater tolerance and more openness in the larger society, the need to rely on ethnic communities and economies reduces and the communities' ability to enforce conformity pressure shrinks. Research suggests that in such societies, relatively few ethnic practices are retained after three generations (See, for example, Portes and Rumbaut 2006).

## CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This paper focuses on responses to indirect ethnic conformity pressure in Turkish communities in Belgium, and on how this affects ethnic boundaries and ethno-cultural change within immigrant groups. Drawing on in-depth interviews with second and third generation Turkish Belgians, we find that members of the Turkish community construct symbolic boundaries between their own group and the dominant population, and that the community as a whole tries to maintain that boundary by means of ethnic conformity pressure through social control. When community members "cross the

boundary” by giving up on certain aspects of their Turkish culture and identity, they are stigmatized as *becoming Belgian*, and in severe cases no longer accepted as members of the community. This is especially the case for women, who – like in many other ethnic communities (see for instance Dasgupta and Dasgupta 1994; Espiritu 2001) – are considered the main responsables for maintaining ethnic boundaries and group identity.

However, our study shows that conformity pressure through social control is not inescapable, and that individual members of the community respond to it with particular impression management strategies. Broadly speaking, we distinguish three different strategies: *conformity*, *creativity* and *disregard*. What distinguishes these three strategies from each other is (1) whether or not people try to maintain the impression that they are living up to the standards by which they are judged (distinguishing *disregard* from *conformity and creativity*) and (2) whether or not they actually realize these standards (*conformity*) or just engineer a convincing *impression* that these standards are being realized (*creativity*). In terms of boundary change, only *creativity* has the potential of blurring the boundaries, given that in the other two cases, the symbolic boundaries are not changed from within: those who disregard the conformity pressure leave the ethnic group or have never been part of it in the first place, and hence cross the boundary rather than blurring it. Those who conform also do not change the boundary, regardless of whether they conform involuntarily or not.

Which strategy people choose is shaped by a number of interrelated factors, in particular the severity of the norm violation, the social structure of the ethnic community, their gender, their own and their parents’ embeddedness in the Turkish community, and the availability of an alternative support network. Those who tend to disregard are most clearly distinguishable, because they are generally outsiders to the ethnic community and do not care as much about the impression they make. In many cases, this *sense of outsidersness* is related to their parents’ socio-cultural background: parents of disregarders tend to be more modern or liberal, often because they come from more urban regions in Turkey. Consequently, their children feel they are different from more traditional co-ethnics and do not feel the need to be accepted by them. Also, men tend to disregard more than women, because the sanctions of norm violation are much less severe for them.

In case people do value their membership of this more traditional community, which is the dominant pattern given the high degrees of exclusion and discrimination in the wider society, they have to take conformity pressure into account. Whether they choose for a strategy of conformity or one of creativity, depends on their gender, the social structure of the community, the severity of the norm violation and their parents’ expectations. Voluntary conformity occurs most among those who have the power to define the norms, in casu men and older people. Involuntary conformity typically

occurs when consequences of potential norm violation are high, i.e. when the actor is female, the norm violation is severe, and the social settings is characterized by high network closure and monitoring. Creativity finally is typical for women want to realize their desired lifestyle without losing membership and respect in the group. Because creativity has the potential to change ethnic boundaries – both the symbolic and the social dimension – women are not only keepers of culture (Billson, 1995) but at the same time cultural entrepreneurs who are actively engaging with their cultural frameworks, whilst continuously transforming them (See Bhachu, 1993, p. 101).

Unfortunately, the data do not allow us to draw conclusions about how age shapes the choice for a particular negotiation strategy and negotiation of conformity pressure changes throughout one's lifetime. The fact, however, that some respondents mentioned decreased monitoring and pressure after marriage, points towards the importance of particular life course events for the enforcement of conformity pressure. More research (preferably longitudinal) is needed to explore how exactly age, maturity and particular life course events (such as marriage or increasing financial independence) shape the experience and negotiation of ethnic conformity pressure.

While second and third generation Turkish Belgians may have some self-defined reasons to keep premigration cultural practices and ethnic boundaries alive, if it were not for their social and economic exclusion by the mainstream, they would have little motivation to do so. For this reason, responses to conformity pressure and, consequently, the maintenance of ethnic boundaries, should be seen in the light of the lack of available opportunities and resources in the wider society. In societies where certain ethnic groups' mobility and incorporation are blocked, these groups have a greater ability to maintain ethnic boundaries and enforce conformity pressure, compared to groups in societies that are more tolerant and open to immigrant incorporation and ethnic diversity. As such, we see a process of *double boundary maintenance* at work, in the sense that boundary maintenance by the mainstream results in more effective boundary maintenance by co-ethnics.

The findings of our study have different implications for theories on cultural incorporation and ethnic change among immigrants and their descendants. First, we want to point out that in studying individual-level processes of cultural negotiation, it is important to pay attention to how the social structures people are part of shape their cultural negotiations. Children of immigrants not only have to deal with parental pressure to conform to certain premigration cultural patterns, but also the ethnic community at large plays a role in this effort to resist assimilation. In case of strong ethnic conformity pressure and high network closure, the “old” and the “new” are not as much blended as they co-exist side by side, with people code-switching or even leading double lives frontstage and backstage.

Second, our study demonstrates highly cohesive co-ethnic communities should be understood in more ways than just as a protective force against downward assimilation. The same mechanisms that prevent people from assimilating into an underclass are also sources of constraint and stress, which potentially slow down cultural assimilation and cause acculturative stress, especially among women. Research among various Asian American groups confirms that for many young women, these expectations are a serious burden and can give rise to deep emotional pains, and even suicidal thoughts (See, i.e., Espiritu, 2001; Rumbaut, 1994; Wolf, 1997).

Finally, we want to highlight the value of the boundary approach in understanding processes of assimilation and cultural change. As first Barth (1969) and later Alba (2005) rightfully argued, processes of cultural retention and change are very much related to the construction, maintenance, blurring and disappearance of boundaries. In this study, we link boundary dynamics to processes of cultural change by focusing on how boundary maintenance can slow down cultural assimilation. By sanctioning behavior that is associated with what is considered “the other side of the boundary,” the co-ethnic community can make boundary crossing and assimilation an unattractive option for its members. In situations where the community has a high internal sanctioning capacity, this has the potential of slowing down cultural assimilation, especially in a context of bright social boundaries between the native and immigrant group. As such, a focus on ethnic conformity pressure, and the factors that shape individual responses to it, can help to explain why some groups or people culturally assimilate faster than others.

## CHAPTER 9

# “HOW CAN I FEEL BELGIAN IF BELGIANS DON'T ACCEPT ME?”

*Ethnic Boundaries and National Identity among Turkish  
Belgians.*

Klaartje Van Kerckem, Bart Van de Putte & Peter Stevens

Accepted for publication in book on National Identity in Europe, *Information Age Publishers*



*Racist graffiti on mosque building in Sledderlo, Genk*



**CONTRADICTION IN TERMINIS (3)**

*by Fatih*

Ik ben

Half en half

altijd al

overall tussenin

fifty-fifty

wit of zwart

zwart noch wit

'k ben zwart op wit een

Contradictio in terminis

Als ik vrede wil, krijg ik oorlog

Kga meer naar achter wil ik naar voren

'k ben een paradox, een antoniem,

ik ben...ik ben....wie de f\*ck ben ik?





## INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents an empirical study on Turkish Belgians' ethnic-boundary perception and how this shapes their self-identification in national and ethnic terms. Being Europe's largest immigrant and Muslim population, Turkish Europeans have been the target of many anti-immigrant and Islamophobic sentiments and practices. Different studies demonstrate that stereotypes and anti-immigrant sentiments are stronger towards Muslims, compared to other immigrant groups (Allen & Nielsen, 2002; Strabac & Listhaug, 2008). In many European countries, the strained relationship between the mainstream population on the one hand and several Muslim populations on the other hand can best be described as characterized by "bright ethnic boundaries" (Alba, 2005). Muslim immigrants (as well as their descendants) not only experience general anti-immigrant sentiments, but are also seen as the quintessential other that is difficult to integrate (Betz & Meret, 2009; Field, 2007; Kunst, Tajamal, Sam, & Ulleberg, 2012). In both everyday and public discourse, Muslims are depicted as the outsider within: a group that is essentially different from "Europeans" in terms of culture and religion, and therefore non-belonging. In addition to such discursive practices of othering (Jensen, 2011; Schneider, 2001), there is also a de-facto exclusion of members of Muslim groups, through everyday and institutional discrimination in labor and housing markets, as well as within the education system and social relations (De Rycke, Swyngedouw, & Phalet, 1999; Granato & Kalter, 2001; Silberman, Alba, & Fournier, 2006; Skrobanek & Jobst, 2010; Stevens, 2008; Van der Bracht & Van de Putte, 2013; Vandezande, Fleischmann, Baysu, Swyngedouw, & Phalet, 2009).

In this chapter we study how this context of bright ethnic boundaries and exclusion shapes Turkish Belgians' identification in ethnic and national terms. In focusing on Turks in Belgium, we study members of Europe's largest non-EU immigrant group, who are living in the Western-European country with one of the highest levels of anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiments (Strabac & Listhaug, 2008). Given the high degree of anti-Muslim sentiment and exclusion, Belgium is an interesting case, in the sense that we are more likely to find a clear link between exclusion and self-identification in ethnic and national terms.

The first aim of this study is to explore how these practices of exclusion by members and institutions of the mainstream – including both practices of othering and discrimination – are experienced by members of the Turkish population in Belgium. A large number of studies focus on the various ways in which individuals and institutions of the mainstream draw and enforce ethnic boundaries, but very little is known about how members of the targeted groups experience this themselves in their everyday lives. Finding out how ethnic boundaries present themselves to the ones on the less powerful side of the boundary is an important first step for studying the impact of ethnic

boundaries on individual-level subjective aspects of incorporation such as sense of belonging, and ethnic and national self-identification. Most studies that focus on how an exclusionary context shapes national or ethnic self-identification take perceived discrimination as their independent. However, ethnic boundaries have both a symbolic and a behavioral dimension (Wimmer, 2013), and it is therefore important to not only focus on perceived discrimination (reflecting the behavioral) but to also study how ethnic boundaries manifest themselves in discourse and other forms of representation (reflecting the symbolic).

The second aim of this study is to examine how exclusionary practices and discourses shape Turkish Belgians' ethnic and national self-identification. Acts of categorization and exclusion can have a far-reaching impact on ethnic minorities' self-identification (Jenkins, 2008; Rumbaut, 2005; Waters, 1990) and the discursive context in which the second generation grows up directly affects feelings of belonging (Crul & Schneider, 2010). Surprisingly however, European scholarship has devoted very little attention to how anti-immigrant and Islamophobic sentiments and discourses shape the self-identification of Muslim immigrants and their descendants. A limited number of studies has investigated how perceived discrimination affects self-identification in ethnic and national terms (Martinovic & Verkuyten, 2012; Maxwell, 2009; Skrobanek, 2009), but much less has been done on how discursive boundary drawing – for instance through practices of othering, categorization, or subtle, “everyday racism” (Essed, 1991) – shapes national and ethnic identification. In this study, we address both. After examining the different ways in which Turkish Belgians experience ethnic boundaries in their everyday lives, we analyze our informants' *identity narratives*, focusing on how their narratives of exclusion shape their identity narratives. In analyzing these narratives, We pay attention to the internal:external dialectic of identification – on how self-identity is shaped by both internal assertions and external categorizations (Jenkins, 1994) – demonstrating that both context and self-understandings interact in the formation of a stable identity .

Based on how our informants position themselves with regard to the labels *Turkish* and *Belgian*, we identify five different identity narratives. Each of these narratives represents a particular way of making sense of one's own complex, multidimensional identity, which results from negotiating one's own internal assertions and external practices of categorization and exclusion. By focusing on the internal:external dialectic of identification that is acted out in these narratives, we are able to demonstrate that the experiences of exclusion and othering shape self-identification, albeit not in a deterministic manner. Our analysis of the identity narratives demonstrates that people are active agents in constructing their own identities in the sense that they have the capacity to reclaim, reaffirm or reject those identities that they are denied from the outside.

This chapter is innovative in two ways. Firstly, we build on existing research on the impact of exclusion on identification, in not only paying attention to the role of perceived discrimination but also to how subtle discursive practices shape self-identification. Secondly, in focusing on the internal:external dialectic of self-identification, we provide a more in-depth insight into the different ways in which ethnic boundaries shape self-identification, and help to explain why identity threats such as discrimination and Islamophobia do not necessarily lead to a reactive ethnic identity or reduce national identification (see for instance Kunst et al., 2012).

### **TURKS-AS-MUSLIM: THE *OUTSIDER-WITHIN* AND *ESSENTIAL OTHER* IN EUROPE**

Within Belgium, Turks and Moroccans are considered as the prototypical foreigners (Spruyt & Elchardus, 2012). The observation that Turks-and-Moroccans-as-Muslims are usually lumped together as if they were Siamese twins is indicative of the ethnic boundary between Europe's established population and its Muslim population; a boundary which homogenizes the Muslim population and portrays Muslims and "Muslim culture" as essentially different and incompatible with European identity. In European immigration debates and public discourse, Islam is the focus of attention, because European identity, despite national variations, remains deeply embedded in Christian tradition in which Muslim immigrants constitute a visible "other" (Zolberg & Woon, 1999). Consequently, in Europe, religious boundaries function in the same way as racial boundaries in the United States (Bail, 2008; Foner & Alba, 2008): it is religion – more specifically Islam – that marks the boundary between "us" and "them," between those who belong to the mainstream and those who are considered outsiders. The boundary is "bright" (Alba, 2005) because there is no ambiguity over who belongs where: Islam and the culture of Muslims are presented as essentially different from Western values, and more often than not they are essentialized and represented as monolithic and unchangeable.

The idea that Islam and Muslims are essentially different from "the West" has its roots in orientalism as described by Said (1978). During colonialism, European domination was not only political and economic, but also took a cultural form. This cultural domination, or orientalism, consisted of representing "the West" ("us," Europe) as familiar, civilized, controlled and morally superior and "the East" ("them," "the Orient") as strange, uncivilized, irrational and backward. The contemporary perception of Islam can be seen as an example of neo-orientalist thinking (Saeed, 2007) in the sense that it homogenizes and essentializes the Muslim population, and represents so-called Muslim culture and religion as essentially different from Western identity. Muslim societies

and culture are represented as overly patriarchal, and characterized by tribal or feudal values and a culture of honor in which the status of women is low. In contrast, the prototypical European is conceived of as modern, tolerant, equality-minded and individualist (Razack, 2004). The image of the Muslim today strongly resembles Mosse's description of "the Wandering Jew" decades ago: "The eternal foreigner in our midst who clings to his backwardness and who could never learn to speak the national language properly or strike roots in the soil" (Mosse, 1985, p. 115).

### **ETHNIC AND NATIONAL SELF-IDENTIFICATION AS CONTEXTUAL. THE IMPORTANCE OF CATEGORIZATION AND DISCRIMINATION**

The approach taken in this chapter is to see identity and ethnicity as hybrid, fluid and contextual, rather than something fixed (Hall, 1992; Jenkins, 2008; Nagel, 1994). Ethnicity in particular is not a primordial given, but dependent on historical and contextual factors (Rumbaut, 2005). One of the most important factors in this respect are processes of external ascription and social categorization (Jenkins, 1994), because these create ethnic boundaries, which designate which ethnic categories are available for individual identification (Nagel, 1994). Waters (1990), for example, claims that the "ethnic options" available to individuals are limited to socially and politically defined ethnic categories, and attributes the difference in self-identification between Blacks and Whites in the United States to the limits of individual choice.

Considering the impact of mere categorization on identification, a strong effect of racial or ethnic discrimination – which couples actual practices of exclusion to categorization – should not surprise. Discrimination and divisive political campaigns sharpen ethno-racial identity boundaries and increase the salience of the category on the basis of which people experience unfair treatment (Rumbaut, 2005, p. 146). In the face of these perceived threats, descendants of immigrants can develop a so-called *reactive ethnicity* (Portes & Rumbaut, 1990; Rumbaut, 1994). Research on this matter among immigrants in Europe has yielded mixed results. Studies among Turks in the Netherlands and Germany have found a direct positive effect of perceived discrimination on (re-)ethnicization (Skrobanek, 2009), as well as a negative relationship between perceived discrimination and national identification (Kunst et al., 2012; Martinovic & Verkuyten, 2012). In contrast, among Pakistanis in Norway, national identification was not influenced by perceived Islamophobia or religious discrimination (Kunst et al., 2012).

## **INTERNAL:EXTERNAL DIALECTIC OF IDENTIFICATION**

No matter how important categorization and exclusion are in shaping identification, they do not determine identity construction in an inescapable manner. Many scholars have argued that identity construction is the result of a dialectic between external ascription and internal assertion (Cornell & Hartmann, 2007; Jenkins, 1994; Nagel, 1994; Rumbaut, 2005). In the field of ethnicity, Rumbaut (2005) stressed that ethnic self-identities “emerge from the interplay of racial and ethnic labels imposed by the external society” on the one hand and “the original identification and ancestral attachments asserted by the newcomers” on the other hand.

Regarding this internal or original identification, Cornell and Hartmann (2007) explain that ethnic or racial identities are often felt as being something primordial – anchored in blood ties, common cultural practices or physical links of race. Ethnic or racial identities, they argue, should be seen as constructed primordialities: identities experienced as touching something deeper – more primordial – than mere labels or interests. They argue that ethnicity is not simply a label that is forced on people but something that is to a certain extent chosen and negotiable: it can be accepted, resisted, redefined, actively defended and so forth. It is therefore important to not only focus on the circumstances, but also on how people actively respond to circumstances, guided by their cultural practices, histories and pre-existing identities.

We follow Cornell and Hartmann in their plea for a combination of circumstantialist and primordial approaches to the study of identification. By integrating elements of the primordial accounts into the constructionist approach, we add a creative component that helps to explain “the personally felt power of many ethnic and racial identities and the perceived naturalness that keeps them alive and binding in people’s minds” (Cornell & Hartmann, 2007, p. 73).

## **THE TURKISH POPULATION IN BELGIUM**

Turkish migration to Belgium offers a classic example of the labor migration typical in Western Europe in the 1960s and early 1970s (Reniers, 1999); it consisted mainly of migrants from rural areas in Turkey with little or no formal education (Phalet & Heath, 2011). In 1961, as few as 320 Turkish nationals resided in Belgium, but by 1970, that number had risen to 20,000 (all numbers based on Schoonvaere, 2013). No longer seeking to attract foreign workers, the Belgian government stopped granting visas to low-skilled workers in 1974, but migration from Turkey continued nevertheless, henceforward through family reunification and family formation. The Turkish population is now the

fifth largest population in Belgium with foreign roots, ranking after the Moroccan, Italian, Dutch and French populations.

Ethnic boundaries between the established population and Turkish Belgians are bright, both in social and symbolic terms. Turks occupy one of the lowest rungs on the social ladder and are “at the bottom of the ethnic hierarchy” (Phalet & Heath, 2011, p. 162). Both the migrants and their offspring are among the most disadvantaged members of Belgian society in terms of educational attainment (Timmerman, Vanderwaeren, & Crul, 2003). Although the second generation does significantly better than their parents in terms of educational attainment, the “ethnic disadvantage” (Phalet & Heath, 2011) persists in the second generation: many Turkish children end up in lower-ranked vocational tracks, high-school drop-out rates are four times as high as those for Belgians with no migration background, and the number of Turkish Belgians who attend university remains low (Duquet, Glorieux, Laurijssen, & Van Dorsselaer, 2005; Lacante, Van Esbroeck, De Schrijver, & Palmén, 2007; Phalet, Deboosere, & Bastiaenssen, 2007). Additionally, throughout the years and across the country, unemployment rates for Turkish Belgians have far exceeded those observed for the established population, and Turkish Belgians have been much less likely to enter professional, administrative and managerial careers (Phalet & Heath, 2011; VDAB, 2012; Vertommen & Martens, 2005).

Belgium is one of Europe’s “leading” countries regarding racist and anti-immigrant sentiments and right-wing opinions (Quillian, 1995; Zick, Pettigrew, & Wagner, 2008) and also here, these sentiments are consistently stronger when it concerns Muslims. For instance, in 2000, Belgium ranked second in terms of anti-Muslim sentiments, with 22.7 per cent of the respondents objecting to a Muslim neighbor (Strabac & Listhaug, 2008). These findings have been corroborated by Billiet & Swyngedouw (2009), who report that in Flanders, 48 per cent of the voters have “an extremely negative opinion on Islam and Muslims,” 42 per cent consider Islamic culture more violent than other cultures, and a stunning 81 per cent believes that Muslim men are “too domineering” towards their women. In Flanders, these Islamophobic and anti-immigrant sentiments are reflected in high political racism, expressed as a vote for Vlaams Belang, an extreme-right wing party with anti-immigrant views (Billiet & De Witte, 2008). Given these attitudes, it should not surprise that Turkish Belgians – being Muslim – experience a lot of discrimination, especially in the labor and housing markets (De Rycke et al., 1999; Stevens, 2008; Van der Bracht & Van de Putte, 2013; Vandezande et al., 2009).

Social boundaries between the Turkish and mainstream population are not only reflected in labor market and educational inequalities, but also in a consistently low intermarriage rates. In 1991, 7 per

cent of all married Turkish men and 3.8 per cent of Turkish women had a Western-European spouse (Lievens, 1999). A more recent study documents an increase over the past two decades, but numbers still remain relatively low: 14.3 per cent of the Turkish men who got married in 2008 – but only 8.2 per cent of the women – married an EU-citizen (Van Kerckem, Van der Bracht, Stevens, & Van de Putte, 2013).

## DATA AND METHODS

This chapter reports on a qualitative study carried out among second and third generation Turkish Belgians. Given the nature of the research questions, the main research method was in-depth interviews, which allowed an exploration of the complexities of identification processes. We restricted our sample to the cohorts who were born in Belgium in the 1980s and 1990s, and to those living in Flanders. These restrictions allow us to focus on a region with a high degree of anti-immigrant sentiments and political racism, and on those people who grew up in a time when these anti-immigrant feelings took center stage in public and political discourse. Our sample includes both second and third generation Turkish Belgians. Following Lievens (1999), we define the second generation as those who were socialized primarily in Belgium (born in Belgium or moved there before the age of 6). The third generation then includes those people who have at least one second generation parent. The sample is heterogeneous with regard to gender, age and educational attainment.

All participants in the study were told about the purpose of the research and promised confidentiality and privacy. Each was given the opportunity to choose the interview location and his or her own pseudonym. All interviews were carried out in Dutch, since all respondents were born and raised in Belgium. Most respondents were interviewed only once; interviews lasted from 36 minutes to 2 hours 45 minutes, and were transcribed verbatim.

Before the start of the interview, informants were asked to complete the *Twenty Statement Test* (Kuhn & McPartland, 1954) in order to get an idea of how much importance they attached to the different social identities that would be discussed during the interview. Subsequently, the informants were given a series of label cards, each of which had a particular social identity written on it (such as “Turk,” “Turkish Belgian,” “Muslim,” “Husband/wife,” “Student”) and were asked to choose those that they considered applicable to them. We deliberately focused on more than just ethnicity or nationality-related identifications, to get a complete idea of the informant’s self-identification, and be able to contextualize their ethnic and national identification. The entire interview was built around



these labels, discussing why some had been chosen and others not, constructing and explaining a hierarchy of salience, and explaining the meaning given to the labels.

The research is based on a Grounded Theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to data-analysis, using a combination of open-ended and axial coding. Open coding is “the part of the analysis that pertains specifically to the naming and categorizing of phenomena through close examination of data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 62), making it essentially about data management. Axial coding refers to “a set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 96), and is hence all about the generation of findings.

In a first phase, we read through the first interviews, marked the interesting themes (including, for instance, perception of exclusion and self-identification), and applied them to the data, systematically indexing (coding) the data in NVivo. Once the first interviews were broken up this way, we read through the raw data again, and used an iterative approach to turn the rather crude initial thematic framework into a more refined and inductively generated tree structure. The initial theme self-identification, for instance, was broken up into second-level codes “ethnic identity,” “national identity,” “gender identity,” “local identity,” etc. We used several of the Grounded Theory techniques to enhance theoretical sensitivity, in order to group the different codes in a meaningful way. One such technique was to use basic questions that denote a type of relationship (who, when, where, what, how, why?) to group together different codes into one category. We for instance grouped all the ways (how?) in which ethnic boundaries manifested themselves to the research participants, which resulted in second-level codes ethnic jokes, othering, discrimination, as subtypes of the first-level code ethnic boundary perception.

After this first phase of data management, we started looking more closely at the different codes and tried to establish links between the different categories, using principles of axial coding. This included a close reading and narrative analysis of the coded fragments as well as the identification of explicitly mentioned links between different codes (e.g. when respondent him/herself links a self-identification to exclusion). Finally, we looked at differences in ethnic-boundary perception and self-identification and tried to account for them by linking them up with socio-demographic and other relevant characteristics.

## PERCEIVING ETHNIC BOUNDARIES THROUGH BODY LANGUAGE, DISCOURSE AND DISCRIMINATION

If we want to study how this boundary between Muslims and the dominant population manifests itself to the former group, it is important to bear in mind that an ethnic boundary always has both a categorical and a behavioral dimension (Wimmer, 2013). Consequently, it is useful to make a distinction between discursive manifestations of the ethnic boundary (reflecting the categorical dimension) and discriminatory practices (reflecting the behavioral dimension). In addition, we also include body language as a way of drawing boundaries, as this emerged from our data analysis.

### BODY LANGUAGE

A first way in which informants feel categorized is through body language. Male informants in particular sometimes refer to people looking at them in a fearful or negative way, which they interpret as a sign of prejudice or anti-immigrant behavior.

[Q: Do you often get the evil eye?] Seriously. Yes, always, yes, yes. I can see it on people's faces (imitates it). They walk away, their eyes like this. You just see it (...). They only have to pass a mosque, even then. Instead of just saying hello. (...) You often get the evil eye and if you pay attention to it, it destroys you, but most Turks do not pay attention to it anymore. They say: it is just a Belgian. (Ömer, 21M)

They look at you with a different eye, some people. They look like... yeah, a foreigner or something. Or "what is he doing in our country?" And then you have a hard time because, you know, you are born here, you cannot do anything about it. We know the language, our nationality is Belgian, but we continue to be seen as Turks. (Seyid, 16M)

Both quotes are very powerful examples of how exclusionary it feels to be looked at as if one is dangerous or not welcome. By saying that he feels that people are looking at him as if he is "a foreigner," Seyid signals his perception of being categorized, and implicitly rejects the label of "foreigner". The fact that he is looked at as someone who does not belong in Belgium, makes him feel bad ("you have a hard time") because of his powerlessness vis-à-vis this categorization: he is Belgian by nationality and he knows the language, but still people see him as Turkish.

### DISCOURSE

Our informants' identity narratives reflect the many ways in which members of the established population construct ethnic boundaries in discourse, ranging from subtle *everyday racism* (Essed, 1991) or *everyday exclusion* (Davis & Nencel, 2011) to blatant forms of discursive racism. In

societies where most citizens express commitment to democratic principles of justice, equality and fairness, the notion of everyday racism is important to understand how ethnic and racial inequalities and boundaries are perpetuated (Beagan, 2003). The term was coined by Essed (1991), who described it as “practices that infiltrate everyday life and become part of what is seen as “normal” by the dominant group.” Cases of discursive everyday racism seem harmless and are often even well-intended by those who utter them, but are nevertheless experienced by the “ethnic other” as very exclusionary, particularly because “each racist joke, each racist assumption, occurs in the context of a personal and collective history of such trivial incidents, in the context of one’s own past experiences of racism and the experiences of friends and loved ones” (Beagan, 2003, p. 853).

A first manifestation of everyday racism that is mentioned by our informants is the widespread use of the word *allochtoon* (meaning both “allochtonous” and “allochton” – the noun derived from the adjective). In the 1990s, the word became common in Flanders and the Netherlands as a term to refer to migrants and their descendants. Although semantically, *allochtoon* refers to “someone who comes from elsewhere,” it is most commonly used in policy practice and public discourse to refer to members of non-western (read: Muslim) ethnic groups considered disadvantaged or less integrated into Belgian/Dutch society.

There is a shared understanding among the informants that the term is denigrating and exclusionary. People describe the word as “horrible” (*afschuwelijk*), “humiliating” (*vernedere*), “third division player” (*derdeklasser*), and the practice as unacceptable and narrow-minded:

I even think it is not acceptable, considering the whole migration history. I can understand that our ancestors were seen as migrants. But that in the case of the present generation, that you [Belgians] still feel the need to stick the label *allochtoon*, I find this... you know, I think that is in fact the narrow-mindedness of the people who live here [in Belgium]. (Aleyna, 27F)

According to Aleyna, it is unjustified to make a difference between established Belgians and those with foreign roots. By saying “considering the whole migration history,” she means that Turks have been present in Belgium since the 1960s, and that by now, their descendants should no longer be considered as foreigners. Yet, the word *allochtoon* continues to be used and she attributes this to “the narrow-mindedness” of the Belgians.

Our informants’ negative sentiments towards the term are related to the negative connotation that the word usually carries. The word not only signals an ethnic boundary between those with foreign ancestry and ethnic Belgians, but also has a negative ring to it, because it tends to be used for those who are considered problematic. To put it in the words of one of our informants: “If the media says ‘a couple of allochtonous youngsters’ – if you put youngsters behind it, then the fences are down –

then you know what is going to follow: 'have caused a riot,' 'have demolished,' there is no other way." The word *allochtonen* tends to be used in negative contexts only. *Allochtonen* are never just "people from elsewhere" but treated as "second class citizens, never quite the norm, as a problem, lagging behind" (Essed & Trienekens, 2008, p. 58).

A second way in which everyday racism manifests itself to our informants is through so-called *ethnic jokes* (Davies, 1982). Those who utter them consider them "just a harmless joke," but the narratives of our respondents illustrate their power as an exclusionary mechanism:

I am like conditioned to think that all Belgians see me as *allochtoon*. I don't know how come, but that is how I feel. And... sometimes it happens that it is ostentatiously manifested. For example in the train last time, children of eight years old were laughing amongst each other, they were joking and then one tells a joke and he says "And it was a Turk!" And then they all started laughing [she laughs] and you know, it really was like extremely funny. But it felt like – so I am the other, the different one so to say. Yes, I think Belgians see me as *allochtoon*, I do think so. I do not think that I will ever fit one hundred per cent in the group as Belgian. (Dilek, 27F)

The framing of the joke narrative signals that Dilek perceives it as a sign of categorization and exclusion. In the beginning of her narrative, she says that she assumes that all Belgians see her as allochtonous, and uses the story about the joke to support this impression. Although she thought the joke was funny, it gave her the feeling of being an outsider. Based on her joke narrative, she concludes that she will never fit a hundred per cent in the group as Belgian. The observation that jokes about ethnic minorities are part and parcel of the drawing of ethnic boundaries has been discussed extensively by Davies (1982, 1990). She argues that ethnic jokes delineate both social and moral boundaries of a nation or ethnic group and that "by mocking peripheral and ambiguous groups, they reduce ambiguity and clarify boundaries or at least make ambiguity less frightening" (Davies, 1982, p. 400).

Third, many informants feel categorized and as such excluded through cases of othering and a repeated focus on ethnicity in everyday interethnic encounters:

It is like people do not feel at ease when you arrive in a certain group and... they seem to feel the need to make a remark about your cultural background. Like about talking Dutch, or our weddings, or you know our kebab places. Those are the things you always hear. (...) It is like if I would move to Paris, and I would tell to every Parisian I meet "wow your Eiffel tower!" You get what I mean? Come on, it is... I think it is not useful and I think... instead of just seeing me as a person... Like who am I and who is [Aleyna]? They just automatically put it in the cultural context. (Aleyna, 27F)

By referring to her ethnicity, people give Aleyna the feeling that she is reduced to her Turkish roots. Instead, she would like to be seen in her entirety, as a person. Aleyna's frustration is

exemplary for the difficulties many members of ethnic minority groups have in conveying “the humanity that encompasses [their] total identity” (Lyman & Douglass, 1973). According to Schneider and Crul (2013, p. 33), the dominant discursive context in most European countries presents a serious challenge for belonging, because “it overemphasizes ethnic background as the main signifier in all societal contexts.” Indeed, in another part of the interview, Aleyna explains that she perceives this categorization as very exclusionary: “A couple of times, [my classmates] gave me subtle remarks like ‘Oh, I thought that in your culture it was not like that.’ So they kind of exclude you automatically.” By referring to how things are done differently “in [her] culture”, her classmates – probably unwillingly – give Aleyna the feeling that she is an outsider to their group. Aleyna considers this subtle boundary as even worse than overt racism or discrimination, because these are people she trusts, which makes it all the more painful to realize that they see her as an outsider as well.

Another example of everyday racism is subtle expressions of prejudice and cases of group homogenization. Utterances that signal ethnic prejudice are experienced as very irritating and frustrating, even when they are positive or neutral about the Turkish-Belgian conversation partner. Many people are especially irritated by comments such as “Wow, your Dutch is really good!” – which they not only consider ridiculous because they are born in Belgium, but also irritating because it signals a prejudice that all Turkish people in Flanders speak bad Dutch. Another example is the expectation that all Turkish girls have only limited freedom and are expected to stay at home rather than going out:

There are question marks immediately – always, in all sorts of ways. Also at work: “[Emine], we are going out to party, will you be able [signifying allowed] to come?” And I HATE that. I tell them “Why not? Why not?” It is just like, everybody sees it as different. And that is a pity. (Emine, 26F)

The tendency to essentialize and see the Turkish population as a homogeneous cultural entity also manifests itself in the utterance “but you are different”:

Sometimes people say – and I hate that utterance – “But you are not a real Turk, you are different.. I really hate that little sentence “You are not a real Turk.” Why am I not a real Turk? Are all Turks like THAT? I mean, just go to Turkey, just not to those regions where people here originate from, and you will notice that they are much more modern than people here. That is really something I hate. (Emine, 26F)

People like Emine, who do not fit the stereotypical idea of what Turkish people are like, are often labeled as “different from other Turks” and therefore “not a real Turk.” In doing so, ethnic Belgians homogenize the Turkish population and reaffirm existing stereotypes. Labeling people who do not fit

the stereotype as “not real Turks” signals that they consider particular cultural practices – in this case limited freedom for young women – as essential for defining Turkish identity, hence conveying the idea that all Turks are the same.

In addition to cases of everyday racism, some informants have also been confronted with blatantly racist or anti-immigrant comments, either directed at themselves or others. Sometimes these comments are even uttered by those occupying a formal position, such as teachers in a school context:

She really hated that teacher, my daughter. She had bad grades with that teacher. It was a teacher who looked through the window (...) and said “Look, the little criminals of the future.” I swear. I swear. “Little criminals of the future.” About two little Moroccans. It didn't matter [that they were Moroccan], [my daughter] is Turkish, but it does not matter, this is something you don't say. Just the fact that this teacher utters these words to the children, that hurts. [My daughter thought] “If they say it behind their back, they will probably do the same about me.” (Pinar, 49F)

Pinar continues her narrative by saying that such cases of racism play an important role in her children's identity formation, particularly because they happen in her children's most formative years and in a context in which they should feel safe, rather than be exposed to identity threats. The idea that age matters is also implicit in the following quote:

I might write down [that I am] “Belgian” but I experienced a lot of negative things, cases of racism, as a soccer player. As young soccer player, I was in a rather good team (...) and there were a lot of *allochtonen* in the team. (...). It was a good team and it was met with frustration by the parents of the opponents. With comments such as “brown monkey” and this and that. Shouting at twelve year old boys (...) and in a way, that has shaped the idea in my head “Look [Achmed], you are no Belgian dude, that is not how they treat .” So no, you are not looked at as Belgian. (Achmed, 27M)

In this narrative, Achmed shows how racist comments made him realize that ethnic Belgians do not accept him as a true Belgian. In the opening sentence, he implicitly rejects a self-identification as Belgian, because of these experiences. He goes on with an example to illustrate and justify his claim, and concludes by making the link between his self-identification (“you are no Belgian dude”) and his sense of not being considered Belgian.

## **DISCRIMINATION**

Most of our informants explicitly said that they encountered very few cases of discrimination. Given that many discriminatory practices are related to particular life-course events, such as finding a job or a house, this limited experience with discrimination might be related to the informants' age: at the time of the interview, the majority were in their early or mid-twenties and many were still studying

and living with their parents. Consequently, chances are low that they had already encountered discrimination in the labor or housing market, simply because they have not been looking for jobs or housing yet.

The examples of discrimination that were mentioned were exclusively cases of what Wimmer (2013) labels *everyday discrimination* – discrimination by individual people during everyday interactions outside the domains of state control. Several of our male interviewees for instance experienced discrimination when they tried to enter nightclubs:

I was often denied entrance in nightclubs and stuff. Especially in Belgium. In the Netherlands it is not that bad, but in Belgium we were often rejected. One time we were going to Zillion, we were four guys, and we had found (sic) three girls in the parking lot. Probably Pakistani, or Indian. They looked a bit like us (laughs). You behave decently, friendly and ask them to maybe try and get in together. Four guys, three girls, maybe that is a good group. They [the girls] did not reject us, so I would be really grateful if I would see them again. We arrived at the door, we were happy, they let us in and we get a piece of paper, a form, and we move on and it turns out to be a horror tunnel, like the fairground attraction: we enter one door and exit just like that through another one. Accompanied. And we could not go anywhere because the bouncer was in our way. (laughing) He accompanied us to the other door and that was the exit. So we were back outside, the entire group. We were looking at each other and realized we had been rejected. (Armageddon, 32M)

Sometimes I think maybe [the bouncers at clubs] heard a lot about fights or God knows what. I do not blame them, but I am not saying that everyone is the same. They say: “Yes you are a Turk, we have heard so much about you,” you know, that is what you always hear. “Fights and the like, so you cannot enter [the club].” But not everyone is the same. (...) You are denied access, but I think people should get a chance. I mean the Turks who have not done anything. (Sedat, 25M)

Like Armageddon and Sedat, many men talked about how they were often denied access to a nightclub, just because they were Turkish. Sedat’s narrative shows that he understands that he is denied entrance based on the prejudice that “Turks cause trouble,” and to a certain extent, he even partly accepts this discriminatory practice as legitimate. At the same time however, he considers the generalization that the prejudice entails as unfair, because “not everyone is the same,” and “people should get a chance.”

The narrative of Armageddon shows that men develop strategies in order to enhance the chance of being granted access. It is not uncommon for Turkish men to try and find a couple of women who are willing to show up at the door of a nightclub with them, as if they are a group of friends that wants to enter together. In doing so, men show they are aware of the stereotypes that exist about them: by arriving at the door with young women, they signal to the bouncers that they are not there

to harass women or cause trouble – two prejudices that many ethnic Belgians have about young Muslim men.

Several informants, both male and female, also referred to discriminatory practices when they were looking for a job or a place to live. In most cases, they felt the discrimination was based on prejudices, as is illustrated in the following narratives:

I went to the job office and that lady said “Oh good morning, I have not had time yet to look at your file, but I will do so right away.” And then she looks at it and says “(surprised tone) Higher education?” It sounded like “Good gracious! Higher education... you?!” (...) And that lady, really, she was constantly trying to undermine my self-confidence. After I went to see her for the second time, I really thought I would never find a decent job. She always gave me the lousy jobs. I mean, lousy, like social sector and stuff, and I thought “how are those good for me?” I mean seriously, what am I going to do in the social sector? Nothing. (Damla, 27F)

[Finding an apartment] was completely traumatizing. I never imagined it would be that bad. I always thought “We speak Dutch, we do not wear a headscarf and I am already a bit blonde.” So I did not think it would be problematic. But finding a place to stay really was a trauma. We were refused everywhere. And in the job market it is even more difficult to check. You are rejected, ok, but you do not know who the other candidates were and which qualities or skills they possess that I don't have. I notice that all allochtons who graduated, and who have a job, are doing a job that is related to allochtons, and I think it is really unfair. I feel like, if I graduate from university I have the same qualities as my co-students. We should be equal on the job market. I want to be in competition with them in the private job market. Why do I have to do a job that involves allochtons and be dealing with those problems and matters. I might as well do my thing in the [regular] economy. (Dilek, 27F)

Both women have experienced difficulties in the job market and both explicitly or implicitly convey the message that this is due to the prejudice that Turkish Belgians do not do well in school. Because of the generally low educational attainment among second and even third generation Turks, ethnic Belgians seem to have the prejudice that all Turkish Belgians do poorly in terms of education. Both women – who have both done very well in relation to many of their co-ethnics – experience frustration because they are not treated equally compared to ethnic Belgians with the same educational level. As Dilek argues, it is difficult to prove differential treatment, because one never knows anything about the skills and qualities of other job applicants. However, several highly mediatized cases of ethnic discrimination in the job market signal that their gut feeling about not getting a fair chance is probably right.



## **THE IMPORTANCE OF GENDER AND EDUCATION**

Our analysis of these different types of ethnic boundary perception reveals socio-demographic differences. First, in line with previous research (De Rycke et al., 1999), we find that there are gender differences: compared to women, men report more blatant forms of exclusion, such as explicit racism and discrimination, and they have more concrete examples of personal everyday discrimination. Women on the other hand talk a lot more about subtle and discursive ethnic-boundary drawing, and many state that they personally have not experienced blatant racism or discrimination. The observation that men experience more discrimination compared to women is probably partly related to the fact that are more exposed to potential discrimination, seeing that spend a larger amount of their time in public. In addition, it might also be related to the stereotypical image of Muslim men as “dangerous” and “threatening”, which stands in sharp contrast with the stereotype of the Muslim woman as a victim.

Secondly, we perceive differences in ethnic-boundary perception according to educational level: the higher educated more frequently report being excluded, compared to those who stopped studying after high school. One possible explanation is that more-educated people are more politicized in their behavior and attitudes and therefore more sensible to discrimination or othering practices. Another hypothesis is that the higher educated are not only more sensitive to cases of ethnic-boundary drawing, but that they are also more likely to be confronted with ethnic boundaries because they have more contact with prejudiced ethnic Belgians. Turkish Belgians who do not move on to tertiary education have generally been in a vocational track at secondary school. Because this track is especially popular among ethnic-minority pupils, these pupils might have a lower perception of being different, both because there are many co-ethnics, and because the ethnic Belgian pupils and teachers are used to ethnic diversity. Those people who go to schools that are specialized in the higher-ranked general track – schools which often have a low proportion of ethnic minority pupils – seem to experience more categorization and exclusion, not seldom from the part of the teachers, who are not used to dealing with ethnic diversity. When people move on to tertiary education, chances are high that they experience even more categorization as a result of increased contact with people who are not used to ethnic diversity and are hence more prejudiced.

## **FROM A SENSE OF EXCLUSION TO AN INCLUSIVE IDENTITY**

In line with theories on identification and social categorization, we notice interrelatedness between how informants self-identify and their perceptions of ethnic boundaries. Identity narratives are

closely linked to narratives of othering and exclusion, which signals that identification is to a large extent shaped by people's perception of how others categorize and treat them.

Before we move on to the discussion of different identity narratives, it is important to point out that many informants not only feel excluded and othered by members of the established population in Belgium, but that they equally have a feeling of being outsiders during their trips to Turkey:

People do not see me as Turkish either you know. Because the moment you are on holiday abroad or in Turkey, you are the one who comes from Europe, you are European. You are the German in fact. If I were to say "I pack my belongings and move to Turkey," I would not be one of the guys. Maybe I would be after a while, but I will always be considered as the European. (Achmed, 27M)

Because ethnic Belgians do not consider them as true Belgians, and Turks do not consider them as Turkish, several interviewees reported a feeling of not belonging anywhere and some even said they were confused about their identity.

But a feeling of being an outsider does not necessarily lead to identity crises. In what follows, we demonstrate how identification is to a large extent shaped by processes of othering and exclusion, while simultaneously highlighting that people are active agents in constructing a positive identity. Based on how people position themselves vis-à-vis the labels Turkish and Belgian we identify five different identity narratives. In discussing each of these narratives, we zoom in on the meaning people give to the labels Belgian and Turkish, as well as on how they link their self-identification to perceptions of exclusion and othering, hence uncovering the internal:external dialectic of identification. We treat these identity narratives as expressions of the different ways in which people make sense of their multidimensional identity and as the internal:external dialectic of identification in action, and not as an reified, exhaustive list of all possible "identification types."

## **BELGIAN ON PAPER, TURKISH BY HEART**

The first identity narrative is one in which people combine a strong feeling of being Turkish with a recognition that they are Belgian by birth:

I feel like... I am Turkish but I am born here in Belgium so I am actually also a Belgian. And that is the thing, you feel very Turkish... but actually you are Belgian (...) So if you ask me, yes I am Belgian, but I am a Belgian from Turkey. Most people say "I am just Turkish," no, if you are born here, you are Belgian. (Emine, 26F)

For people who identify as Belgian on paper and Turkish by heart, the two identities each have a different meaning, as Emine's narrative illustrates. When she talks about the label "Belgian," she uses the verb *to be*, whereas she uses *to feel* in the context of her Turkish identification. Hence, what

it means to be Belgian is defined in terms of nationality, whereas being Turkish is defined in emotional terms. In many cases, people smile or touch their heart while talking about being Turkish, signaling a strong emotional attachment. They talk about how they feel closer to the Turkish culture than to the Belgian one, and about how they feel better around Turkish people.

This distinction between an emotional identification on the one hand and a civic, national one on the other hand mirrors Verkuyten & Dewolf's (2002) distinction between being, feeling and doing. Just like the Chinese in their study, many of our informants make an unconscious distinction between what could be labeled as an emotional identification (feeling) and a categorical one (being); the latter referring to a category they merely belong to, without necessarily feeling closely attached to it.

In many cases, the lack of emotional identification with the label Belgian is explicitly or implicitly linked to the perception of being excluded or considered different by ethnic Belgians.

"Do you feel Belgian?" [my teacher] asked me. I replied: "The moment that you are going to see me walk in the streets as a Belgian, I mean, when you walk in the street and you think 'Hey, look, that Belgian kid there,' then I will feel Belgian," I said. "I promise." (Achmed, 27M)

Yes, I am a... Turkish Belgian. Or Belgian Turk. You can maybe look at it from both sides. One who actually... who feels more Turkish here in Belgium. And who still has these feelings that you are seen by some people as, you know, let's say "the brown one," you know. (Ayhan, 31M)

In the first narrative, Achmed signals that he is conscious of the fact that his teacher categorizes him as Turkish, and links this categorization to his self-identification: he promises that once the teacher starts to see him as Belgian, he himself will in turn feel Belgian. What he is saying more implicitly, is that as long as people categorize him as Turkish, he will never feel Belgian. Also Ayhan links his emotional identification to external categorization: he feels more Turkish (compared to Belgian) and immediately links this to the fact that he is racially categorized by some people as "the brown one."

But the limited emotional identification with the label Belgian does not imply that people reject a Belgian identity. In fact, many informants stress their Belgian identity, as a way of reclaiming an identity that is denied to them from the outside. They object to the limited "identity options" (Waters, 1990) available and narratively assert their Belgian identity by stressing that they are good Belgian citizens, and that Belgium is the country where they are born and have spent all of their lives.

It is not because we have other habits, another culture, that we do not belong here. Because we go... we also follow the same rules as the Belgians. We also have to do our paperwork, we also have to do payments (...) In terms of life in Belgium, everything is the same. We also do our payments for instance. When we go shopping, we also wait in line for our turn like the Belgians do. (Serpil, 27F)

As a result of exclusion and categorization, Serpil does not feel very Belgian, but this quote shows that she does identify as such in terms of citizenship. Based on her Belgian citizenship and the fact that she fulfills her duties as a Belgian citizen, she demands equal treatment: she observes the rules just like ethnic Belgians do, so she should be treated equally and be seen as belonging in Belgium.

In sum, this narrative combines a strong emotional identification as Turkish and a more categorical national or civic identification as Belgian, which serves to reclaim an identity that is denied from the outside. The limited emotional identification as Belgian is often explicitly linked to perception that they are not considered as “true Belgians” by ethnic Belgians, which signals that discursive manifestations of ethnic boundaries are potentially as consequential as actual or perceived discrimination.

## **BELGIAN WITH TURKISH ROOTS**

The second identity narrative is built around a strong emotional identification as Belgian and recognition of one's Turkish roots. Here again, people make a distinction between how they feel (i.e. Belgian) and what they recognize they are (i.e. Turkish):

We are born in Belgium but you cannot just ignore your roots. You cannot say “my parents are Belgian,” because that is not the case. We are Turks, we are Turks by roots. And I see myself as a Belgian Turk. I cannot say that I am hundred per cent Turk, no. I am born here [in Belgium], I live here, I speak the language, I work between these people, I have always lived here. I do feel Belgian. (Otoman, 32M)

The difference between the previous identity narrative and this one is that people in this category feel Belgian and recognize their Turkishness, whereas in the former pattern, it was the other way around. What it means to be Belgian is in this case not only defined in terms of citizenship, the identification is also emotionally felt. This narrative is most typically found among those who have frequent, close contacts with ethnic Belgians and have lost much of their sense of being Turkish.

Most informants who identify this way have experienced cases of othering or exclusion just like anyone else, but these experiences do not take up a prominent role in their identity narratives. Rather, their negative experiences are minimized, or presented as something they actively try to prevent:

It is the way it is, you don't have to complain about it. My name is not Jan, or Peter. You know? You don't get to choose your parents, nor your origins. But you have to assert yourself. That is how I function. Someone else would say “(lamenting tone) Uuuu, we are not accepted and blahblahblah.” No, you have to make yourself accepted (Ferhat, 28M).

According to Ferhat, Turkish people have to accept that they are treated differently because of their ethnic origin, but that does not mean they have to be passive about not being accepted. Rather, his stance is that people are active agents who need to assert themselves and make themselves accepted. Rather than focusing on potential threats to his Belgian identification, Ferhat chooses to not give too much importance to exclusionary discourses or practices but to actively make himself accepted. As such, he eliminates potential threats to his Belgian identity, hence making such identification possible.

The idea that Turkish Belgians have to work especially hard “to prove themselves” vis-à-vis ethnic Belgians also surfaced in other identity narratives, but there, it was often seen as “exhausting” and “unfair.” Within this identity narrative however, it is accepted as legitimate, and as something one “just has to do” in order to become accepted.

### **THE ESSENTIAL TURK**

In this third identity narrative, people stress and are proud of their Turkish identity and reject a Belgian one:

In fact, I do not feel Belgian at all. I have Belgian friends and stuff. But...I know of myself that I have Turkish blood and that I am not a Belgian in fact, that I would rather have been born in Turkey; or would rather live there than here. (Seyid, 16M)

In the essential-Turk narrative, Turkish and Belgian identities are reified and presented as mutually exclusive. Turkishness is described as an essential part of who they are and as something that is incompatible with Belgian identity. The rejection of Belgian identity is usually accounted for by referring to a sense of being essentially different from Belgians, and a strong sense of belonging in Turkey. People who identify as such, describe Turkey as “their country” and long to be reunited with “their people.” Such a way of self-identifying is a clear example of *constructed primordialities* – a notion coined by Cornell and Hartman to refer to the idea that ethnicity is felt or constructed as being something primordial:

Whatever [the] actual origins, [it is] experienced by many people as touching something deeper and more profound than labels or interests or contingency. This felt power (...) seems to be rooted in intimately shared experiences and interactions, in the sense of connection to the past, and in the quasi-mystical significance often attributed to blood ties” (Cornell & Hartmann, 2007, p. 93).

What is remarkable in the identity narratives of the essential Turk is that they do not explicitly link their identification with a sense of exclusion. They are proud of being Turkish and link their identification up with essentializing narratives in which they refer to blood ties and roots, rather than

narratives of exclusion. However, all of them talk about a strong sense of exclusion and cases of discrimination at some point in the interview. It seems they have constructed a reactive ethnic identity (based on their already present ancestral attachments) and attached a positive meaning to it.

### **THE IN-BETWEEN**

The most dominant narrative among our informants is that of being in-between. This sense of being in-between is usually described as feeling both Turkish and Belgian, but as considered neither of the two:

I am a Turk and I am also a Belgian, because I am born here, I have the Belgian nationality, I went to school here, I studied here, I work here. I feel both. But I personally think that we are in-between. Like when we go on holiday to Turkey, they say like... "look, there's a Belgian." They do not accept us as Turks (...) [And here in Belgium], they will definitely say "that is a migrant," "that is a stranger." And in Turkey it is exactly the same. We are not accepted there, nor here... We are in-between. (Azra, 34F)

The sense of being in-between results from the combination of a self-identification as both Turkish and Belgian, and the awareness of being considered an outsider in both Turkey and Belgium. Depending on which feeling dominates, we can make a distinction between *attached* and *unattached* in-between narratives. In attached in-between narratives, people highlight the positive aspects of being in-between in cultural terms, referring to a creolization process in which they combine the positive of both worlds. Also, they do not seem to favor one of the two identities (i.e. Belgian and Turkish) in terms of how they feel. They stress that they can feel both, usually depending on the circumstances. In the unattached in-between narratives, people interpret their in-between position negatively in terms of belonging nowhere – a state which is characterized by the absence of a positive social identification as Turkish and/or Belgian, and labeled and felt as an identity crisis. Considering the fluidity of identification however, it is likely that as time passes, this identity crisis fades away, as people find an alternative source of identity, which is not ethnic or national but, example, local, religious or supra-national (cf. *infra*).

### **THE WORLD CITIZEN/HUMAN BEING**

The final identity narrative is one in which people stress their identity as a world citizen or human being, either because these all-embracing categories provide an alternative identity in the absence of other positive options, or because they simply refuse to identify in ethnic or national terms. The case of Dilek is illustrative for the first of these motivations. Dilek has a strong sense of exclusion and

during the interview she explicitly rejected Belgian identity. While talking about how she lives her life however, she started to consider her own narrative as very contradictory:

Actually, maybe I do have an identity crisis. Because I am very contradictory. I say that I am Turkish, but in fact I have a hundred reasons (laughs) [why I am not Turkish]. (...) You know, maybe... Isn't it possible that because I am not Belgian, or I do not want to call myself Belgian, and because I do not fit in with being Turkish, that I comfort myself with the idea that I am a world citizen. So that is maybe how I identify. (...) Because I do not fit into those two things, I see myself as a world citizen. And it is so broad, that I cannot but fit in (laughs). That is a category that suits me. Yes, world citizen! (Dilek, 27F)

This quotation reflects Dilek's pathway to the construction of an all-embracing identity: in reaction to a high sense of exclusion by Belgian society, she has constructed a strong Turkish identity, but during her narrative she starts to realize that she "does not fit in with being Turkish" either. Because she now feels she can neither identify as Belgian, nor as Turkish, she chooses the label world citizen as an alternative inclusive identity.

In Dilek's case, the identification as a world citizen grew out of a lack of other group identities, but for others it can also grow out of a refusal to think in terms of ethnic boundaries:

[I put world citizen at the top of the hierarchy] because I am a human being. What is most important for me is a human being. We are all built with the same raw material. You, me, Jan, Ahmet, Mustafa or Abdel of Jean. We are all human beings. That is [what] world citizen [means to me]. (Armageddon, 32M)

Armageddon first and foremost wants to identify as a human being, and chooses this label because it is all-inclusive and uniting. It focuses on what links people together, rather than on the differences and boundaries. By identifying as a world citizen they are the change they want to see.

In socio-demographic terms, this identity narrative is especially common among the higher educated, who in most cases have a high sense of exclusion. Because of their higher education, they have more contact with ethnic Belgians, which has led to a cultural creolization process in which they have mixed Turkish and Belgian cultural practices and attitudes into a new hybrid culture. To a certain extent, they feel similar to ethnic Belgians in terms of lifestyle; but the experienced or perceived exclusion – both in Belgium and in Turkey – results in a strong sense of exclusion. Although some of the informants were at the time of the interview still struggling with the resulting identity crises, many have found a way out by identifying with an all-embracing category such as world citizen or human being.

## DISCUSSION

Research has demonstrated that Belgium is one of Europe's "leading" countries with regard to ethnic prejudice and anti-immigrant sentiments, and that these negative feelings are even stronger towards the Muslim population (Quillian, 1995; Strabac & Listhaug, 2008). Being the largest Muslim population in Europe and the second largest in Belgium (the largest being the Moroccan population), Turks are exposed to an array of orientalist prejudices, discursive othering practices and institutional and everyday discrimination. Considering the importance of exclusion and categorization for self-identification, this study focuses on how these discourses and practices of exclusion and othering shape Turkish Belgians' national and ethnic self-identification. Drawing on in-depth interviews with second and third generation Turkish Belgians we explore how Turkish Belgians themselves experience ethnic boundaries in their everyday lives and on how their narratives of exclusion and othering act out in their identity narratives.

We find that Turkish Belgians are confronted with ethnic boundaries through ethnic Belgians' body language, discourse and discriminatory practices. The observation that boundaries manifest themselves in both discourse and practice echoes Wimmer's (2013) claim that boundaries always consist of a categorical (or symbolic) and a behavioral dimension. The categorical dimension is acted out by ethnic Belgians through a myriad of discursive practices, including both subtle everyday racism (Essed, 1991) and blatantly racist utterances. The behavioral dimension translates itself in everyday discrimination in the housing and labor market and within certain social settings, most particularly nightlife. Compared to cases of discursive exclusion and everyday racism, cases of discrimination are much less frequently voiced, and mentioned almost exclusively by male informants.

Our analysis shows that even in the absence of explicit racism or personal discrimination, many of our informants have the feeling of being considered different and excluded, as a result of subtle ethno-religious boundaries implicit in discourse and behavior of ethnic Belgians. In fact, many more informants based their sense of exclusion and being different on practices of categorization and subtle everyday racism than on factual discrimination. One hypothesis for this strong impact of everyday racism and discursive exclusion is that it is much more socially acceptable and therefore more widespread than actual discrimination. Moreover, the fact that it not only occurs in hostile contexts but also in friendly interactions with friends and in supposedly safe settings such as a therapy session or the school context, makes it all the more painful and maybe an even bigger identity threat for those who experience it.



In line with what has previously been observed (Cornell & Hartmann, 2007; Jenkins, 1994, 2008), our analysis demonstrates that identification of Turkish Belgians is the result of a dialectic between external processes of ascription and exclusion on the one hand, and internal assertion on the other hand. We have identified five different identity narratives, based on how people position themselves vis-à-vis the labels Turkish and Belgian, and on how they link their self-identification to their experiences of exclusion and othering. Although we observed that narratives of othering and exclusion often take center stage within the identity narratives, we also found that perceived exclusion or discrimination not necessarily result in a rejection of a Belgian identity or in the adoption of a reactive, dissimilative ethnic identity. Our analysis shows that a sense of exclusion does not determine identity construction in an inescapable manner, but that people are active agents who can reject categorization and assert certain identities. In the absence of an emotional identification with Belgians, people do seem to need another identity that provides them with a sense of belonging. For some people, this sense of belonging is provided by their membership in the Turkish community. Those identifying as Turkish by heart, Belgian on paper and as the essential Turk, compensate their sense of exclusion with the positive feelings attached to being Turkish. When the sense of belonging in the Turkish community is not strong, people nevertheless are able to construct a positive, inclusive identity by identifying with the all-embracing categories of world citizen or human being. In case of no alternative identification finally, people can perceive an identity crisis, but given the fluidity of identification, this is most likely to be a temporary phase, which will eventually end as people find alternative forms of identification.

The different identity narratives not only represent different constellations of ethnic, national and supra-national identities, but also different ways of negotiating ethnic boundaries and responding to discourses and practices of exclusion: those who identify as Belgian on paper, Turkish by heart report that it is hard to feel Belgian, but nevertheless reclaim the Belgian identity that is denied to them from the outside, by stressing their Belgian citizenship. The few who identify as being Belgian with Turkish roots refuse to see themselves as victims of exclusion and actively try to be accepted and hence eliminate a possible threat to their Belgian identity. Essential Turks have constructed a narrative that presents their ethnic identity as reified, primordial and incompatible with Belgian identity, hence making external categorization seem inconsequential. In the in-between narrative, the double sense of exclusion is counterbalanced with the positive feelings associated with having “the best of both worlds.” In the final narrative – that of the world citizen or human being – people react to ethnic boundaries and exclusion by rejecting the idea of boundaries and stressing what unites people, hence “being the change they want to see.”

Linking back our results to previous research, our study confirms Jenkins' findings that externally-located processes of social categorization are very influential in the production of social identities. To a certain extent, it also confirms the finding that categorization and exclusion can limit the ethnic options available to choose from (Waters, 1990), at least when it comes to emotional identification: those who have a sense of being excluded by ethnic Belgians, tend to not feel any emotional attachment to that particular social identity; but this does not mean that they do not identify as such. With regard to ethnic options our most remarkable finding is that people not only find alternative ways of identification when certain options are made unavailable, but that they also actively re-claim those identities that have been denied to them.

Overall, reactive identifications such as the essential Turk are rather uncommon, given the observation that a sense of exclusion or othering is widespread among our informants. This finding puts into perspective the quantitative studies on the link between perceived discrimination and reactive ethnicity (Maxwell, 2009; Skrobanek, 2009). Although there is certainly a relationship to be found between the two, our analysis shows that it should not be assumed that perceived discrimination or exclusion necessarily leads to a reactive, dissimilative identity. Some people choose to ignore that exclusion, or re-claim the identity that is denied to them by others, referring to their nationality, birth or good-citizenship practices.

This chapter has linked together narratives of exclusion and narratives of identity, but much remains to be done. First, we have demonstrated that both subtle and blatant forms of ethnic-boundary drawing shape self-identification, but quantitative research is necessary to study the exact impact of both. Based on our findings, we hypothesize that practices of everyday racism – such as ethnic jokes, a repeated focus on one's ethnicity, generalizations and categorizing labels such as *allochtoon* – are experienced as at least equally exclusionary – if not even more – as actual discrimination, both because they are more widespread and because they occur in supposedly safe and familiar contexts. Consequently, we hypothesize that self-identification is shaped at least as much by subtle discursive experiences of ethnic boundary drawing as by practices of discrimination.

Secondly, more research is needed to understand whether the impact of othering and exclusion differs according to age or between particular stages in the life course. For instance, does it make a difference if one experiences exclusion and discrimination early on in the life-course – during one's most formative years? What happens when people start being confronted with discrimination after having grown up in a context with little or no experiences of exclusion?

Finally, our study also does not allow for an in-depth exploration of how patterns of identification shape perceptions of exclusion or othering, nor does it enable us to answer how perceived exclusion

relates to actual experiences of personal discrimination. All of these are interesting research questions in their own right and we hope that our study will be an incentive for other researchers to take up the challenge to tackle them.

# CHAPTER 10

# TRANSNATIONAL MARRIAGES ON THE DECLINE

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*Explaining Changing Trends in Partner Choice among Turkish  
Belgians*

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This article reports a decline in transnational marriages among Turkish Belgians between 2001 and 2008 and explains the changing trends through a qualitative study of Turkish Belgians' current partner preferences and union formation practices. Young people prefer a local marriage because it enables upward social mobility, and the possibility of premarital relationships and lower parental involvement seem to further add to the declining popularity of transnational marriages. Despite these changes, however, a considerable percentage of people continues to marry a partner from the country of origin. By identifying four "types" of transnational marriages we highlight the changes and diversification with regards to transnational marriages.



Ik snap het niet hoe ze dat nog kunnen doen. Dat iemand die hier opgegroeid is, hier geboren is, dat die dan gaat zeggen, ik ga met iemand uit Turkije trouwen. Het kan natuurlijk altijd zijn dat hij verliefd is geworden, maar het is meestal niet uit verliefdheid, dat weet ik ook, dat weet jij waarschijnlijk ook wel. Ik snap het niet echt.

MURAT, 22M



## INTRODUCTION

Notwithstanding an immigration ban in 1974, many Western European countries have continued to receive new immigrants from non-European countries that used to provide them with guest workers. One of the main reasons the ban did not effectively stop immigration is that migrants and their descendants used the possibility of family reunification as a reason to marry someone from their country of origin. In a study based on the 1991 Belgian census, Lievens (1999) found that among Turkish Belgians, 74.7 percent of the men and 68.7 percent of the women married an “imported” partner. Strassburger (2004) demonstrated that of all marriages of Turkish residents in 2006 that occurred in Germany, over 60 percent involved a partner who had lived in Turkey prior to the marriage. And Bijl and colleagues (2005) concluded that in the Netherlands between 1999 and 2001, “almost two-thirds of all marriages entered into by Turks and Moroccans [were] migration marriages”. In all of these cases, the preference for a transnational marriage was observable not only among those of the first and 1.5 generations, but to an almost equal extent among the second generation.

The fear that these transnational marriages would slow down the integration process spurred politicians in countries such as Denmark, Belgium, and the Netherlands to launch a plea for stricter immigration laws. In an attempt to reduce immigration and prevent forced marriages, the Danish Alien Act was amended in 2002. One of the most prominent changes set the age threshold at 24 for both partners. Similar measures were taken in the Netherlands in 2004. There, the age threshold was set at 21 for both partners, financial requirements were stipulated for the “importer,” and a citizenship exam was made obligatory for the marriage migrant. In April 2011, Belgium adopted family reunification laws that strongly resemble those of the Netherlands.

This type of marriage-related migration is not unique to immigrant groups in European countries – it has, for instance, been observed among Asians in the United States (Kibria, 2012; Thai, 2003) and Australia (Khoo, 2001) – but the European case seems to be unique in the public and political attention it has received. In a comparative study of transnational marriages among Bangladeshi, Kibria (2012) shows that the politicization of transnational marriages was observable only in Britain and was absent in the U.S. But within Europe, differences have also been found in the extent to which the phenomenon is politicized. In newer countries of immigration, such as Italy and Spain, family migration is not an issue and is marginal to the public debate (Kraler, 2010). In Britain, a country that has one of the highest number of immigrants and the highest rates of people immigrating, the issue has also not received the attention it gets in continental Europe, although



recently the British government has begun to adopt the policies of its neighbors “in seeking to tighten restrictions on spousal immigration” (Charsley, Storer-Church, Benson, & Van Hear, 2012).

Initially, the restrictive policies that some European countries adopted seem to have accomplished their goal and to have led to a decrease in transnational marriages. In the Netherlands, for instance, the 2010 integration report declares that in 2009, only 14 percent of the Turkish second generation married a partner from their home country, compared to over 40 percent in 2004 (Van der Vliet, Ooijevaar, & Boerdam, 2010). While legal restrictions are one plausible explanation for this change, they should not be assumed to be the only explanation; the decline may also be a result of changes in attitudes and practices within immigrant communities. Different studies (Autan, 1995; Beck-Gernsheim, 2007; Gonzalez-Ferrer, 2006; Hartung, Vandezande, Phalet, & Swyngedouw, 2011; Hooghiemstra, 2001; Huschek, de Valk, & Liefbroer, 2012; Lievens, 1999; Milewski & Hamel, 2010; Strassburger, 2004; Timmerman, 1999; Yalçın, Lodewijckx, Marynissen, & Van Caudenberg, 2006) have provided insight into why people chose a transnational marriage in the eighties, nineties and the early 21st century, but little is known about what their children or younger family members currently think about it.

This study addresses this lacuna in scholarship on transnational marriages by linking the most recent statistics on transnational marriages among young Turks in Belgium to their current attitudes, discourses, and practices regarding partner choice and marriage. The focus on Belgium is particularly interesting because the laws regarding family reunification did not become restrictive until April 2011. Consequently, any decline observed in transnational marriages cannot be attributed to changes in the legislation. The aim of our inquiry is twofold. First, we will analyze trends in partner choice among Turkish Belgians from 2001 to 2008. Second, our study seeks to explain recent trends through a qualitative analysis of young Belgian Turks’ preferences, attitudes, and practices regarding transnational marriages and links these current trends to previously observed risks and advantages associated with transnational marriages.

## **TURKISH MIGRATION TO BELGIUM**

Migration from Turkey to Belgium started in the early 1960s and consisted of three distinct migration waves (Lievens, 2000). The first wave of *labor migration* was initiated by the Belgian government in an attempt to resolve the shortage of laborers in certain industrial sectors. At that time, mostly men immigrated 75 percent of whom were married (Reniers, 1999). Despite initial plans to return to Turkey, most migrants eventually settled in Belgium, which gave rise to the second migration wave of *family reunification*. In 1974, the Belgian government called a moratorium on

immigration, but rather than bringing the migration to a halt, this created a new dynamic: *marriage migration*. This third migration wave is ongoing and brings around 3,000 Turkish citizens to Belgium per year, the majority of whom enter through a transnational marriage (Timmerman, Lodewijckx, & Wets, 2009).

Rather than being studied in the context of migration, the phenomenon of transnational marriages is, in the Turkish case, often framed with regard to the partner preferences of those already residing in Europe. For instance, in a study based on census data, Lievens (1999) demonstrates that in 1991, 74 percent of married Turkish men and 68 percent of married Turkish women residing in Belgium were married to a partner from Turkey. More recent research shows that between 1991 and 2004, this did not change drastically. Corijn and Lodewijckx (2009) found that in 2004, slightly over 60 percent of all married Turkish Belgians between 20 and 29 years old were married to a partner from Turkey, with no notable gender differences in choosing a transnational marriage.

Turkish migrants and their offspring are considered among the most disadvantaged members of Belgian society with regard to educational attainment and employment (Phalet & Heath, 2010; Timmerman, Vanderwaeren, & Crul, 2003). Most labor migrants and their spouses come from rural areas in Turkey and have had little formal education. Although the children are doing better than their parents, there is still a large gap between those children and native Belgians when it comes to school success and employment. Research has demonstrated that the “Turkish disadvantage” is perpetuated from the migrant generation to their children through mechanisms of class disadvantage, and that this results in an underrepresentation of the 1.5 and second generations in tertiary education and a high risk of school dropout in secondary education (Phalet, Deboosere, & Bastiaenssen, 2007). In addition to their disadvantaged structural position, the Turkish population is one of the immigrant populations in Belgium that is most stigmatized and most discriminated against (De Rycke, Swyngedouw, & Phalet, 1999; Stevens, 2008; Van Craen, Vancluysen, & Ackaert, 2007).

## **EXPLAINING TRANSNATIONAL MARRIAGES**

Three distinct characteristics have contributed to an increase in transnational marriages in post-World War II European immigration: (1) stimulating factors in the emigrant community, (2) a connection between emigrant and immigrant communities and (3) stimulating factors in the immigrant communities (Lievens, 1999). These aspects have been present particularly in the Turkish immigrant community in Belgium. First, one of the most important stimulating factors in the emigrant community was and is the lack of employment opportunities in Turkey (Loobuyck, 2006). Second, the strong transnational ties that families and communities maintain in both the sending and

receiving countries have provided mediating channels that are useful for establishing transnational marriages. Third, concerning stimulating factors in immigrant communities, studies show that many Turkish Europeans chose to marry a partner from the country of origin for a number of reasons (for Belgium: Lievens, 1999; Timmerman, Lodewijckx, and Wets, 2009; for the Netherlands: Hooghiemstra, 2001; for Germany: Strassburger, 2004; Gonzalez-Ferrer, 2006; for France: Milewski and Hamel, 2010).

According to Kalmijn (1998), the particular partner choice a person makes is a result of the interplay between three factors: (1) individual preferences, (2) third parties and (3) marriage market constraints. Regarding *individual preferences* about transnational marriage, some studies have reported gender differences among European Turks from different countries (for Belgium: Lievens, 1999; for the Netherlands: Hooghiemstra, 2001; for Germany: Gonzalez-Ferrer, 2006; Beck-Gernsheim, 2007; for France: Milewski and Hamel, 2010). Turkish men prefer a transnational marriage because they consider Turkish females in Europe too liberated, and those in Turkey more “decent” and “traditional” (Hooghiemstra, 2003; Timmerman, 1999, 2006; Yalçın et al., 2006). These men – and their families – often prefer girls from rural areas with a low educational background, because they are considered to be more respectful towards their husbands and parents-in-law, and hence less of a threat to the husband’s patriarchal position (Timmerman, 2006). Women, on the other hand, believe the local Turkish men are too traditional and not ambitious and responsible enough compared to men in Turkey. These differing motivations are also linked to another profile: male importers marry younger and have a lower educational level than female importers (Gonzalez-Ferrer, 2006; Lievens, 1999). In addition to these gendered preferences, other studies point out that young Turkish Europeans also often have “strategic considerations” (Charsley, 2007) for choosing a transnational marriage. These considerations are often gender-related as well and aimed at giving the Belgian partner more power and independence. This is especially true for women, who often see a transnational marriage as a tool in their struggle for more autonomy (Autan, 1995; Callaerts, 1997; Gonzalez-Ferrer, 2006; Lievens, 1999; Timmerman, 2006).

With regard to *third parties*, almost all studies on co-ethnic transnational marriages refer to kinship as one of the most important factors in explaining the motivation to marry a partner from one’s country of origin (Beck-Gernsheim, 2007; Charsley, 2007; Shaw & Charsley, 2006). Two factors – *emotional ties* of kinship and kinship *obligations* – have been identified that affect the preference for a co-ethnic transnational marriage; both are present for Turks in Belgium and Europe at large. First, migrants want to stay connected to their kin and may strengthen their alliances by arranging transnational marriages (Beck-Gernsheim, 2007). Second, because of the immigration

restrictions in many Western countries and continuing transnational ties, some immigrant families feel obliged to help relatives migrate to Western Europe through arranged marriages (Callaerts, 1997; Yalçın et al., 2006). In some countries, this has resulted in a high number of “consanguineous marriages” between cousins, both among first and second generations (Esveldt, Kulu-Glasgow, Schoorl, & Van Solinge, 1995; Reniers, 2001; Tribalat, 1995).

Although kinship may be less important for the second generation than for the first and 1.5 generations, it is nevertheless an important factor because of the strong influence parents have on the partner choice of their children (Callaerts, 1997; De Valk & Liefbroer, 2007; Hooghiemstra, 2003; Milewski & Hamel, 2010; Yalçın et al., 2006). This influence is rarely excessive – children are seldom forced to marry someone – but is nevertheless very powerful in shaping marriage decisions. In the mid-1990s, most marriages among Turks in Belgium were to a certain extent “arranged” but with various degrees of input and choice, depending on gender, personality, family status and educational level (Callaerts, 1997; Kose, 1995). Callaerts (1997) argues that during this period, generational change was beginning to happen: compared to first- and 1.5-generation women, a higher proportion of second-generation women in Belgium reported that either they or their partner, instead of the parents, initiated the marriage. However, this form of generational change was not widespread: because of a high degree of segregation by gender, arranged marriages were a necessity for many girls, and time to get to know the suggested partner was limited (Köse, 1995). Parental influence also remained strong, even in the second generation, because a high value was placed on good family relations and respect for parents (Hooghiemstra, 2003). Hence, the evolution towards more autonomy in choosing a partner should be understood as a gradual change, from a “parental decision” to a “decision of the marriage candidates with approval of the parents” (Lesthaeghe & Surkyn, 1995).

A final, explanatory factor relates to the *structural features* of the marriage market. There is often a sex-ratio imbalance in the first years after a new migration wave, which makes it hard for men to find a partner within their own ethnic group; this was especially true for Turkish labor migration, which was almost exclusively male. For second and third generation Turkish Belgians, however, there is no longer a *numerical* shortage of potential spouses. What we have observed from previous studies, however, is a *perceived* shortage of marriage partners, or what Thai (2003) refers to as a “social construction of scarcity.” As indicated, both Turkish men and Turkish women link their preference for a transnational marriage to a lack of “decent” spouses in the local marriage market. Additionally, other studies (Callaerts, 1997; Hooghiemstra, 2003) point to the importance of restrictions in the local marriage market once someone has acquired a bad reputation. Women that have already been in an intimate relationship often experience difficulties in finding a marriage

partner because of a powerful virginity norm, as do men whose reputation is damaged because of alcohol or drug abuse.

## **RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH TRANSNATIONAL MARRIAGES**

There are, however, certain risks associated with transnational marriages, for either potential spouse. According to Charsley (2005), women marrying a spouse from their country of origin are vulnerable, as they may become “immigration widows” if their spouse fails to obtain the visa necessary to join them, and because they face the danger of being exploited as a migration opportunity. But migrant husbands also face difficulties in a transnational marriage. Because they are forced to depend on their wife in an unfamiliar context, they may feel disempowered (Gallo, 2006), which may lead to frustration and sometimes violence and divorce (Charsley, 2005). Indeed, research among Turkish Belgians shows that the relative divorce rate for transnational marriages is almost double that of marriages between two co-ethnics born in Belgium (Eeckhaut, Lievens, Van de Putte, & Lusyne, 2011).

A limited number of recent studies indicate that Turkish Belgians are increasingly aware of the risks associated with transnational marriages (Timmerman et al., 2009; Yalçın et al., 2006; Zemni, Casier, & Peene, 2006). The most often voiced fear is that the marriage migrant is simply using marriage as a fast way to obtain legal residence in Europe. Other objections to a transnational marriage are a lack of time to get to know each other, the partner not knowing the language or having the right qualifications for employment in an economy dominated by service sectors and possible difficulties in adapting.

Given these findings, we can expect a (future) decline in transnational marriages among Turkish Belgians. Thus far, however, perceived risks and disadvantages and their impact on attitudes and behavior regarding transnational marriages have not been explored in depth.

In the initial, quantitative part of our study, we present trends in partner choice among Turkish Belgians from 2001 to 2008 (The authors, 2012). Considering the seemingly contradictory preferences for transnational marriages and the associated risks, we examine whether, and to what extent, this growing awareness of the risks has resulted in a decline in transnational marriages. Given that most of the studies conducted so far date from around the turn of the millennium, these trends offer new insights into changing patterns of partner choice among a long-established immigrant population in Belgium and the rest of Europe.

## DECLINE IN TRANSNATIONAL MARRIAGES (2001–2008)

We analyze trends in partner choice based on an earlier study (The authors, 2012). The resulting dataset from that study is an extraction from the Belgian National Register comprising all legally registered partnerships, that is, legal marriages and legally registered cohabitations, formed between January 1, 2001 and December 31, 2008, of whom at least one partner was either of Turkish descent<sup>1</sup> and born in Belgium or had immigrated prior to age seven. This selection contains 15,277 second-generation inhabitants of Turkish descent who engaged in an official partnership between 2001 and 2008, regardless of whether the marriage/partnership was celebrated or initiated in Belgium or Turkey.

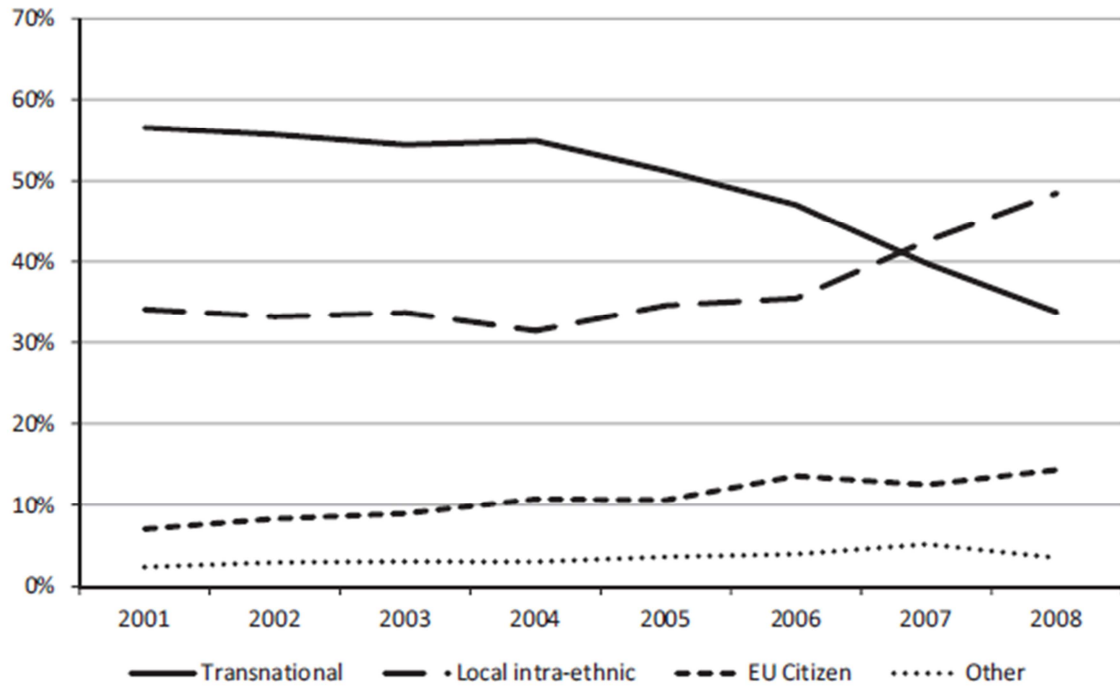
We discern four different possible partner choices: (1) a transnational partnership, consisting of residents with one partner having Turkish nationality at birth, who did not reside in Belgium before the partnership; (2) a local intra-ethnic partnership, consisting of two partners who both have Turkish nationality at birth and who both resided in Belgium prior to the partnership; (3) a partnership with a Belgian or other EU-country citizen; and (4) all other combinations.

Figure 7 and Figure 8 display the trends in proportions of partner choice for male and female Turkish immigrants' descendants, respectively. The proportions at the start of the period reveal that a transnational partnership is by far the predominant preference for both men and women. Contrary to earlier findings that reported a higher prevalence among men (Lievens, 1999), or no gender differences at all (Corijn & Lodewijckx, 2009), we found that women are slightly more prone to engage in a transnational partnership, at 59.9 percent versus 56.5 percent for men. Local intra-ethnic marriages are equally common among men and women in 34.1 percent of the cases. Partnerships with EU citizens and other partnerships are quite marginal, and together account only for 9.4 percent among men and 6 percent among women.

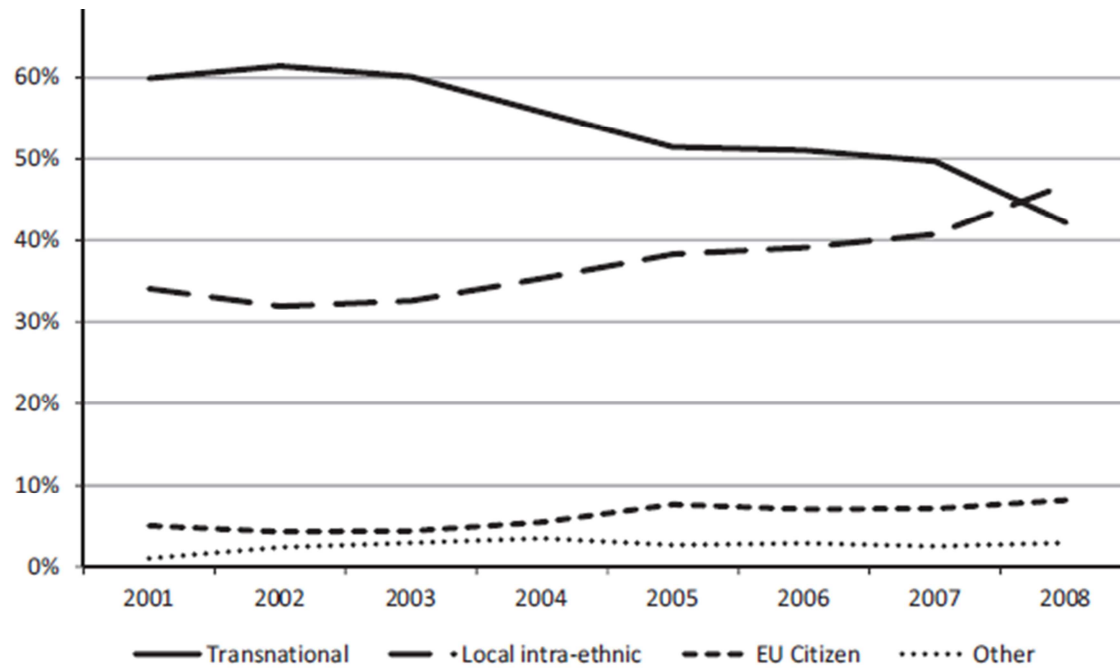
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<sup>1</sup> To determine the (Turkish) descent of individuals, the selection was based on the nationality at birth. This is a sound basis for determining descent based on the Belgian National Register, with only one minor exception: from 1984 on, individuals automatically acquire Belgian nationality at birth if at least one parent has Belgian nationality. Given that marriages can only take place from age 18, and that we are studying up to and including 2008, couples born between 1984 and 1990 who have at least one Belgian partner are missing from the selection. This will, however, result in only a minor selection bias, since large-scale naturalization did not take off until the 1990s.

**Figure 7 Partner Choice among Male Turkish Immigrants' Descendants (2001-2008)**



**Figure 8 Partner choice among female Turkish immigrants' descendants (2001-2008)**



A striking drop in transnational marriages is also shown. By 2008, in just seven years, the proportion of men entering a transnational partnership drops to 33.7 percent. The same trend is seen in women, although the drop is somewhat less pronounced at 42.1 percent by 2008. It seems that the decline occurs more slowly for women than for men. The steep decline is mostly absorbed by the local intra-ethnic partnerships, with 48.5 percent and 46.8 percent of men and women, respectively, entering into a local intra-ethnic partnership in 2008. Thus, local intra-ethnic marriages have taken over as the dominant trend for Turkish immigrants' descendants. For men, this has also led to an increase in partnerships with EU citizens, from 7 percent to 14.3 percent; this increase is less marked for women, going from 5 percent to 8.1 percent, a pattern which is often associated with the influence of Islam, which doesn't allow a Muslim woman to partner with a non-Muslim (Reniers, 1999).

The recent steep decline in transnational partnerships is unprecedented in the non-Western labor-migration communities in Belgium (Beck-Gernsheim, 2007), and a decline has also been observed in Germany among second-generation Turks (Huschek et al., 2012), although, a substantial number—around one third—of Turkish immigrants' descendants still choose a transnational partnership. With these declines in mind, how do we explain current preferences for transnational marriages, even though it occurs among a smaller percentage of the immigrant population? We believe that qualitative analysis is best suited to address our two main findings, which are (1) the steep decline in Turkish immigrants' descendants conducting a transnational partnership during the past eight years and (2) the continuing preference for those partnerships among a non-negligible proportion of the immigrants' descendants stock.

## **UNDERSTANDING CHANGING PREFERENCES FOR TRANSNATIONAL MARRIAGES**

### **METHODS**

Qualitative data are necessary considering the focus on complex interactive processes and individuals' experiences and meaningful actions. During the process of data collection, the topic under study manifested itself as a sensitive and potentially stigmatizing issue. As a result, we opted for triangulation through a combination of in-depth interviews, focus-group discussions and informal talks during fieldwork. Analyzing these three data sources together enhances the reliability and validity of emerging themes in the data, and leads to deeper insight through the analysis of possible contradictions. The in-depth interviews were carried out with the children and grandchildren of Turkish migrants who were unmarried or got married from 2001–2012. Based on previous studies



and fieldwork experiences, we designed an interview sample (N = 55) that is heterogeneous in terms of marital status, age, gender, generation and educational attainment (See Table 9 and

Table 10). The majority of the informants were unmarried (n = 37), 14 were married (6 of them transnationally) and 3 were divorced (1 transnationally). The age range was 17 to 33 for the unmarried, and 22 to 36 for the married and the divorced. The sample shows a gender imbalance in favor of women (n = 32), which results from persistent challenges in convincing men to participate in the study, and which strengthens our initial expectation that we are dealing with a stigmatizing issue.

**TABLE 9: COMPOSITION FEMALE INTERVIEW SAMPLE**

(1= primary; 2= secondary; 3=tertiary; \*=not yet completed)

Interviewee	Age	Educational Level	Generation Father	Generation Mother	Marital Status
Armagan	24	1	1	2	Married – transnational
Ayben	26	3	1	1.5	Unmarried
Ayse	20	3*	1	2	Unmarried
Azra	27	3	1.5	1	Married – transnational
Berfin	21	3*	1.5	2	Unmarried
Damla	31	3	1	1	Married – local inter-ethnic
Didem	19	2	2	1	Unmarried
Dilek	27	3	1.5	1	Unmarried
Ebru	23	3	1.5	1	Unmarried
Elif	25	2	1	1	Unmarried
Enise	19	3*	1	1	Unmarried
Eser	24	2	2	1	Unmarried
Ferdane	22	2	2	1	Married – local co-ethnic
Gimze	17	2	Unknown	Unknown	Unmarried
Hava	20	3*	2	1	Unmarried
Havin	23	3*	1.5	1.5	Unmarried
Hawin	20	2	1	1	Unmarried
Huliya	37	2	Unknown	Unknown	Married – local inter-ethnic
Kubra	27	2	1	1	Unmarried
Leyla	27	3	2	1	Divorced – local co-ethnic
Meltem	22	2	1.5	1	Unmarried
Merve	20	2	1.5	2	Unmarried
Özge	21	2	2	1	Unmarried
Selda	24	3	1	1.5	Unmarried
Serpil	25	2	1	1	Married – local co-ethnic
Songül	24	3	1.5	1	Divorced – local co-ethnic
Varli	17	2	Unknown	Unknown	Unmarried
Yamca	17	2*	Unknown	Unknown	Unmarried
Yasemin	25	2	1.5	1	Married – local co-ethnic
Yeliz	22	3*	1	1	Unmarried
Zehra	27	3	1.5	1	Married – transnational
Zeynep	18	3	2	1	Unmarried

**TABLE 10: COMPOSTION MALE INTERVIEW SAMPLE**

(1= primary; 2= secondary; 3=tertiary; \*=not yet completed)

Interviewee	Age	Educational Level	Generation Father	Generation Mother	Marital Status
Abdullah	23	2	1	1	Married – transnational
Adem	28	2	1	2	Unmarried
Ali	26	3	1	2	Unmarried
Apo	20	1	2	1	Unmarried
Ayhan	31	2	1	1	Married – local co-ethnic
Batuhan	24	3	1.5	1.5	Unmarried
Gokhan	23	2	1	1	Unmarried
Ilker	21	2	1	2	Unmarried
Kadir	23	3	2	1	Unmarried
Mehmet	35	2	1	1	Married – transnational
Mertcan	22	3*	1	1	Unmarried
Murat	22	3	1.5	1	Unmarried
Musti	32	2	2	1	Married - local co-ethnic
Otoman	33	2	1	1.5	Unmarried
Resul	21	3*	1	1.5	Unmarried
Sedat	27	2	1.5	1.5	Married – local co-ethnic
Sercan	22	3	1	1.5	Unmarried
Seyid	16	1	1	1	Unmarried
Suat	28	1	1	1	Married – transnational
Umit	23	2	1.5	1	Unmarried
Volkan	37	2	1	1	Divorced – transnational

Concerning generation<sup>2</sup>, 16 informants belong to the second generation (both parents are first generation), 14 have one first-generation and one 1.5-generation parent, three have two 1.5-generation parents, 15 have one second-generation and one first-generation parent (who is in most cases a marriage migrant), and finally, two people have one second-generation and one 1.5-generation parent. With regard to educational level, there is a slight imbalance between those who have completed or are enrolled in tertiary education (n = 23) and those who have completed or are enrolled in secondary education (n = 28). Three people did not finish their secondary education. Most informants for the in-depth interviews were recruited in the context of the PhD research of the main researcher, who had built a large network of possible informants through six years of fieldwork and the help of intermediaries. In addition, we used the snowball technique in order to find those people that were missing from or underrepresented in our sample.

<sup>2</sup> Assigning individual informants to a specific generation proved to be difficult and problematic as a result of a high degree of transnational marriages and the existence of a 1.5 generation among the generation of their parents. Therefore, to give as detailed generational info as possible, we decided not to assign a specific generation to the informant, but to mention the generation of both parents.

These in-depth interviews were supplemented with six complementary focus-group discussions (See Table 11) with other informants, one with unmarried Turkish men ( $n = 9$ ) and five with unmarried Turkish women ( $n = 35$ )<sup>3</sup>. Within each focus group, all informants knew each other, either because they all belonged to the same institution through which they were recruited (a youth movement or a secondary school) or because one person was addressed and asked to bring good friends to the focus-group discussion. This was an important prerequisite given the negative attitudes towards premarital sexual intercourse and relationships and the high degree of gossip and social control within Turkish communities (De Vries, 1995; Timmerman, 1999). Both during the in-depth interviews and the focus-group discussions, informants were asked to talk about their own partner preferences and experiences and to reflect on the current situation regarding relationships and marriage among Turkish Belgians in general. We specifically focused on attitudes towards transnational marriages and the role of their parents and family in their partner choice. Those who had already married were asked to talk about their opinions and experiences *prior* to their marriage, and to tell us their “marriage story.” All informants were informed about the purpose of the research, about confidentiality and privacy, and could choose the interview location and their own pseudonym. All interviews were carried out in Dutch.

In addition to these two data sources, we also collected data from in-depth interviews with a lawyer and a community worker who can both be considered experts on the matter and from informal conversations during fieldwork (including on-line and face-to-face conversations with Turkish-Belgian friends and acquaintances). On-line conversations were saved in their original form and face-to-face conversations were reconstructed in as much detail as possible in the main researcher’s field notes, as soon as possible after the actual conversation. The information obtained through these informal conversations served to identify understandings and experiences with regard to transnational marriages and partner preferences, and was introduced during the in-depth interviews and focus-group discussions for further exploration.

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<sup>3</sup> The gender imbalance in the composition of the focus groups is a result of three focus groups being carried out in the context of another project that involved only women and of, again, difficulty in finding men to cooperate with our own study.

**TABLE 11: DESCRIPTION FOCUS GROUPS**

	Gender	Age Range	Educational Level	Participants	Recruitment
1	Female	19–24	Tertiary	5	Friend circle
2	Female	16–19	Secondary – vocational	8	Youth organization
3	Female	16–19	Secondary – vocational	7	Secondary school
4	Female	16–21	Secondary – general	11	Youth organization
5	Female	19–21	Secondary – vocational	4	Secondary school
6	Male	16–21	Secondary – mixed	9	Youth organization

We used NVivo to attribute first-level codes to the documents, designating the main research topics, theoretical concepts and issues raised by informants (*i.e.*, attitudes towards transnational marriages, parental influence, risk negotiation) as first-level codes. In the second stage of our analysis, we analyzed the coded fragments, looking for important and/or recurring themes, attitudes and practices. In the final stage, we identified patterns according to gender and age, as well as interdependencies between different concepts. In addition, we constructed a typology of transnational marriages based on the informants' insights and on our analysis of the stories of those who married a partner from Turkey. In line with Grounded Theory, we were careful to prioritize the informants' feedback and comments over existing concepts in our discussion of certain practices and phenomena.

Our data analyses of the informal conversations and the formal interviews and focus-group discussions support the emergence of shared interpretations and experiences of issues related to transnational marriages. To make clear that certain conclusions are based on recurrent observations by different informants, we will use the concept of “shared understanding”, to make clear that it is the *interpretation* of the informants, rather than a conclusion based on hard indicators.

All quotes used to illustrate these points are translated from Dutch as literally as possible. Where understanding or informant anonymity was jeopardized, we made minimal changes to the text, signaled by square brackets. Unless otherwise noted, the quotes that are used to illustrate particular points represent situations or utterances that were heard frequently in other conversations, discussions or interviews as well. The particular quote is usually chosen because of its richness of information on a particular topic. Overall, we prioritized the interviews and discussions, rather than the researcher's field notes, as sources of quotes, and we tried to give voice to as many different informants as possible.

## **THE RECENT TRENDS EXPLAINED**

As expected, based on our statistical analysis, the in-depth interviews and focus-group discussions pointed towards a strong preference for a marriage with a local co-ethnic rather than an interethnic or transnational marriage. Intra-ethnic marriages continued to be preferred over interethnic ones,

because of both a preference for cultural similarity and a persistent taboo about marrying a non-Muslim, which is especially strong for women. In line with what we observed in our statistical analysis, men are more open towards an interethnic or interreligious relationship and hardly ever mention the taboo on interreligious marriages. Women, on the other hand, often rule out this option because they have the impression that their parents would never accept it.

Given the preference for intra-ethnic marriages, why do we still observe a decline in both *preferences* and *decisions* for transnational marriages? Based on our in-depth interviews, focus-group discussions and informal conversations, we distinguish three factors which explain the decline in transnational marriages: (1) problem awareness and risk perception with regards to transnational marriages, (2) the emergence and acceptance of premarital relationships and (3) minimal parental involvement in partner choice.

Regarding risk perception, our informants expressed three different concerns. The first and most often voiced concern – both by men and women – is a partner’s inability to speak Dutch and the resulting dependency of a possible spouse. During both the interviews and focus-group discussions, informants unequivocally voiced the concern that a Turkish partner’s inability to speak Dutch affects a family’s financial position, as well as their children’s chances in education and life. Additionally, other informants, most of them women, objected to the added responsibility they would have as a result of their partner’s dependency.

If you marry someone from Turkey and he comes here, it is like a completely different environment for him. He knows no one. He only has you and he is dependent on you and does not know the language. Then you have to completely take care of him for minimum one or two years. Because he has to learn the language. (Azize, 21F, unmarried, focus-group discussion 4)

Azize’s words echo those of a lot of other women, who see the dependency of a Turkish husband as a burden that puts all responsibility for paperwork and providing an income on them. This contrasts sharply with the findings in previous studies that interpreted this dependency as “freedom” for the girl, an interpretation that in our study only surfaced when people talked about what older family members advised them to do.

[My parents] say: “If you bring someone here from Turkey, they listen to you. You do what you want and he does not, cause he does not master the language very well; he is dependent on you.” That is what they want. I do not know why, because it is inappropriate. You have to be dependent on a man and not the other way around. I could also never fall in love, if the guy is dependent on me. They think I will be happier but no. (Ebru, 19F, unmarried, in-depth interview)

In contrast to her parents, who see male dependency as a good thing, Ebru considers it inappropriate because it implies a reverse of traditional gender roles. Although no other women in our sample took the moral stance implicit in Ebru's use of the word *inappropriate*, some do recognize the potential relationship problems inherent in a situation of reversed gender roles: not only is the woman under a lot of stress because she has to take up the man's role, but the man is faced with a situation where traditional power balances are reversed, and is confronted with his own failure to live up to his role as a husband and father.

Besides the language problem, cultural differences between the partners are seen by some as potentially problematic. Many consider Turkish Belgians to be more modern than the Turks in their country of origin. Not everybody agrees with this interpretation, though, and those who disagree often refer to urban/rural differences in norms, values and behavioral patterns. They point out that people in the countryside tend to be more traditional compared to city dwellers, who are often also better educated. For some women, especially the higher educated ones, the social profile of city dwellers was one of the conditions under which they would consider transnational marriage an option.

A third disadvantage of transnational partnerships mentioned by the informants is the lack of time people have to get to know each other and the resulting fear of being deceived by the Turkish partner. Many informants, both men and women, equate a transnational marriage to a "fast marriage", which takes place during summer, when people spend one or two months in their parents' hometown. Many see the limited time between becoming acquainted and the actual marriage as very problematic, but reference is often also made to the fact that no love is involved and that the Turkish partner only wants this marriage to obtain papers.

If you marry from there, 80 percent even 90 percent does it just to come here. It is not because they love you or something. It lasts only five months that they love you and then they have their papers and "Well, bye! I'm going" and they don't come home and party and do more stuff than the guys who live here. (Emel, 16F, unmarried, focus-group discussion 2)

Just like Emel, many women expressed a fear of being used for the papers and abandoned once their husband is more acclimated. But during focus-group discussions, it became clear that not everyone has this extremely negative view.

Moderator: Almina, you also wanted someone from Belgium?

Almina: Yes from here. Because I personally think that guys from Turkey only want to come for papers.

Moderator: Does everyone think that?

(4 together): No/Yes/Indeed/Indeed

Azize: (smiling) No because my sister is now going to marry someone from Turkey (smiles) so I do not think that he comes for his papers. Because if it would be the case ... actually he is afraid to come here, my sister's husband. He is afraid to come here because he knows he is going to experience difficulties because my father has told him ... "You are going to be dependent on my daughter". So first he was afraid, but then he said: "Yes I love [her] so I am going to accept everything".

Moderator: And you, do you also think –

Sofie: Yes it is for the papers.

Azize: But not everyone is the same.

(they start discussing amongst each other)

(focus-group discussion 4, with unmarried women)

This fragment of conversation shows that some females do recognize that transnational marriages need not necessarily be fast marriages. Azize points out that not all men come for the papers and that love sometimes is involved; she justifies her claim through "a true love story" from her own family. Hence, despite reservations and an awareness of the risks associated with transnational marriages, many young people – especially women – do not really exclude the possibility of a transnational marriage. There is a shared understanding that transnational marriages are perfectly acceptable if people fall in love during their holiday in Turkey. This is often spoken as an aside, illustrating again that it is not the first thing that comes to mind when they think of marriage with someone in Turkey. Also, many women keep their options open because they fear that they might not find someone in Belgium who meets their expectations. They often make reference to many local co-ethnics being "players" and hence, not good marriage candidates.

Finally, it is worth noting that a small minority expressed a clear preference for a partner from Turkey without making reference to the problems and risk factors mentioned above. Because they were all under the age of 20, age may be an important factor in explaining their preference for a transnational marriage; in fact, some of the older informants acknowledged that age plays a role in partner choice, in the sense that with growing older, people tend to take into account more factors than just virginity or a partner's reputation. The role of age was also very clear during one of the focus-group discussions, where the older participants instructed the two younger ones (16) about the importance of a double income in response to their preference for a girl from Turkey.

Other than age, no sociodemographic factors seem to account for differences in problem perception and risk awareness. Unlike the findings from previous studies, we find no gender differences in partner preferences and attitudes towards transnational marriages. Apart from the younger informants, most informants said they prefer a marriage with a local co-ethnic over a

transnational one, regardless of their gender or educational level. In contrast with previous research, we did not find that lower-educated men tend to prefer a partner from the country of origin, but found that both higher- and lower-educated informants mention the same risks of transnational marriages. The only observation we can make is that highly educated women tend to elaborate more on these issues, which may indicate that they evaluate the different options more thoroughly.

The increase in problem awareness is not the only factor that explains the decline in transnational marriages. Premarital relationships with local co-ethnics are now very commonplace, despite the taboo that still surrounds it for females. During informal conversations, the decline was often attributed to this. Transnational marriages therefore become less attractive, since many have already found a partner in the local community.

But this aspect is, in fact, incited by the third factor: a declining parental influence in partner choice. In line with previous studies, our analysis shows that parents and the broader family sometimes still try to arrange marriages, but their role is now often nothing more than that of a matchmaker.

Sometimes my grandparents tell me “we have an eye on someone, let us know when the time [to get married] is there”. Every year they have an eye on at least someone. But I think it is more like a pastime for them, it is nice to see them involved in it. (Ümit, 23M, unmarried, in-depth interview)

In fact, as illustrated in the quote above, many young people are fairly positive about arranged marriages, because it helps them to get to know “decent” partners, and because they believe that older family members know more than they do: the older family members know what makes a good partner and may evaluate a potential partner using different criteria – including his/her family – which the younger members often do not consider. But most informants agree that there is little pressure and that in the end, they may choose whoever they want.

Gulli: They do ask me first, so it’s my choice. If I say yes, it’s yes. If it’s no, it’s no.

Moderator: But do they pressure you, to marry someone from Turkey?

Gulli: No, it is all my choice.

Asli: But you know, it used to be like that.

Gulli: Yes, but that was before. My parents for instance did not see each other ... They only saw each other at their engagement party ... For us that is weird, but that is the way it was before.

(focus-group discussion 4, with unmarried girls)

That there is a generational difference with regard to parental involvement also became clear in an interview with a second-generation mother of grown-up children.



- Pinar: I wanted to marry someone I loved and that I wanted to marry myself. But it was not allowed, it was not appropriate. You could not choose yourself, your parents you know. I did fight a little against it back then, but you lose [...]
- Interviewer: So you do not want that for your children?
- Pinar: No, never, never! No, No. My second [child] met a girl five years ago. And she is getting her degree and he is marrying her. I went there to watch, to judge who she is. She is a bit more traditional, the family. I am going to have a hard time with her.
- Interviewer: Would you rather see it differently?
- Pinar: Well yes, it is the way it is. (Pinar, 49F, married, in-depth interview)

Different reasons were given for this generational change. First, we notice that – as the above conversation illustrates – some mothers do not want to put their children through the same pain they have suffered. Also, there are indications that the parent-child relationship has changed from a fairly authoritarian parental style to a more affectionate bond.

Now you can talk about everything with your mother. Ok, not always with your father, but you can with your mother, you can tell everything. While before, they really did not dare to [talk], there was a very large distance [between children and parents]. And now it is smaller. The parenting style is warmer today than before. (Azize, 21F, unmarried, focus-group discussion 4)

Finally, a number of informants also mentioned that parents are more lenient out of fear that their daughters would run away with their boyfriend if they did not give permission to get married.

- Azra: A girl and a boy were together for four years. So after four years, they decided themselves to get married. But you know, in our community, the parents of the boy have to go to the girl's house to ask for her hand. And they said "no we do not want that our daughter marries your son". And after a year they went back to ask her hand again and again they said no, so the girl decided to run away and be together after all ... They are married now.
- Interviewer: And does she still see her parents?
- Azra: I think it is completely over. Maybe that the father goes looking for her after a couple of years. It used to happen quite a lot, but now it is decreasing.
- Interviewer: What is decreasing? That they run away?
- Azra: That they run away, yes! Because the parents give in.
- Interviewer: And what do you think changed for the parents?
- Azra: In the Turkish community, it is like this: the daughter has run away from home, and there is gossip and stuff, and the parents do not want that anymore. (Azra, 26F, married, in-depth interview)

Previously, running away allowed young people to marry despite parental objections (Köse, 1995), but, as Azra says, the downside of this practice was the huge stain on the family's reputation, which explains why parents now comply with their children's choices.

Finally, we should note that there is more parental involvement in some families than in others, something which became especially clear during focus-group discussions with young women: while some of them mentioned they had complete freedom in choosing their partners, a few said that their parents threatened to arrange a marriage for them if they did not behave properly. In line with what has been observed in a recent study by Huschek (2011), we hypothesize that there are still differences in parental involvement that correspond to different family systems: those Turkish second-generation young adults whose parents show characteristics of a traditional family model are more likely to have a partner from Turkey because parental involvement is greater and pressure is higher.

Problem and risk awareness regarding transnational marriages, an acceptance of premarital relationships, and the freedom of children to choose their own partner, together account for a drastic decrease in transnational marriages in favor of those with a local co-ethnic. Notwithstanding these changes, however, a considerable percentage of people continue to marry a partner from the country of origin.

## **TYPES OF TRANSNATIONAL MARRIAGES**

Despite the sharp decline, a considerable proportion of the young Turkish Belgians still marry a partner who comes from Turkey. To understand why, we interviewed men and women who engaged in a transnational marriage from 2001–2008, and compared their stories with information obtained through interviews and informal conversations with other informants. Based on informant narratives, we identify four different types of transnational marriages: (1) the second chance marriage, (2) the therapeutic marriage (3) the perceived-scarcity marriage and (4) the perfect-match marriage.

The *second chance marriage* is a marriage that is preceded and partially motivated by a failed relationship with a co-ethnic in Belgium. The stories of Azra (28F) and Armağan (23F) illustrate how attitudes about transnational marriage can change. Both females initially had a very negative attitude towards transnational marriages.

My idea was never to marry in Turkey. ABSOLUTELY NOT ... He had to be from Belgium and speak the same language. And he could do all sorts of things, like helping me with paperwork and so on. Yes. My aunt got a lot of requests [while we were in Turkey] that summer ... Every day someone came to ask my hand. And I said, yeah, I did not want it. No. In one case I did not like his eye. In

another his eyebrow, in another – I was just like looking for reasons because I did not want one from Turkey. (Armağan, 23 F, married transnationally, in-depth interview)

Considering their initial resistance, it is remarkable that both females eventually accepted a marriage proposal coming from Turkey. For both, one very important factor in explaining this shift was a failed relationship with a Turkish Belgian. After Azra ended the engagement with her fiancé in Belgium, she went to Turkey, where a friend, whom she had known for three years, asked her to marry him. After consulting her parents, she accepted his proposal, despite her initial resistance towards transnational marriages. She said she changed her mind “because [she] experienced a couple of things with those two guys,” referring to her two previous break-ups. In Armağan’s case, the acceptance of a marriage proposal also immediately followed a failed relationship with a Turkish Belgian.

Negative experiences with local co-ethnics have two possible consequences. First, there is a possibility that people will generalize their negative experience with one Turkish Belgian partner to the whole group. Based on her negative experiences with two men, for instance, Azra concluded that “marriages with someone from here are not any better than those with someone from THERE.” Second, considering the importance of virginity and honor in Turkish culture, a failed relationship increases the risk of not being able to find a suitable marriage partner any more (Hooghiemstra, 2003). This increased risk is reflected in a “fear of scarcity”, which in turn affects one’s attitude towards transnational marriages: afraid that one will not find a local co-ethnic spouse, a person is more disposed to accept a marriage proposal coming from Turkey.

It is interesting to notice that informants who changed their mind about transnational marriages conveyed their initial reluctance by consenting only after they were sure they could exclude at least some of the possible risks. Azra, for instance, repeatedly pointed out that she only gave her consent because she had already known her current husband for some years. In a similar vein, Armağan told us how she subjected her husband to a cross-examination, prayed in order to find out what to do, and eventually said yes once she was sure he did not want to marry her just to come to Belgium.

The second type of marriage that we identified is the *therapeutic marriage*.

There are different kinds [of marriages] you know, on the one hand there’s the family here that assumes – the parents of the boy who was born here – “if we let him marry someone from Turkey who is submissive and so, then he’s going to be more present in his family.” But... these are therapeutic marriages I think; I call them therapeutic marriages. But instead of searching for the cause of the problem in the way of life or tackle the upbringing of their children, they think of marriages with someone from the country of origin as a solution, and then it goes wrong...(interview with Turkish-Belgian lawyer)

We indeed found that some parents see marriage as a way of bringing children who have gone astray back on track. Volkan, for instance, got married at the age of 26 due to continuing pressure from his parents, who believed that at the age of 26, a man should stop partying and start acting responsibly. They saw a transnational marriage with a “submissive” Turkish girl as a form of therapy that would help their son get back on track. Volkan did not want to marry at all, because it would mean the end of his freedom, but eventually he gave in out of respect for his parents.

When children agree with their parents’ proposal they frequently do so out of respect for their parents, but there are indications that their motivations for complying with their parents’ wishes are coupled with strategic considerations. By agreeing, they not only please their parents, but also acquire more freedom, as they free themselves from their parents’ concerns and marry a partner who is dependent on them. Thus, this type of marriage reflects interacting factors: the motivations of the parents interact with those of their children.

The third type of transnational marriage happens when there is a *perceived scarcity* of suitable marriage partners. Mehmet, for instance, explained how he had no other choice but to look for a partner in Turkey, because where he lived there were only people from a region in Turkey that he disliked:

I did not want anyone from Emirdağ. That is something I really did not want. I am a little bit against those people. [And in my own group] everyone is family. There are a couple who are not, but the rest is all family. (Mehmet, 36M, married transnationally, in-depth interview)

Thus, because of a *perceived scarcity* of acceptable choices, Mehmet saw no other option than to marry someone from Turkey.

In addition to this perceived scarcity, some people indicated that they knew people who married someone from Turkey because they could not find anyone to marry in Belgium because of a bad reputation or other factors that made them “undesirable.” Not surprisingly, considering the stigmatizing nature of this motivation, this reason was never given by those who married transnationally themselves. In contrast, this reasoning was repeatedly heard during in-depth interviews and informal conversations. We heard the reasoning over and over again; therefore there is reason to believe that it is an accurate reflection of the actual situation. During an informal conversation, for instance, the owner of a Turkish bar told the main researcher that men marry a girl from Turkey “because they enjoyed their life here too much” (field notes, October 9<sup>th</sup> 2011, reflecting a conversation with a Turkish-Belgian bar owner outside of his bar). This implies there are restrictions in the local marriage market once someone has acquired a bad reputation, something which has been observed in previous research as well (Hooghiemstra, 2003).

Finally, there are *perfect-match marriages*. In line with the observation that people do not have negative attitudes about slowly evolving transnational love-marriages, we find that some transnational marriages result from two people who got to know each other in Turkey and decided to get married after a considerable amount of time because they consider themselves right for each other. Abdullah, for example, met his wife in Turkey, and described the transnational character of his marriage almost as mere coincidence.

No, it did not matter. Just looking for the right girl, does not matter if it's from here or Turkey, or Germany or the Netherlands. I used to have a girlfriend from the Netherlands, from France ... It's just about insight you know, how that girl is in terms of personality, in terms of character and so on, if you can get along or not. (Abdullah, 23M, married transnationally, in-depth interview)

For Abdullah, it did not matter where his future wife came from. Considering his family's transnational ties, there was the possibility of broadening his scope from the local marriage market to a transnational marriage market already, thus enhancing his opportunities to find a spouse that matched his individual preferences. Abdullah's story suggests that transnational marriages sometimes just happen because people move in transnational spaces.

## DISCUSSION

Transnational marriages with a co-ethnic have been identified as an important source of migration to first world immigration countries in Europe, and in Australia and the United States (Beck-Gernsheim, 2007; Charsley, 2012; Charsley et al., 2012; Khoo, 2001; Kibria, 2012; Thai, 2003). However, it is only in Europe that this phenomenon has been politicized by concerns about continuous migration, forced marriages and immigrant integration, especially with regard to Muslim populations.

In the past two decades, different European countries have tried to discourage transnational marriages through a stricter immigration policy, and the decline in these types of marriages among Turkish Europeans seems to suggest that the policies are effective. However, our study shows that the decline should not necessarily be attributed only to the restrictive policies: a drastic decline in transnational marriages precedes the adoption of restrictive legislation, hence challenging the necessity or effectiveness of such a policy.

We identified three factors that help to explain this considerable decline in transnational marriages. First, we observed an awareness of the problems and risks involved in transnational marriages among young Turkish Belgians, regardless of gender and educational attainment. We identified the inability to speak Dutch and resulting dependency of the Turkish partner as the main

reason people object to a transnational marriage. Second, premarital relationships make transnational marriages less attractive because young people may already have found a local co-ethnic partner by the time they reach a marriageable age. And third, the increasingly minor role of the parents in the partner choice of their offspring gives children the chance to choose a partner according to their own preferences.

Our analysis demonstrates that even in the absence of restrictive legislation, there can be a decline in transnational marriages due to changing attitudes and practices *within* the immigrant group. If we compare our findings with those in previous studies, three striking differences emerge. First, having witnessed the risks and downsides of transnational marriages in their own family, young people prefer a local marriage because it gives them and their future children a higher chance at upward social mobility. Their interpretation of dependence as a burden contrasts sharply with the interpretation of it as a freedom in previous studies, which analyzed the phenomenon among older cohorts (Autan, 1995; Callaerts, 1997; Gonzalez-Ferrer, 2006; Lievens, 1999; Timmerman, 2006). This new interpretation also seems to point to a change in the negotiation of gender roles and gender inequalities. Both men and women no longer desire a power imbalance in the family that puts either of them in a dominant position, but rather strive for a more balanced relationship in which both partners can negotiate gender roles from a more or less equal position.

Second, in contrast to the important role that was reserved for third parties in previous studies, our informants' discourse shows how the influence of the parents has diminished. Parents take on an advisory role, and although most children take this advice very seriously, the children make the final decision. Given the relationship that has been found between parental background characteristics and marriage patterns (Huschek, 2011), our results suggest that the parents of our informants are moving away from traditional values to a more modern family system in which children are given more independence. Third, although we see that there is still a "social construction of scarcity" that results from a negative image of the other sex, people no longer necessarily see transnational marriages as the answer. As a result, some people – especially higher-educated females, who perceive this scarcity most strongly – find themselves in a position where neither option is desirable, almost forcing them to remain single.

Still, a considerable percentage of people continue to marry a partner from the country of origin. Our study identifies at least four types of transnational marriages that exist today among Turkish Belgians: the second chance marriage, the therapeutic marriage, the perceived-scarcity marriage and the perfect-match marriage. By constructing these ideal types, we take our analysis a step further than the identification of motivations: the ideal types reflect the pathways towards a transnational

marriage, or a cluster of interacting factors. Although the respondents in our sample who opted for a transnational marriage can be classified as belonging mainly to one of the four identified marriage types, the motivations of each type sometimes overlap, suggesting that commonalities as well as differences exist among the motivations of the four types. In second-chance marriages, for instance, a failed relationship is not presented as the motivation to marry transnationally, but as the beginning of a pathway towards a transnational marriage. In therapeutic marriages, motivations of the parents interact with motivations of their children: the parents' strategy to have their son/daughter marry someone from Turkey succeeds because the children themselves have their own motivations for not refusing.

The analysis of these different types of marriages indicates that the transnational marriages of today are no longer *necessarily* the fast marriages that different informants identified as the dominant pattern about 20 years ago. In many cases, people now take their time to get to know their future partner, trying to minimize the risks and to build the foundation for a healthy marriage. However, our results also show that some of the transnational marriages, particularly the therapeutic marriages, fall into the category of the fast marriages, which have a high probability of turning into unhealthy relationships.

The stigmatizing nature of certain types of transnational marriages in both public discourse and the Turkish community under study, affected our study in three ways. First, we had problems finding male informants, both for in-depth interviews and focus-group discussions. Informal conversations and focus-group discussions revealed a shared perception that when men marry transnationally, it is often because they have acquired a bad reputation, or because they want a wife that is not a threat to their patriarchal position. Given these observations, chances are high that there is a systematic underrepresentation of men who prefer a transnational marriage out of strategic considerations or perceived scarcity. Second, it proved difficult to find informants who had recently engaged in a transnational marriage. This is partly due to the decline in transnational marriages but also partly due to the sensitive nature of our research topic. A final issue is that people often try to present a story in a way that puts themselves and their community in a positive light. As a result, some people, especially those we did not know prior to the interviews, might not have talked about motivations that they expected the interviewer to disapprove of. However, we tried to minimize the impact of these three issues by triangulating three different data sources, and by asking informants about perceived changes and motivations for transnational marriages, both of which helped us identify those motivations and changes that people did not want to talk about when it concerned themselves. We believe further research should take this methodological shortcoming into account; we also argue

for an interview approach where subjects are interviewed not once but multiple times to enhance trust and familiarity and to reduce the random character of the single interview.

In conclusion, we address two important policy implications for these research results. First, our findings raise questions about the assumptions that several European countries have based a tightening of the regulation of marriage migration on. Research shows that in Western-European and Scandinavian countries especially, changes in immigration legislation were a measure designed to enhance the sociocultural integration of ethnic minority populations and a response to concerns about forced marriages and the supposed oppression of young Muslim women (Jorgensen, 2012; Kraler, 2010; Myrdahl, 2010; Schmidt, 2010; Wray, 2009). This study shows, however, that transnational marriages are not necessarily a sign of failed integration or the oppression of women. Transnational marriages are often an answer to challenges in the local marriage market that is made possible by transnational ties and activities, and not so much a consequence of adherence to old ways or family or group pressure. They are a result of conscious negotiations of advantages and disadvantages by all people involved, but always with a life in Belgium in mind. Considering this conscious negotiation process, it is a misrepresentation of the real situation to treat all transnational marriages as forced or arranged marriages. Even in cases where parents pressure their children to marry transnationally, both males and females should be considered active agents who can object or find their own motivations for complying with their parent's wishes.

Second, we want to highlight that even in the absence of stricter immigration policies, transnational marriages are on the decline. Considering this recent decline, and the awareness of the risks associated with these marriages, implementation of stricter legislation should be questioned, especially given the many side effects that have been identified in different European countries. These legal measures have the potential to break up families, especially as the "Europe route" – (temporarily) relocating to another EU country to evade the strict legislation in the residing country – gets increasingly popular among partner migration couples (Rytter, 2012; Schmidt, Graverse, Jacobsen, Jensen, & Liversage, 2009). Additionally, the strict measures create socioeconomic and gender inequalities in the freedom to choose a partner: due to financial and other restrictions, only those minority groups who are better off have the ability to freely choose a partner, as has been demonstrated in the Netherlands (Leerkes & Kulu-Glasgow, 2011). In many countries, moreover, it is likely that women will have a harder time meeting the income requirements, especially if they already have children (Kraler, 2010).

Finally, the changes in legislation regulate migrant family life to such an extent that human rights are threatened. In the Netherlands, for instance, Human Rights Watch has warned that the overseas



integration test – which needs to be passed in order to join family members or a spouse – targets specific populations, and hence breaches the European Convention on Human Rights (Wray, 2009). Given these detrimental side effects, on the one hand, and the decline in transnational marriages, which predates the restrictive legislation, on the other, the efficacy of this legislation should be questioned, both in Belgium and elsewhere in Europe.

# CHAPTER 11

# LOVE WITHOUT BOUNDARIES?

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*How ethnic boundary dynamics shape interethnic partner choice  
among Turkish Belgians*

Klaartje Van Kerckem, Bart Van de Putte & Peter Stevens

Submitted to *DiGest*

In this study, we explore the relevance of ethnic boundary dynamics for understanding why some people are open to an interethnic relationship, while others are more reluctant. We analyze partner choice narratives of second- and third-generation Turkish Belgians, focusing on differences that can help explain different attitudes towards interethnic relationships. Our analysis reveals two essential differences in how the willing and the reluctant talk about interethnic relationships. First, the reluctant stress ethno-cultural differences, whereas the willing deny the relevance of ethnicity for producing similarity and difference. The reluctants' narratives point to internalized bright symbolic boundaries, while the willings' narratives indicate blurred boundaries. Second, the reluctant accept or have even internalized the taboo on interethnic marriages, and therefore construct interethnic relationships as impossible or unacceptable. The willing, in contrast, see themselves as active agents who have the power to follow their own path and prioritize their preferences over third party expectations. We discern two factors that help to explain these differences: the social structure of people's environment (which is strongly related to their educational level) and the extent to which people are exposed to ethnic boundary (de)construction in their immediate social environment.



Together they had overcome the daily incomprehension, the instantaneous hatred, the reciprocal nastiness, and fabulous flashes of glory in the conjugal conspiracy. It was time when they both loved each other best, without hurry or excess, when both were most conscious of and grateful for their incredible victories over adversity. Life would still present them with other moral trials, of course, but that no longer mattered: they were on the other shore.

GABRIEL GARCIA MARQUEZ, *LOVE IN TIMES OF CHOLERA*



## INTRODUCTION

Many researchers have linked intermarriage to ethnic boundaries on an aggregate, structural level, conceptualizing the former as an indicator of the latter. In this study, we take a different approach, and question *how* ethnic boundary dynamics – the dynamic processes of marking, maintaining and negotiating ethnic boundaries – shape partner choice. Rather than conceptualizing interethnic marriage rates as an indicator of ethnic boundaries, we turn our attention to the *micro-level* and show how ethnic boundary dynamics help to understand differences in partner choice among second- and third-generation Turkish Belgians.

On an aggregate level, intermarriage between an ethnic minority group and the mainstream population is often seen as an indicator of assimilation or strength of ethnic boundaries (Alba & Kessler, 1979; Hidalgo & Bankston, 2010; Kalmijn, 1993; Lee, Potvin, & Verdieck, 1974; Qian & Lichter, 2007; Rosenfeld, 2002; Tinker, 1973; Wildsmith, Gutmann, & Gratton, 2003). Intermarriage reveals meaningful interaction across group boundaries and indicates that, at least to some degree, members of different groups accept each other as social equals. Conversely, low degrees of intermarriage between two groups point towards the existence of *bright ethnic boundaries* (Alba, 2005) in both symbolic and social terms. *Symbolic boundaries* manifest themselves in an “us-versus-them” dichotomization that is coupled with essentialized cultural differences. In a context of bright symbolic boundaries, people see members of another ethnic group as essentially different, and, therefore, as less suitable partners. *Social boundaries* are reflected in patterns of ethnicity-based social inequality and differentiation (referring to horizontal divisions in society, such as parallel systems and patterns of segregation) on an aggregate level (Lamont & Molnar, 2002). High degrees of ethnic inequality and differentiation reduce the chances that members of the different ethnic groups will marry each other because, for example, there are limited opportunities for interaction (in case of ethnic differentiation), or because of status differences (in case of ethnic inequalities).

In this study, we do not simply assume that low intermarriage rates are indicative of ethnic boundaries, but instead focus on how ethnic boundary dynamics influence partner choice. To understand this, we analyze partner choice discourses of second- and third-generation Turkish Belgians, focusing on how symbolic boundary marking, mechanisms of boundary maintenance and the negotiation of these mechanisms feature in their narratives. In comparing the narratives of those who are open to interethnic relationships (whom we refer to as *the willing*) with the narratives of

those who are predominantly negative (*the reluctant*)<sup>1</sup>, and focusing on boundary dynamics, we hope to explain *why* some people are open to the possibility of an interethnic relationship, while others are more reluctant or even outright negative. In other words: we explore in detail the role of different ethnic boundary dynamics – including symbolic boundary drawing, mechanisms of boundary maintenance and boundary negotiation – in shaping partner preferences and partner choice. As such, we provide a detailed, in-depth analysis of how exactly boundary-related mechanisms translate into particular partner choice patterns, something which is insufficiently done in standard quantitative research on interethnic marriage.

Our study points out that the narratives of the reluctant and the willing differ in at least two respects. First, the former group defines similarity and difference in purely ethnic terms, drawing bright symbolic boundaries between Turks and Belgians, whereas the latter group recognizes that ethnicity is not necessarily relevant in shaping similarity and difference. Second, in talking about third party expectations, the reluctant present external pressure as obsolete and non-negotiable, while the willings' narratives show there is always a degree of agency involved in the sense that people can choose to prioritize their own preferences and devise strategies to minimize negative social consequences. In a final section of the analysis we show that these differences can be explained through two factors: First, the composition of people's social networks, which shapes the possibilities that Turkish and ethnic Belgians may meet, and which creates opportunities for the deconstruction of symbolic ethnic boundaries; Second, people's orientation and attitude towards the Belgian mainstream population, which is shaped by the symbolic boundaries drawn in their immediate environment, and experiences that help deconstruct these boundaries.

## **PARTNER CHOICE AMONG TURKISH BELGIANS**

Many studies show that Turkish Belgians strongly prefer a co-ethnic partner. Indeed, there has been a very low degree of interethnic marriages in this population over the past five decades. A study based on 1991 census data showed that 7 per cent of all married Turkish men and 3.8 per cent of the women were married to a Western-European partner (Lievens, 1999). More recent studies carried out among the second generation indicate an increase in interethnic marriages, but it remains rather small and occurs mainly among men (Hartung, Vandezande, Phalet, & Swyngedouw, 2011; Huschek, de Valk, & Liefbroer, 2012; Van Kerckem, Van der Bracht, Stevens, & Van de Putte, 2013).

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<sup>1</sup> In reality, attitudes towards interethnic relationships can best be represented as a continuum from very positive to very negative. Also, throughout their lives, people can move closer to one pole or the other. These two dichotomous categories, therefore, should be seen as ideal types, and represent discourses rather than actual categories of people.

How is this strong preference for co-ethnic partners explained? According to Kalmijn (1998), partner choice is a result of the interplay between three factors: (1) individual preferences, (2) third parties and (3) marriage market constraints. Regarding *individual preferences*, previous studies demonstrate that many Turkish men prefer a traditional partner and a marriage with gender-specific role patterns, while many young Turkish women prefer a man that has a good education and is in favor of more equal gender-roles (Sterckx & Bouw, 2005; Yalçın, Lodewijckx, Marynissen, & Van Caudenberg, 2006). These preferences, and the idea that many Turkish people in Belgium do not match these criteria (Turkish-Belgian men consider Turkish women in Belgium too emancipated and westernized, Turkish-Belgian women think many Turkish men in Belgium are spoilt and “losers”) explain why many people choose a transnational marriage with partner from Turkey (Lievens, 1999).

With regard to *third parties*, several studies show that young people’s partner choice is shaped to a relatively large extent by others’ attitudes and expectations, particularly parents (Callaerts, 1997a; Sterckx & Bouw, 2005; Yalçın et al., 2006; for similar findings in the Netherlands, see De Valk & Liefbroer, 2007; Hooghiemstra, 2003) and peers (Huschek, 2011). While partner choice is mainly an individual matter among ethnic Belgians, for Turkish Belgians it is more of a collective concern: partner choice is not seen as “the most individual expression of the most individual emotion,” but as an affair in which the family, and especially the parents, play an important role (Loobuyck, 2005). In the mid-1990s, most marriages among Turks in Belgium were “arranged” to a certain extent, with varying degrees of input from the person to be married (Callaerts, 1997a; Köse, 1995). Today, parental influence is rarely excessive, as children are seldom forced to marry anyone. But they remain powerful, nevertheless, in shaping marriage decisions. The evolution towards more autonomy in choosing a partner should be understood as a gradual change, from a “parental decision” to a “decision of the marriage candidates with approval of the parents” (Lesthaeghe & Surkyn, 1995).

A final, explanatory factor relates to the *social structure* of the contexts in which people are embedded. According to Blau’s structural theory (1977), the extent of social associations (in this case the degree of interethnic marriages) depends on opportunities for contact, an idea reflected in his most famous dictum “one cannot marry an Eskimo if no Eskimo is around.” Contact opportunities should not only be examined on the macro-level of a society or city, but also in meso-level contexts such as the neighborhood, school and workplace. The rather high degree of ethnic inequality, as reflected in the relatively high proportion of people of Turkish origin that are unemployed or concentrated in lower status jobs (Phalet & Heath, 2010; Vertommen & Martens, 2005), and relatively high ethnic segregation in schools, neighborhoods (Van Houtte & Stevens,



2009) and social life, restricts opportunities to interact. This can be regarded as an additional factor in explaining the low intermarriage rates between the two groups.

## **PARTNER CHOICE AND ETHNIC BOUNDARY DYNAMICS**

Here we argue that differences in partner choice can be understood by focusing on *ethnic boundary dynamics*. The basic idea communicated in the ethnic boundary approach is that the continuing existence of ethnic groups does not depend on cultural differences, but rather on the active processes of *boundary maintenance*. Following Wimmer (2013) we argue that the process of ethnic boundary maintenance involves both symbolic and behavioral dimensions: boundaries between groups are maintained because members of both groups keep *marking symbolic boundaries* in discourse, and because they try to remain distinctive as a group by pressuring their own members to conform, regulating interethnic contact and excluding outsiders through mechanisms of social closure. If groups are successful in their mechanisms of boundary maintenance, this is translated on an aggregate level in ethnicity-based social inequality and social differentiation – the former referring to a situation in which people have differential access to valued resources, the latter to horizontal subdivisions in society, as reflected, for example, in patterns of segregation, parallel labor markets and in-group marriage.

We argue that ethnic boundary dynamics are essential for understanding why some people engage in interethnic relationships while others do not. First, individual preferences can be shaped by cognitive *symbolic boundaries*. People often prefer a partner that is similar to them, the so-called principle of *homophily* (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). But how exactly *similarity* is understood differs from person to person, and is largely based on the cognitive symbolic boundaries that people draw in their minds. For example, a great number of studies have pointed out the importance of education in choosing a partner (see, for example, Kalmijn, 1991; Skopek, Schulz, & Blossfeld, 2011; Smits, 2003): people with tertiary education prefer a partner of the same educational level, for reasons of similarity. The idea that people with the same educational level see each other as similar, and others as “too different to get along” is based on a symbolic boundary that creates a dichotomy between those with and those without tertiary education, which is coupled with the assumption that both groups are essentially different. The same logic can be applied to the importance of ethnicity or religion in shaping partner choice: people can prefer a co-ethnic partner based on a cognitive symbolic boundary that constructs ethnic others as essentially different, and therefore incompatible as a partner. If we want to understand why some people are open to

interethnic relationships, while others are not, we need to analyze their narratives, exploring how they mark symbolic boundaries and conceptualize “similarity” and “difference.”

Second, pressure by third parties is often related to a desire to maintain ethnic boundaries. As Barth (1969) argued, members of ethnic groups often try to maintain boundaries and cultural distinctiveness through a set of *proscriptions* that prevent interethnic interaction. For example, more dominant segments of a particular ethnic group can try to insulate parts of their culture from confrontation and modification through a taboo on intermarriage and associated social consequences – including ridicule, loss of honor and repudiation. This can also happen within the family: just as parents may pressure highly educated children to marry someone of the same educational level, contributing to the maintenance of class boundaries, young people can be pressured to marry someone from their own ethnic group, which contributes to the perpetuation of social boundaries between ethnic groups on an aggregate level.

Finally, structural constraints in the marriage market can be reformulated in terms of social boundaries on an aggregate level: when ethnic inequality and differentiation are high, chances for meaningful interaction across ethnic group boundaries are significantly lower. When Turkish Belgians are segregated in particular neighborhoods, become members of Turkish organizations and are employed in the ethnic labor market, chances for interethnic relationships are lower simply because there is less opportunity for contact. Also, if social inequality is ethnically patterned in the sense, for instance, that members of the mainstream population occupy the highest positions and those of ethnic minority groups the lowest, chances are high that educational or class homophily is translated into ethnic homogamy.

## METHODS AND DATA

The data for this study consist of in-depth interviews on partner choice with second- and third-generation Turkish Belgians, and, in the case of interethnic relationships, their Belgian partners. We have information on both unmarried and married Turkish Belgians, as well as interethnic and intra-ethnic couples. Given that gender and educational attainment are important factors in shaping partner choice, we made sure that our sample was heterogeneous in both respects for all types of marital status involved. As can be seen in Table 12, the final sample consists of 20 single Turkish Belgians, 8 people who are in a long-standing relationship with a co-ethnic (4 of them married, 1 engaged, 3 in a relationship), and 9 interethnic couples who had been together for at least one year (3 of them married). We chose to include both couples who already lived together (in which case, their family members and larger community knew about the relationship) and those who did not. In case of the

interethnic couples, we tried to interview both partners (which succeeded in five of the nine cases), and chose to interview them simultaneously in order to get a more accurate and complete story. We also included a focus group with four single, higher-educated Turkish girls in their early twenties, which focused on partner choice, particularly interethnic relationships.<sup>2</sup> The sample was relatively balanced in terms of gender and educational status. The educational imbalance among women who are in an interethnic relationship results from difficulties in finding women with only a secondary education, which already indicates a potential relation between educational level and the choice for an interethnic relationship, at least among women.

**TABLE 12: REALIZED SAMPLE**

	MEN			WOMEN			TOTAL
	Secondary	Tertiary	<i>Subtotal</i>	Secondary	Tertiary	<i>Subtotal</i>	
Single	4	4	8	5	7	12	20
Co-ethnic relationship	2	2	4	2	2	4	8
Interethnic relationship	2	3	5	1	3	4	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>37</b>

Before the start of the interview, all informants were informed of the purpose of the research, confidentiality and privacy, and could choose the interview location and their own pseudonym. All interviews were carried out in Dutch. Most of the interviews with single Turkish Belgians focused entirely on aspects of partner choice, including partner preferences, third parties' attitudes, transnational marriages and interethnic relationships.<sup>3</sup> We also included more general interviews that were conducted in the framework of the doctoral research project of the first author, in which we mainly focused on themes such as identity, conformity pressure and interethnic relations. We included only interviews in which the research participant spoke at length about issues of partner choice, and interethnic relationships in particular. All but one interview with those in a co-ethnic relationship were such general interviews. The interviews with interethnic couples, finally, focused entirely on interethnic relationships. These interviews focused on reconstructing their entire relationship story, from before the moment they met, through the present, and probed about their ideas regarding the future. The interviewer started by asking people to talk about how they met, a

<sup>2</sup> This focus group was conducted in the framework of the master's thesis of a student, and was supervised by the first two authors. We decided to use it because it provided extremely rich and valuable information regarding attitudes towards interethnic marriages.

<sup>3</sup> Some of these interviews were conducted by a master's student who wrote her master's thesis on partner preferences of unmarried Turkish Belgians. It was supervised by the first two authors of this article. We decided to include these interviews because they provided rich and valuable information on all aspects of partner choice, including interethnic marriages.

pleasant way to break the ice in an interview. At appropriate times, she asked about both partner's attitude towards interethnic marriages before they met, what they regarded as important characteristics in a partner, how their relationship proceeded before they went public with their relationship, the "coming out" process, reactions from families and their communities, how they dealt with these reactions, whether they experienced difficulties because of their different ethnic backgrounds and how they saw the future, particularly concerning the upbringing of potential children. During the couple interview, we paid equal attention to both partner's viewpoints and experiences. In this article however, the stress is primarily on attitudes and experiences of the Turkish partner, given that we explore why some Turkish Belgians are open towards an interethnic marriage and some not. The attitudes of the partner and his/her social environment are important insofar as they seem to shape attitudes and experiences of the Turkish partner.

In a first stage of the analysis, we read through the interviews, highlighting all fragments that related to ethnically mixed relationships, later assigning the code "interethnic relationships" to these fragments in NVivo. In the second stage, we printed out the coded fragments and analyzed them more in depth, looking for personal and third-party attitudes regarding interethnic marriages (in line with Kalmijn's theory on intermarriage), and for different ways in which people respond to third-party expectations and other potential difficulties. In a third phase, we analyzed each aspect in depth, comparing the narratives of those who are negative about the possibility of an interethnic relationship to the narratives of those people who are open to it. In a final stage, we linked people's attitude towards interethnic relationships to their socio-demographic characteristics and other factors that can explain the difference in attitude towards interethnic relationships.

## **"CULTURAL DIFFERENCES" VERSUS "IRRELEVANCE OF ETHNICITY." BRIGHT VERSUS BLURRED SYMBOLIC BOUNDARIES**

The dominant narrative that the research participants – both the reluctant and the willing – use to motivate their partner preferences or partner choice is one of similarities and differences. Both groups chose their partner based on what they have in common, and motivate the rejection of another type of partner based on what they see as too large differences, a finding that, once more reflects the importance of *homophily* in partner choice (McPherson et al., 2001). The difference between the two groups lies in how they conceptualize difference. The reluctant define the similarities exclusively in terms of culture, language and religion, whereas the willing stress similarity on other grounds, and do

not regard ethnic and religious differences as problematic. Compare, for example the two following quotes<sup>4</sup> :

- Sercan [A Belgian girl] would not be possible I think. Cultural differences I think.
- Interviewer Is it important that she is Turkish or Muslim?
- Sercan For me, she has to be Turkish. But that is because I will feel closer to her. There will be no cultural difference.
- Interviewer Would your parents object against a marriage with a Belgian girl?
- Sercan I don't think so. They would first say, don't do it. But if I really want it, they cannot do anything about it. But I could not do it myself. The cultural difference, the way of life is too different. The way you live, when you go out, where you go out, how long you go out... (Sercan, 22M, single, tertiary education)
- Nele That is how we found each other. Not based on ethnicity but purely because our world view is very [similar] – our sense of justice, what we think is acceptable and not, our dreams and ambitions, in that sense, we get along extremely well. And that is what has created the link, and the ethnic aspect, pfff, that is in the sideline.
- Junior I think it is enriching, it would have been boring if we both had the same culture. It would be boring. Then we are going to have weird hobbies like going dancing together.

People who object to interethnic relationships frequently base their decision on what they regard as essential ethno-cultural differences. Analyzing Sercan's quote, the term "difference" is always related to "culture;" for him, the only differences that matter when it comes to compatibility are the (ethno)cultural differences. By claiming that "the way of life is too different," he essentializes "Turkish" and "Belgian" culture, presenting the two as essentially different and incompatible. In doing so, he ignores intragroup differences in attitudes and lifestyle both among Turks and Belgians, as well as the possibility that people can negotiate potential differences. Motivating one's preference for a co-ethnic by referring to cultural differences points to an internalization of symbolic boundaries; people who believe interethnic marriages are impossible due to cultural differences tend to see "the other" as essentially different, as having "a culture" that is irreconcilable with their own. Because they see the cultures as essentially different and irreconcilable, they expect difficulties in the sense that partners will not get along in terms of lifestyle or on how to raise their children.

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<sup>4</sup> All quotes are translated from Dutch as literally as possible. Where understanding or confidentiality was jeopardized, we made minimal changes to the text, signaled by square brackets. For reasons of confidentiality, we have not provided socio-demographic information about those who are in an interethnic relationship. Linking socio-demographic information to the quotes could jeopardize the anonymity of the quoted research participants, given that interethnic marriages between Turkish and ethnic Belgians are quite rare.

One reason why the reluctant consider cultural differences problematic, it seems, is because they are not willing to make *cultural concessions*. Both male and female respondents show that preference for a co-ethnic can be grounded in the desire for ethno-cultural retention: they want to “keep their ethnic culture” and pass it on to their children.

I thought, I get along better with Belgian people than with Turkish ones, but you nevertheless have the cultural differences. If I would be married to a Belgian, I know myself, I am going to adapt to him, and am going to neglect the Turkish culture. But I do not want that my children are, how to put it, half Turkish. And I will already have problems passing it on, because I only know it half myself, because I have integrated very well already, so it is not going to work. So my children are going to be one fourth Turkish, and if they have children it is going to be like... somewhere in the family there once was a Turkish grandmother, and that was it, and I do not want that. (Arzu, 24F, single, higher education)

As the above quote demonstrates, partner choice is sometimes seen as instrumental in slowing down cultural assimilation. Some people feel that marrying a Belgian is an act of disloyalty to one’s own ethnic group, and see children that are born out of such a marriage as no longer fully Turkish. Arzu’s quote demonstrates that such reasoning is not unique among more conservative members of the Turkish population, but also occurs among people who claim to have lost much of their Turkish culture. Precisely because she “only knows it half,” Arzu feels the need to marry a co-ethnic to insure the longevity of her Turkish culture. Partner choice, then, can be seen as a way of *maintaining ethnic boundaries*: by marrying a co-ethnic, people not only hope to avoid too much cultural assimilation, but also fight the gradual disappearance of the Turkish population and culture.

The willing, in contrast, define similarity in non-ethnic terms, implicitly or explicitly arguing that ethnic origin is not necessarily significant in producing and explaining similarity and difference. In the above quote, for example, Junior and Nele explicitly argue that ethnicity did not matter, and that they regard ethno-cultural differences as positive rather than negative. Throughout the interview, they stressed their common worldview, conceptualizing similarity and difference in terms of lifestyle and opinions, rather than as anchored in ethnicity. Senay and Freddy also point out that ethnicity does not matter much when it comes to similarity and difference. They felt similar based on their common educational background, and deconstruct the idea that ethnic groups are culturally homogeneous:

Senay (F): I have a couple of similarities with [Freddy], but that is related to the fact that we studied similar things. That is because I was in the same environment, group of friends.

Freddy (M): I think, in any case, Turks are not a homogenous group. There is so much diversity within that group itself. Just like among Flemish people. And that there are similarities

with some people, or more similarities than differences, seems logical to me. And once you hang out with each other, you also make your own path a little, you see.

The observation that the willing do not regard ethno-cultural aspects as the most important in accounting for similarity between partners does not mean that they deny the existence of ethno-cultural differences. They also point out cultural differences, but simultaneously draw attention to the possibility of overcoming potential difficulties through open communication and willingness to make cultural concessions, as the two following quotes demonstrate:

Damla (F) The only thing that was difficult, that we had to come to an agreement about was the religious aspect. Not eating meat, no longer drinking alcohol.

Interviewer And from when on was that discussed?

Sam (M) From the very start actually

Damla (laughing) Second date. But he brought it up. We were just together, one week, and he brought it up (...) Like, "Being Muslim, how are we going to do that?" And I said "I don't know." And then he said "I am never going to drink alcohol again, and I am never going to eat meat again." And I was like, ok! And I wrote it down, you know, it was written down (laughs).

Freddy (M): I don't feel that we have other points of view... Don't know how it will be in the future. But you have to be a bit pragmatic in life you know. I mean, if you want to continue with each other, you will have to find a solution for every problem you encounter.

Unlike those who are against interethnic marriage, these couples do not express a desire to retain and transmit their culture. Instead, like Freddy in the above quote, they stress the need to be pragmatic when it comes to ethno-cultural and religious differences, in order to come to an agreement that satisfies both partners. Given that Damla is very religious, for example, Sam offered to give up on alcohol and meat. Damla saw this as a sufficient concession, and did not demand that Sam – who identifies as atheist – would completely convert to Islam.

In sum, those who object to interethnic marriage base their decision on what they see as essential cultural differences, whereas those open to ethnically mixed marriages argue that ethnic origin is not necessarily significant in producing and explaining similarity and difference. An additional difference in their discourses is that those against a mixed marriage often emphasize their desire for cultural retention and transmission, whereas the others stress the possibility of *cultural negotiation* and the need for what we could label *cultural flexibility*. To put it in terms of ethnic boundary dynamics, the reluctant draw bright symbolic boundaries between the two groups, and maintain

ethnic boundaries by choosing marriage with a co-ethnic. The willing recognize that there are cultural differences, but do not use these differences to draw symbolic boundaries between the two ethnic groups. Rather, they see these boundaries as blurred and negotiable, stressing intragroup heterogeneity and prioritizing characteristics other than ethnicity in producing similarity and difference.

## **ACCEPTING EXTERNAL CONSTRAINTS OR FIGHTING FOR LOVE? DEALING WITH THIRD PARTY EXPECTATIONS**

A second difference in the narratives of the reluctant and the willing has to do with how people deal with a potential taboo on interethnic marriages in their environment (including family, peers and their wider social circle). In line with prior studies conducted among Turks in Belgium and the Netherlands (Callaerts, 1997b; De Vries, 1987), our data show that the taboo on intermarriage in Turkish populations in Belgium remains strong, particularly for women:

It comes more from our religion, it is less accepted for the girls. If a Turkish guy tells at home that he is with a Belgian girl, it is going to be accepted more easily. If a Turkish girl would do the same, it would not work I think, it will be less acceptable. It is not about the Turkish guy, it is about the Turkish girl. For guys, it is more easily accepted. (Mehmet, 35M, co-ethnic marriage, secondary education)

The fact that the taboo is strongest for women does not mean that men do not meet any resistance. Men can also face disapproval when they enter a committed interethnic relationship, both from their families and their peers. Overall however, it seems that social consequences and disapproval are less severe for them than for women.

Comparing the narratives of the reluctant and the willing, we notice a difference in how they respond to the third-party expectations. The reluctant frequently justify their choice by referring to external disapproval and social consequences:

I do not have a preference for an *autochton* or an *allochton*<sup>5</sup>. If that happens, then it happens. But I can imagine that my parents would consider it a problem. So I think you automatically start excluding. In order to avoid that you would develop an interest in them, or in order to not give them a signal one way or another. Because you know that eventually, it will not work out anyway, because you will have your parents against you. (Nergis, 23F, single, tertiary education).

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<sup>5</sup> In Dutch: *allochtoon* - refers to people with a foreign background. In Belgium, this term mainly used to refer to people of Turkish or Moroccan ancestry.



Maybe, another generation is going to be different. But I think it is easier [to marry a Turkish woman]. I did not learn it from my parents, I learned it more from friends and the like. Because of friends who... the way they think about Belgian girls and stuff, you know, and... (hesitates, almost afraid to say something) the way one... I mean if you say like... like... if you do marry a Belgian woman, they are not going to disapprove or something but... You learn it, you also see what the Belgian girls are like you know. I mean, I mean, I am not going to say that they are worse, or that all Turkish girls are good (silence) But sorry, if I see them, I mean I go out... and (more silently) a girl, you know, it all goes so smoothly. It all goes too smoothly. I think it goes too smoothly and therefore, it loses its value. (Ali, 26M, single, tertiary education).

These narratives show that people often reject interethnic marriage because they feel the need to conform to the ethnic community's expectations, and want to avoid negative consequences. The first quote shows that some people do not consider an interethnic relationship an option even though they do not necessarily have anything against a relationship with an ethnic Belgian; it is simply not allowed in their family. This is indicative of the gendered nature of the taboo that only women exhibit such reasoning, explaining that the sole reason why they do not consider interethnic marriage is because "it is not allowed, so simply not considered." The second quote illustrates that the pressure not to engage in an interethnic relationship can become internalized and legitimized as "the right thing to do." Ali has "learned from his friends" that Belgian women are unsuitable as marriage partners. He does not say it with these exact words<sup>6</sup>, but among his peers, marriage to a Belgian girl is disapproved of because of these girls' bad (sexual) reputation<sup>7</sup>. Consequently, things would be "easier" for him – in the sense that he would not be ridiculed or lose respect among his peers – if he married a Turkish woman. He ends his argument by legitimizing this viewpoint, claiming that his own experience, he has found Belgian girls to be "too smooth." In doing so, he demonstrates that he does not merely act based on what his peers expect, but that he has internalized their point of view, making it his own.

Not only the reluctant, but also the willing, talk about a disapproval of interethnic marriages in their environment. There are gender differences in the narratives regarding how parents and the larger environment react to an interethnic marriage. Most female participants report a strong fear of telling their parents because they expect strong disapproval, severe social consequences and even potential repudiation. Men, on the other hand, mainly refer to disapproval by the family and their

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<sup>6</sup> The pauses, hesitations and repeated reformulations show that he is reluctant to express his opinion, probably because he does not want to offend the interviewer.

<sup>7</sup> Elsewhere in the interview, he raises the concept secondhand women – women who have already had sexual intercourse with someone else

peers, never to social consequences as severe as repudiation. Compare, for example, the following narratives:

- Ayben (F): I guess [I will tell them] maybe when it becomes too hard to handle. You cannot keep it a secret. It won't be anytime soon, because I have to gather all my courage to be able to tell it. (...) I am going to get a lot of reactions, phone calls to reflect on my decision. The chance exists that I will be repudiated, maybe the first years, that chance exists. [My family] is highly convinced it is not possible. And also, what are the relatives going to say, or the people in [our town]. I often tell them about friends who have made the same decision and every time I get a negative reaction: it is unacceptable.
- Apo (M): At first sight, [my parents] were actually against [my relationship]. Because she was Christian, but in fact, that is not a big deal. Me as a guy, with a Christian is not a bad thing. So, they accepted it right away. And now they love her and like her. Always, from the beginning.

These viewpoints are exemplary of how most men and women talk about pressure from their families regarding interethnic relationships. Just like Ayben, many women fear an extremely negative reaction from their parents and larger family, and understand that choosing an interethnic relationship might lead to a break with their families. This can be as extreme as being declared dead by the family and the environment:

There are also Turkish girls who became Belgian, who eventually married a Belgian, and have all the characteristics of a Belgian. They are not even counted anymore. The name is even not mentioned anymore; I know parents whose daughter is married to a Belgian. For them, it is over with no doubt. That girl, she has not lived, [for her parents] and also for other people. They no longer ask "how is your daughter." (Elif, 25F, co-ethnic relationship, secondary education)

Despite the fact that they expect negative reactions, these men and women do not give in to the pressure and continue their interethnic relationship. Most often, especially when it concerns a relationship between a Turkish woman and a Belgian man, the couple hides the relationship (at least from the parents) until they are sure that they want to spend their lives together. This is not always easy, as is illustrated in the following narrative:

- Ayben (F): It is very hard. I have a lot of trouble dealing with it. Also because I get along well with my mother and it is hard to – I feel bad that I cannot share it with her. (...) I was in love, you do not think about those things. But when push comes to shove and you realize it is becoming serious and you start thinking about the future, then the penny drops, and you wonder how to deal with it (...) But I am going to tell them at home, I think first to my mom. And it is going to be a huge disappointment, but maybe if he

would convert – it would be more pro forma I think – then maybe it will be acceptable. Otherwise it would be really difficult.

Ayben's narrative shows that hiding the relationship, and the actual *coming out* are both difficult and risky. Several of the Turkish participants (both men and women) expressed guilt about lying about their relationship to their parents. These narratives also show that guilt can be exacerbated by the fact that the other partner – who often does not need to hide the relationship – sometimes gets frustrated about constantly dating on the sly.

In addition, Ayben's narrative, as those of other Turkish participants, shows how people think about how to make their relationship known, and seen in an acceptable light, while they are simultaneously hiding it. One strategy to ease the coming out is to first tell family members who are going to be least negative, and ask them for their support. At the time of the interview, Ayben had already told her sister, and she described her support as essential in gathering the courage she needed to tell her mother. After siblings, mothers are often the second in line because they are regarded as "softer" than the father. In several cases, the mother tells the news to the father, partly in order to spare the son or daughter from the first and harshest reaction.

Two strategies that people use (especially the couples involving a Turkish woman) to make an interethnic relationship more acceptable for others in the environment, is getting married (necessary considering a rather strong taboo on cohabitation for women) and the non-Muslim partner's conversion to Islam. Senay, for example, wanted to find "a way to keep both [Freddy] and [her] family." She figured out that the only way they could be together was if Freddy would convert to Islam, and they would have a religious wedding:

Freddy (M): [Converting] was bizarre actually. I knew very little about it, what was expected from me, except that I had to say a couple of sentences in Arabic. I thought that was pretty okay, because I had also told myself like "look [Freddy], this is something you do for [Senay]. You know, I am not religious, so all in all that did not mean so much to me. So in that sense, it was a bit hypocrite. But it was the only way to be able to do what we wanted.

Senay (F): Yes, because I knew that it was going to be an issue for my mother. Not having a civil wedding, that was acceptable, but the religious one was an issue. And actually, now she knows that [Freddy] did it for me. Sometimes she says: does he fast? And then I reply: No mother, you do know that he became Muslim for me? And then she shuts up, saying "ok, I am not going to ask any further, I will pretend I did not hear it."

Given that the taboo on interethnic marriages is grounded in the religious rule that a Muslim woman cannot marry a non-Muslim, the conversion of the Belgian partner is a way to force parents

and the environment to accept the relationship. That this conversion is often *pro forma* does not seem to matter. The religious marriage should also be seen in this light; Senay insisted on doing it (even though neither felt ready to marry), in order to make the relationship acceptable for her mother and to avoid the possibility that people would go to her mother and present what she had done as taboo. By having a religious ceremony to which many people were invited, she showed the outside world that her mother accepted the marriage—an attempt to silence the people in her mother’s environment.

In sum, in terms of third-party expectations, the difference between the willing and the reluctant lies in whether or not they are willing to prioritize their own preferences over those in their environment, and the extent to which they feel they have the agency to make an interethnic relationship accepted. The narratives of the former group are centered around the “impossibility” or “unacceptability” of interethnic relationships – a word choice that denies agency. The formers’ narratives show that they consider themselves agents who have the power to follow their own path, even if it is difficult. The question remains, however, what factors account for this difference and the difference in individual preferences?

## **NETWORKS, SCARCITY AND NARRATIVES OF OUTSIDERNESS. EXPLAINING THE DIFFERENCES**

Choosing an interethnic relationship is not something that the Turkish partner in interethnic couples have always had in mind. In some cases, especially among men, it is sometimes presented as a coincidence, especially if it did not really matter to them whether or not their partner was Turkish:

Apo: Actually, it is purely coincidental. Before my girlfriend, I had close contact with a Turkish girl, but it did not really work out (...) I don’t need a Turkish one, it is not necessary; If you feel good with someone, she does not need to be black, she does not need to be Arab, she does not need to be anything. As long as she is a decent person, if you can have good conversations, if you feel good with her.

In other cases, especially among women, the interethnic relationship is presented as the outcome of a path-dependent process in which certain factors make such a relationship gradually more likely. If we reconstruct the path towards the interethnic relationship for our research participants, we notice that prior to the relationship, none of the Turkish partners mentioned a preference for a Belgian partner. At least six of the nine participants (3 men, 3 women) had already been involved with a Turkish partner before they entered their current relationship. In the case of the women, they entered these relationships because they took it for granted that a Turkish partner was best for them:

Damla: I thought, like I just said, [a Turkish man and I] are going to have the same worldview, we are going to have the same way of life. Those habits, like no alcohol, halal, those are practical issues. I also knew a lot of Belgians and I know how they react to these things, they just run away from me, you know, they were not interested in me. They *were* interested in me, and the moment they heard like ok, we are not going to get anything before we marry, they are gone. They are gone. They just wanted to play, and then you get an image of Belgian people like look, they just want to play, they do not want anything serious.

Senay: I grew up with the unwritten rule that I would marry a Turk. In my time, there were very few people who married a Turkish guy from Belgium. Because you know, at that time there weren't so many, and if you are going to have some demands, the chances [that you will find someone] are really small. So I had the idea that it would be someone from Turkey. I was 200 per cent sure of that.

Damla rejected an interethnic relationship because of her high religiosity and her experiences with the Belgian men that she had gotten to know: all of the men she had spoken to had “ran away” when they realized she did not want to have sex before marriage. She thought that it would be easier to be with a Turkish man, because he would have the same religion, and therefore, she assumed, the same lifestyle. Senay's argument for initially prioritizing a co-ethnic (transnational) marriage is an example of the internalization of third-party expectations: she grew up with the idea that one has to marry a Turkish partner, and, for that reason, rejected the possibility of an interethnic marriage.

However, the women's reluctance to engage in an interethnic relationship gradually lessened, and eventually disappeared, due to a number of factors. Based on the narratives, we distinguish at least three: the composition of their *social network*, a sense of being different from other members of their ethnic group and a *perception of scarcity* of suitable partners within their ethnic group. In what follows, we focus on the importance of these factors in reconstructing the path-dependent process towards an interethnic relationship (which mainly applies to women). We stress however, that these factors not only matter in understanding why some people move from *reluctance* to *openness*, but are also important for explaining interethnic relationship that are assumed to be “coincidental” (which mainly applies to men).

To begin, following Blau's structural theory (1977), participants refer to the importance of one's social network for understanding why some engage in an interethnic relationship, while others do not:

Ayben: I do not think it is a coincidence [that I am with a native Belgian]. How do you meet people? Who do you start something with? Someone you meet at work, in the street, where you live, where you hang out. And where I hang out is not in the marketplace of [my town]. Me and my boyfriend had a lot in common. We were [working together]. For me it seemed very evident.

Freddy: If you do not run into an Eskimo, you cannot marry an Eskimo, you know. If you stay in your own culture or community, and you, for example, do not continue your education [after high school] – that is the moment you choose your partner.

Freddy refers almost literally to Blau's claim that the social structure of the environment is an important factor in explaining partner choice. As Freddy points out, for many Turkish Belgians, a central factor in this regard is tertiary education because it strongly increases Turkish Belgians' chances of having meaningful contact with ethnic Belgians. People who pursue tertiary education not only have a higher likelihood of engaging in meaningful interaction with ethnic Belgians, but also do so at an age at which people start looking for a partner. Universities and colleges, as well as the job they gain access to, can therefore be seen as micro-level marriage markets. Given that relatively few Turkish Belgians pursue higher education, these marriage markets are predominantly "Belgian," enhancing their chances for interethnic relationships. The importance of the social structure of one's environment is one of the reasons why we claim that interethnic relationships are not as coincidental as they are sometimes perceived. The mere structure of someone's social environment is important in shaping people's partner choice, but this is something people are not always aware of, explaining why they label the interethnic character of their relationship as a coincidence.

The narrative of the importance of the social network and central role of higher education in this sense is often linked with *narratives of outsidersness*:

Senay: I have often been an exceptional case... in school, for sure in university, because... there are few allochtons who continue their education. And if I saw how my Turkish female friends started a relationship, and married and stuff... most of them had an arranged marriage. Some of them also met someone but those were Turks. But those girls were in that social sphere you know. They had not studied, they did not have contact with Belgian guys, and they did not have the opportunity to meet those guys. While in my case, it was either in university or after university hours in a bar, and that way I could meet someone.

Senay and some of the other Turkish men and women who engaged in an interethnic relationship often present themselves as "different" from the majority of the Turkish population in Belgium. In most cases, they motivate their claim of being different by referring to the fact that they do not remain ensconced in their Turkish community, as many others seem to do. Senay gives the example of her friends who did not pursue higher education, and therefore did not come into close contact with ethnic Belgians at an age when people start looking for a partner. The claim of being different is not only based on *more contact* with ethnic Belgians, but often also on a stronger orientation towards ethnic Belgians and the "Belgian" way of life. Junior and Nele, for example, explain how Junior's

family was different from other families, particularly regarding their attitude towards ethnic Belgians:

- Junior            I look a bit different at things compared to the average person that grew up in a traditional Turkish family. I try to get the best of both worlds.
- Interviewer    You mention “a typical Turkish family” – is your family different then?
- Junior            I got chances – I have a typical family but it is the chances you get. (...) The good thing about my dad was: he went from the village to the city to work [in Turkey], so he kind of saw the things there. He did not come immediately from the village to Belgium. I don’t know, but maybe his attitude, his worldview would have been different. Also, he had a Flemish friend and twice a week [my mother and him] went for dinner at his place. And because of that person, my mother has learned how to make fries and meat stew, and vol-au-vent<sup>8</sup>
- Nele              His father had lots of respect for Belgian people and he could really – like this [friend of his], that was really his best friend, and him and my mother-in-law have a lot of very good relationships.

Because Junior grew up in a family that had good relations with ethnic Belgians, he considers himself more open to the Belgian lifestyle compared to people who grew up in more traditional Turkish families. This partly explains why ethnicity does not seem to matter to him and his partner Nele. Junior also does not feel the need to hold on to his Turkish identity, like some others do, which is another reason why they do not perceive cultural differences and difficulties when it comes to their relationship. Unlike people who consider it important to hold on to “their Turkish culture” and pass it on to their children, Junior is open to “combine the best of both worlds,” which makes a relationship with an ethnic Belgian easier.

Finally, there is also a link between a *sense of outsidersness* and a *perception of scarcity* of suitable marriage partners in one’s own ethnic group – a link we exclusively found in the narratives of Turkish women. Because they consider themselves different from other, more traditional Turkish men and women – often because they have pursued higher education and have more egalitarian gender-values – some women expect difficulties in finding a suitable partner in the Turkish community. In some cases, this expectation is partly based on previous, unsuccessful commitments to Turkish men that made them realize that a Turkish partner was not necessarily a good choice for them. These women’s narratives show that they do not necessarily exclude the possibility of a relationship with a Turkish man, but that they perceive their chances of finding an ideal partner in the Turkish community as slim.

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<sup>8</sup> Both can be considered typical Belgian dishes.

The combination of intensive contact with ethnic Belgians and the awareness of the possible difficulties of finding a good match in the Turkish community is crucial to understanding why women's reluctance towards interethnic relationships gradually lessens, sometimes eventually disappearing when someone falls in love with an ethnic Belgian. At this point, personal preferences gain the upper hand over parental expectations. Given the taboo on interethnic marriages in the Turkish community<sup>9</sup>, many couples initially hide their relationship, at least until both partners realize they want to share their lives together, something which often takes several months, or even years. At a certain point however, the relationship can no longer remain hidden. It is at this point that the Turkish partner's struggle with his/her own preferences and the expectations of the environment seems to reach its climax. Confronted with the possibility that by choosing to continue the relationship, the Turkish partner risks being repudiated (in the case of women), many couples start to look for ways to "keep each other as well as their families." In most cases, this means that the Belgian partner makes *religious* or *cultural concessions* – such as learning the language, wearing a headscarf or converting to Islam – so (s)he becomes more like "one of them."

What do we learn from mixed couples' narratives, and the reasons why some people are open to an interethnic relationship, while others are not? One important condition for interethnic marriages, it seems, is to have meaningful, repeated contact with ethnic Belgians at the age at which people start looking for a partner. Being embedded in a predominantly Belgian social environment not only enhances Turkish Belgians' chances of meeting an ethnic Belgian partner, but also potentially contributes to the deconstruction of symbolic boundaries and prejudices they might have. By engaging in meaningful interaction, people can come to realize that the social reality is more complex than us-versus-them dichotomies seem to suggest, and that "similarity" and "difference" cannot be reduced to ethnic backgrounds.

But social contact alone is not enough. A second difference between the willing and the reluctant lies in their attitude towards ethno-cultural retention. Whereas the reluctant generally want to maintain premigration cultural patterns, the willing exhibit more cultural flexibility. This is why the willing see themselves as "different" from other Turkish people. As argued, this sense of being more culturally flexible is related to their higher education, or to their parents' attitude towards ethnic Belgians and the so-called Belgian lifestyle.

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<sup>9</sup> The fact that we focus on the taboo in the Turkish community does not mean that the expectations of the parents of the Belgian partner do not play a role. Indeed, studies have shown that Belgian parents can also oppose interethnic relationships, especially in the case of daughters (see, for example, Clycq, 2012).



## DISCUSSION

In this study, we explore the relevance of ethnic boundary dynamics for understanding why some people are open to an interethnic relationship, while others are more reluctant. We analyze partner choice narratives of second- and third-generation Turkish Belgians, focusing on differences that can help explain different attitudes towards interethnic relationships. Our analysis reveals two essential differences in how *the willing* – those open to an interethnic relationship – and *the reluctant* – those who are more negative about it – talk about interethnic relationships. First, the reluctant stress ethno-cultural differences, whereas the willing deny the relevance of ethnicity for producing similarity and difference. The reluctants' narratives point to internalized symbolic boundaries: they think in us-versus-them terms and see cultures as essentially different. Some object to an interethnic relationship out of a fear of cultural strain, others because they do not want to give up on their cultural identity, and value ethno-cultural retention. In contrast, the willings' narratives indicate blurred boundaries: they recognize cultural differences, but do not see them as essential or necessarily problematic. They stress the importance of communication to deal with potential difficulties, as well as the need for cultural flexibility.

A second difference relates to how people talk about third parties' attitudes and expectations. The reluctant accept or have even internalized the taboo on interethnic marriages, and therefore construct interethnic relationships as impossible or unacceptable. The willing, in contrast, see themselves as active agents who have the power to follow their own path and prioritize their preferences over third party expectations, even if this is difficult or potentially results in severe social consequences, such as repudiation.

We discern two factors that help to explain these differences. First, the narratives of the willing point out the relevance of the social structure of the environment. In line with Blau's famous dictum, "one cannot marry an Eskimo if no Eskimo is around," we notice that those in interethnic relationships often attribute this to higher likelihoods of meeting, particularly because of their tertiary education. Second, the blurred ethnic boundaries and cultural flexibility that are evident in their narratives are related to the observation that their social environment has contributed to the deconstruction of ethnic boundaries and greater openness towards ethnic Belgians and the "Belgian culture." In their narratives, this is translated into *narratives of outsidersness*, in which they present themselves as being different from other Turkish Belgians, who are presented as having less contact with ethnic Belgians and more culturally conservative. They attribute this sense of being different to their tertiary education – which has put them in contact with many ethnic Belgians and has made

them more reflexive about the Turkish and Belgian culture – or to the cultural openness of their immediate social environment – in particular parents or older siblings.

Given that the taboo on interethnic relationships is stronger for women than men, partner choice narratives show clear gender differences. First, women talk a lot more about third-party expectations and, accordingly, narratives of “impossibility” and “unacceptability” of interethnic relationships are mainly found among women. Because they presuppose very negative reactions to interethnic relationships, women often talk about how they never even considered such a marriage – something we did not find among men. The male reluctants, in contrast, merely talked about cultural differences and associated difficulties, or about a desire to retain their ethnic culture. Second, those females who did opt for an interethnic relationship never explain the ethnically mixed character of their relationship as a coincidence – as several men did – but rather as the outcome of a path-dependent process in which several experiences gradually made an interethnic relationship more likely.

Based on our findings, we argue that the distinction between personal preferences, third-party expectations and structural constraints is useful in an analytic sense, but that in practice the three levels function together (for a similar claim, see Yalçın et al., 2006). First of all, we have shown that individual preferences are shaped by the structure of people’s social environments. The relation between the two is an indirect one via the construction or deconstruction of symbolic boundaries: people who grow up in a context of bright symbolic boundaries and who do not have much meaningful interaction with ethnic Belgians tend to conceptualize similarity and difference in ethno-cultural terms. Because of limited contact opportunities, chances are high that these symbolic boundaries will be internalized and that they will shape their partner choices. Second, individual preferences are also linked to third-party expectations: if people grow up in a context in which us-versus-them discourses are omnipresent and interethnic relationships are associated with stigma and taboo, chances are high that they are going to internalize and legitimize these ideas and expectations, making them their own. It is most clear that the three levels function together in the observation that the link between third-party expectations and individual preferences is shaped by the social structures an individual is embedded in: the link between the two becomes weaker with increasing opportunity to interact with ethnic Belgians.

This study attempts to explain micro-level differences in partner choice among Turkish Belgians. It should not be treated, however, as a study that lists the factors that account for the low intermarriage rate on an aggregate level. In order to explain why the intermarriage rate between ethnic and Turkish Belgian is so low, one also needs to look at what happens on the other side of the boundary, including the attitudes ethnic Belgians have towards interethnic relationships, how their

environment thinks about such relationships and to what extent people come into contact with members of the Turkish population.

The theoretical implications of this study are threefold. First, our results show that social boundaries between two ethnic groups – in this case reflected in low degrees of intermarriage – are maintained voluntarily as well as because of external pressure. People marry co-ethnics because they feel such a partner is more similar to them, and/or because their environment pressures them to do so. In both cases, the preference for a co-ethnic follows from bright cognitive symbolic boundaries: people have internalized us-versus-them discourses that present ethnic others as essentially different, and hence not suitable partners.

The link between symbolic boundaries and partner choice brings us to a second implication: there is a strong relationship between the symbolic and the social dimension of ethnic boundaries that works in two ways. As just argued, symbolic boundaries contribute to the maintenance of social boundaries because they shape partner choice. But our study shows that social boundaries equally contribute to the maintenance of symbolic boundaries. Social boundaries between ethnic groups affect interethnic meeting opportunities, which in turn shape the construction or deconstruction of symbolic boundaries.

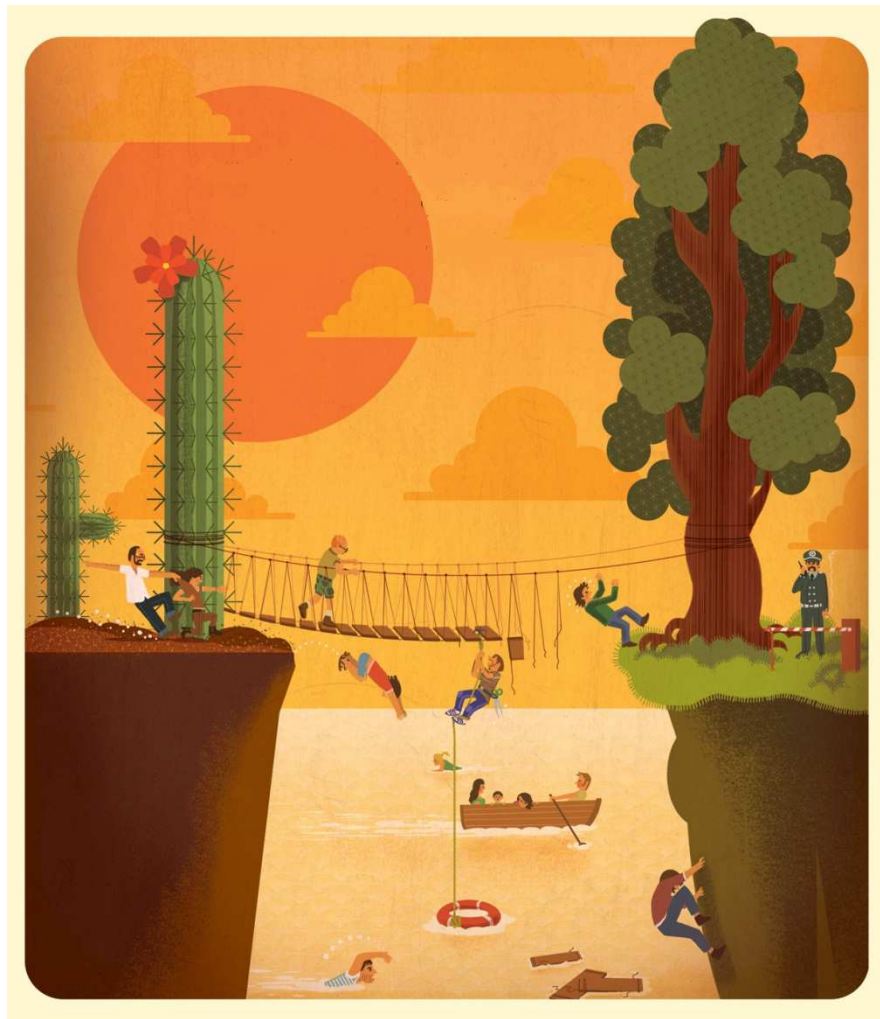
Third, our study demonstrates that ethnic boundary dynamics are important for understanding intermarriage, but we can equally argue that intermarriage is important in shaping boundaries. As Kalmijn (1998, p. 397) argued, intermarriage “bears the potential of cultural and socioeconomic change,” which includes – among other things – the blurring of symbolic and social boundaries. The narratives of our interethnic couples show that interethnic marriages are essentially about blending two cultural influences into one hybrid mix that retains as much of the cultural richness as possible. Their stories demonstrate that, on a micro-level, interethnic marriages are not about the “assimilation” of the partner with a foreign background, but rather about mutual adaptation and cultural flexibility.

# CHAPTER 12

# BRIDGING THE GAP?

# PRESENT AND FUTURE

*Conclusion and Discussion*





## RESEARCH CONTEXT & AGENDA

At the time of this writing, several Belgian cities are celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Turkish-Belgian bilateral agreement of 1964, which officially initiated labor migration from Turkey to Belgium. But half a century and three generations after the first Turkish migrants settled in Belgium, it seems that many members of the Turkish population have yet to reach parity with ethnic Belgians. Both in symbolic and social terms, Turkish Belgians are seen as second-class citizens who are not considered an integral part of Belgian society. As in several other European countries, members of the Turkish population are often regarded by members and institutions of the mainstream as essentially different and outsiders-within, mainly based on most Turks' religion, Islam. In addition to this symbolic boundary, the Turkish population in Belgium is also separated from the mainstream by a social boundary that manifests itself in a high degree of ethnic differentiation and inequality.

In this context of a bright ethnic boundary between the Turkish population and the mainstream, I explored the ethnic boundary dynamics that contribute to the boundaries' enduring relevance, as well as how boundary dynamics shape individual-level aspects of Turkish Belgians' socio-cultural incorporation. Following Barth (1969), I argue that the persistence of clearly identifiable ethnic groups is not dependent on enduring ethno-cultural differences or an absence of interethnic contact, but rather on the maintenance of ethnic boundaries by one or both groups.

Based on 62 semi-structured qualitative interviews with male and female second- and third-generation Turkish Belgians, this dissertation addresses the following three questions: (1) how do members of the mainstream and the Turkish populations (both as perceived by the research participants) contribute to the maintenance of an ethnic boundary between themselves; (2) how do second- and third-generation Turkish Belgians negotiate the boundary and boundary maintaining mechanisms with which they are confronted; and (3) how do ethnic boundary dynamics (both maintenance and negotiation) shape individual-level aspects of the socio-cultural incorporation of second- and third-generation Turkish Belgians? In asking these questions, I want to understand how both structure/context (ethnic boundary maintenance) and agency (ethnic boundary negotiation) shape individual-level aspects of socio-cultural incorporation, including cultural incorporation, subjective aspects of incorporation (i.e., self-identification) and partner choice.

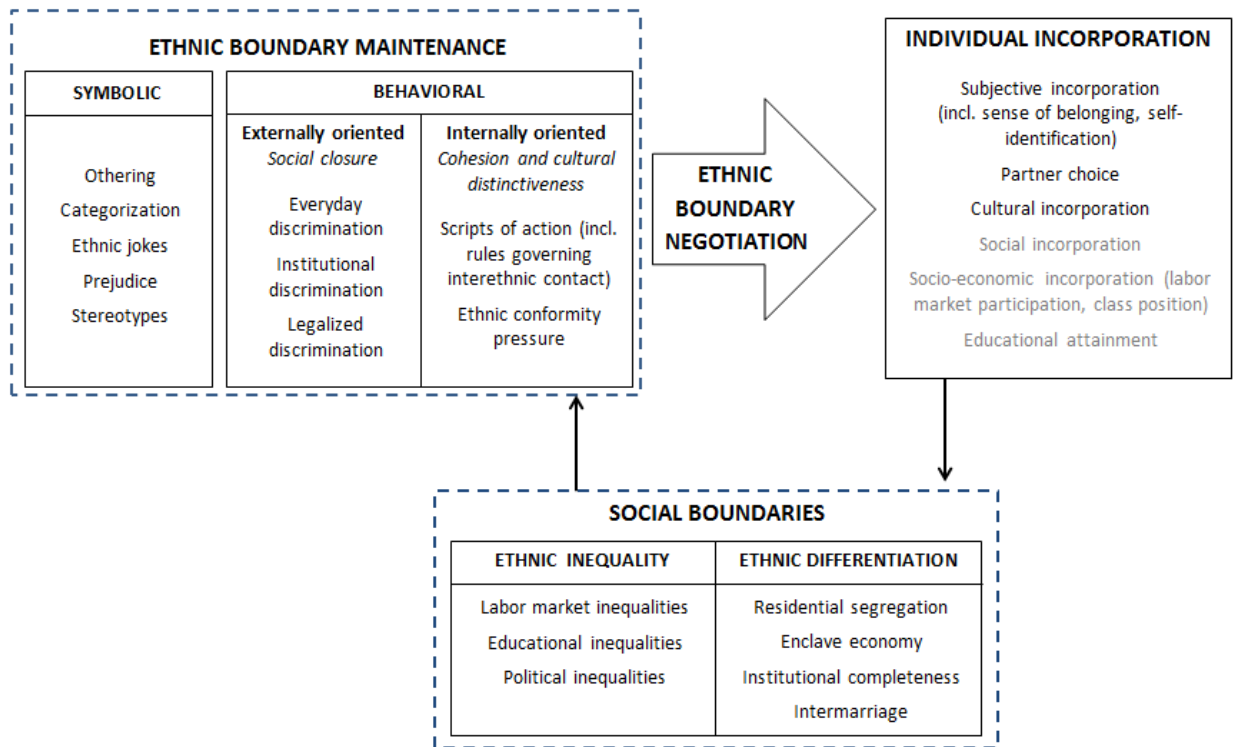
## THEORETICAL MODEL

The main theoretical aim of this dissertation is to demonstrate that Barth's ethnic boundary approach is a useful theoretical starting point for studying differences in socio-cultural incorporation, both between and within ethnic groups. At the same time, this dissertation is an empirical study of second- and third-generation Turkish Belgians' experiences with mechanisms of ethnic boundary maintenance, how they negotiate these mechanisms and how the combination of these two factors shapes their individual-level socio-cultural incorporation.

Based on a review of the literature on ethnic boundaries and on immigrant incorporation, I have built a tentative model of *bounded incorporation* (See Figure 9), the structure of which strongly mirrors Esser's model of intergenerational integration (2004). The central idea behind the model is that individual-level differences in incorporation can partly be explained by the extent to which individuals are exposed to ethnic boundary maintaining mechanisms, and their responses to them. In other words, I argue that individual-level socio-cultural incorporation is shaped by the combined effect of *ethnic boundary maintenance* and *ethnic boundary negotiation*. Following Wimmer (2013), I subdivide the process of ethnic boundary maintenance into two separate, but equally important, dimensions, namely a symbolic dimension (marking boundaries) and a behavioral dimension (creating barriers). The latter I further subdivide into internally- and externally-oriented mechanisms of ethnic boundary maintenance. Finally, following Esser (2004), I claim that the sum of all individuals' incorporation patterns translates into social boundaries (or oppositely societal integration) on an aggregate level, which is expressed in ethnic inequality and ethnic differentiation.

The difference between my model and Esser's is that I focus on only one aspect of the context, namely ethnic boundary maintenance. In doing so, I do not argue that other aspects of the context are irrelevant in explaining individual incorporation (especially regarding structural factors, such as occupational and educational attainment). What I do claim is that ethnic boundary dynamics are the most central part of the context when it comes to explaining socio-cultural aspects of incorporation. Other factors, such as group size, group composition and access to different forms of capital, matter, but mainly in the sense that they shape the extent to and the ways in which an ethnic boundary is maintained, as well as the individuals' power to negotiate mechanisms of ethnic boundary maintenance. The goal, then, is not only to outline how boundaries are maintained and negotiated, but also to study what factors shape the effectiveness of boundary maintaining mechanisms and the power individuals have to respond to these mechanisms. Such a view is in line with a relational sociology that explains group relations and inequalities through a focus on *unfolding transactions* rather than on preconstituted attributes (Emirbayer, 1997).

**Figure 9 Model of bounded incorporation**



The remainder of this final chapter is as follows: I start with an overview of the main findings and their implications for existing and future theoretical and empirical research. Subsequently, I discuss the limitations of the study and give suggestions for further research. I end this chapter with a critical discussion of the implications for policy, policymakers and professionals.

## MAIN FINDINGS AND THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

In what follows, I present the main findings of this research project, offering in-depth answers to the three main research questions, as well as additional insights that emerged from the data analysis. Throughout the presentation of the research results, I will link my findings back to existing literature, discussing how they contradict, support or build on previous research findings. I start by answering the three main research questions, integrating the answers to the different sub-questions into the overall answer. After, I focus on factors that explain within-group differences in how boundaries are maintained and negotiated. Subsequently, I examine the link between the individual and the aggregate level, discussing how boundary maintenance, negotiation and their consequences for individual incorporation shape and are shaped by macro-level social boundaries. I end this section with theoretical implications for incorporation research and sociological research in general.



## **ETHNIC BOUNDARY MAINTENANCE: A MATTER OF JOINT WORK**

*RQ 1: How do members of the mainstream and Turkish population contribute to the maintenance of ethnic boundaries?*

My research participants' narratives demonstrate first that the active maintenance of a boundary is *joint work* done by members of both groups on either side of the boundary: members of the mainstream population mark symbolic boundaries and maintain social boundaries through mechanisms of exclusion, but also members of the Turkish population draw symbolic boundaries between themselves and ethnic Belgians and maintain social boundaries through ethnic conformity pressure.

### *Boundary maintenance by the Turkish population*

In chapter six, I showed that not only members of the mainstream but also those belonging to the less powerful group in a boundary system – in this case Turkish Belgians – actively engage in boundary work. By doing so, they implicitly or explicitly contest the way in which boundaries are marked by the mainstream. The research participants use two sets of boundary markers to “mark the boundaries of Turkishness”: the primacy of the group over the individual, and the importance of female chastity. Unlike in dominant public discourse, Islam is not an important boundary marker in their narratives.

In stressing the positive aspects of a group- and family-oriented culture, and presenting it as morally superior, the research participants offer a counter discourse that delegitimizes the Western superiority ideology, which is based on individual autonomy. It is an example of what Wimmer labels *normative inversion*: actors do not change the location of the boundary but give a new meaning and value to it in order to inverse, or at least equalize the existing rank order of groups, hence reclaiming a positive group identity. The finding that also *female chastity* is an important boundary marker illustrates once more that women are often regarded as the keepers of culture and the cultural signifiers of ethnic collectivities, and that their behavior is of specific relevance for marking and maintaining ethnic boundaries.

In chapter seven, I demonstrated how the co-ethnic community tries to enforce normative expectations (including the above described boundary markers) through *ethnic conformity pressure*. I conceptualize ethnic conformity pressure as an *internally-oriented mechanism* of ethnic boundary maintenance, because it is aimed at enhancing internal group cohesion and cultural distinctiveness, and excludes people who do not conform to the expectations. My analysis shows that co-ethnic communities use social control mechanisms, including gossip, ridicule, social exclusion and the threat of losing one's honor and good reputation, to reinforce norms and values, and prevent group

members from assimilating into the mainstream. Ethnic conformity pressure not only prescribes how to behave as a group member, but also proscribes too much interaction – especially regarding partner choice – with those on the other side of the boundary. For example, in chapter eleven, I discussed the rather strong taboo on interethnic marriages – particularly for women – among Turkish Belgians, and that marrying across ethnic and religious lines can result in repudiation by the family, social exclusion by the more traditional members of the co-ethnic community and ridicule and loss of status among peers. Conformity pressure by the co-ethnic group exists independently of parental pressure but can shape expectations of parents towards their children in the sense that parents sometimes pressure their children to behave according to group norms out of fear of social sanctions.

In chapter seven, I furthermore demonstrate that the occurrence of ethnic conformity pressure and a community's capacity to enforce the normative expectations are strongly shaped by the city context, most importantly the social structure of the Turkish community and the ethnic heterogeneity and interethnic climate of the city. In particular, I find that (1) uniformity of region of origin enhances network closure and normative consensus within a particular community and (2) less ethnic heterogeneity and interethnic contact increases people's dependence on their ethnic community for social support. Both factors enhance the community's capacity to enforce ethnic conformity pressure and hence maintain social boundaries.

These findings have several theoretical implications. First, with regard to ethnic conformity pressure, I want to draw attention to the observation that not only parents but also the co-ethnic community at large can exert pressure to conform to premigration cultural patterns, which mainly happens indirectly, through mechanisms of social control. Previous studies, particularly among Asian immigrant groups in the US, have drawn attention to family pressures to conform to premigration cultural practices, but much less attention has been devoted to conformity pressure by unrelated co-ethnics. Based on my findings, I hypothesize that not only parents, but also the co-ethnic group at large have the power to maintain ethnic boundaries, particularly if the community has a high degree of network closure and it interacts with parental pressure, in the sense that it helps or pressures parents to enforce certain normative expectations. Given that the pressure is exerted through mechanisms of social control, I argue, in line with Barth (1994), that it is important to not only study how boundaries are maintained through interactions on a micro-level, but to also focus on meso-level processes that create dichotomies and boundaries.

Second, while recognizing that ethnic cohesion and social control have many beneficial effects, it is important to also consider its downsides, including the limits to individual freedom (and gender inequality in this case), possible negative psychological consequences and risks of marginalization of

non-conformists. Regarding the latter consequence, it might well be that strong ethnic groups sometimes exacerbate marginalization rather than act as a buffer against it. In this respect, the case of divorced women in Turkish communities comes to mind: given a taboo on divorce, these women are often socially excluded by the community of which they were once a part. Such a situation is specifically problematic for women who came here through marriage migration – women who often have no large social network outside that of their former husband's, and are often in a precarious economic position (because they do not know the language, for example).

Third, I want to point out that despite the high degree of social cohesion in many Turkish communities, members of the Turkish population are often at the bottom of the social ladder. This observation raises questions about segmented assimilationism's claim that strong ethnic communities help to prevent downward assimilation and promote social mobility (For a similar claim, see Phalet & Heath, 2011). In the United States, studies within the segmented assimilation paradigm attribute the upward assimilation of many Asian groups to their strong group cohesion. Tight ethnic groups, they argue, protect against deviancy and downward assimilation into the underclass, and encourage upward social mobility. However, despite high levels of social cohesion and control in Turkish communities, relatively few people are upwardly mobile, which leads me to conclude that strong ethnic groups are no guarantee for upward social mobility. I see access to different forms of capital – including human and social capital – as the crucial factor in this respect. The fact that the coethnic community has little to offer in terms of employment or educational support can help to explain why the group's social control does not lead to upward social mobility for Turks, but rather coincides with a “Turkish disadvantage” (Phalet & Heath, 2011). Also, despite the fact that parents undoubtedly have high aspirations for their children to do well in school, the high degree of perceived discrimination, high unemployment and the limited number of role-models (which is gradually changing) among Turkish Belgians, might result in a sense of futility when it comes to education – a feeling that upward mobility is beyond people's control or out of reach. For this reason, I argue that it is important to be more precise regarding what the specific aspects of strong ethnic communities (e.g. ethnic solidarity, network closure, widespread monitoring, availability of human capital) are that influence a particular outcome, and to study how these factors' influence on educational and occupational attainment is shaped by the context of reception.

### *Boundary maintenance by the mainstream population*

Turkish Belgians not only experience boundary maintaining mechanisms in their own ethnic group, but are also frequently confronted with boundary maintenance by members of the mainstream through the latter's body language, discourse and discriminatory practices. The observation that

boundaries manifest themselves in both discourse and exclusionary practices aligns with Wimmer's (2013) claim that ethnic boundaries always comprise both a categorical and a behavioral dimension. The categorical dimension manifests itself through myriad discursive practices, including both subtle cases of *everyday racism* (Essed, 1991) – such as ethnic jokes, the use of the word *allochtoon* and discursive othering – and blatantly racist utterances. The behavioral dimension manifests itself to the research participants through everyday discrimination, mainly in the housing and labor market and nightlife. Compared to discursive practices of boundary drawing, however, these behavioral manifestations are much less frequently voiced, and mainly by the male participants.

A remarkable finding is that participants with higher education have a higher perception of exclusion and discrimination, compared to those people who have only secondary degree or less. This finding replicates Dutch studies that show that more-educated minority members have a higher perception of discrimination compared to their less-educated counterparts (Gijsberts and Vervoort 2009; ter Teije, Coenders & Verkuyten, 2013) or at least do not differ in their perception (Jaspers and Lubbers, 2005). According to Tolsma and colleagues (2012, p. 794), this finding is counterintuitive, since assimilation theories expect cultural and structural assimilation to go hand in hand (Alba and Nee, 2003; Gordon, 1964; Portes and Rumbaut, 1990). In this regard, several authors speak about an *integration paradox*: the observation that increasing structural integration does not correlate with increasing cultural integration, but with higher sensitivity to ethnic acceptance and equality (Buijs, Demant & Hamdy, 2006; Entzinger & Dourleijn, 2008; Gijsberts & Vervoort, 2009; ten Teije et al., 2013; Tolsma, Lubbers & Gijsberts, 2012). Based on my findings and other studies, I identify two factors that can account for this observation. First, the more-educated are more familiar with Belgian media, and hence more exposed to us-versus-them discourses and other cases of symbolic boundary drawing (for a similar finding, see Gijsberts and Vervoort, 2009; ten Teije et al., 2012). Second, the highly educated are more likely than those with less education to study or work in contexts with more ethnic Belgians, and are hence more exposed to potential discrimination or symbolic boundary drawing (See also ten Teije et al., 2013).

## **ETHNIC BOUNDARY NEGOTIATION**

*RQ2: How are boundaries and boundary maintaining mechanisms negotiated?*

A focus on boundary dynamics not only includes studying how boundaries are maintained, but on how they are negotiated. In line with Alba and Nee (2003), Esser (2004) and the agency-rich approach to the study of ethnic boundaries (Lamont, 1995; Wimmer, 2013), I do not see immigrants and their descendants as powerless, but as rational actors who weigh the costs and benefits of various

options available and who have a certain degree of power (depending on their position in several power hierarchies) to negotiate the boundary maintaining mechanisms with which they are confronted.

Starting with the negotiation of the symbolic dimension of ethnic boundary construction, I have demonstrated that participants contest both the *content* of symbolic boundaries (what it means to be Turkish), as well as the dichotomization between “us” and “them.” In chapter six, I show that by positively valuing the primacy of the group over the individual (stressing aspects such as solidarity, generosity and warm-heartedness), the participants offer a counter narrative to the mainstream’s negative ideas about a group-oriented culture. With their positive descriptions of what it means to be Turkish, people contest the negative meaning that the mainstream attaches to the importance of the group over the individual. This is not to say, however, that they also have the power to represent their view of reality as legitimate: in the interviews, the research participants present a counter narrative that delegitimizes and deconstructs the hegemonic view of the mainstream, but outside of this context, that narrative has, so far at least, limited representational power.

In chapter nine, I demonstrated that people not only redefine the content of what it means to be Turkish, but that they also negotiate how they are categorized by the mainstream. Most people feel excluded because of discrimination, (everyday) racism or othering – experiences that give them a feeling that they are not accepted as true Belgians by the mainstream. The different identity narratives that I present in this chapter all represent different responses to the categorization as non-Belgian by members of the mainstream population. Despite experiences of othering and discrimination, many people still identify as Belgian; they explicitly reclaim the Belgian identity denied to them from the outside and redefine it in terms of citizenship (rather than in terms of culture). They argue that having different cultural practices is no reason to be excluded, and that they deserve to be included based on the fulfillment of their duties as citizens, and, hence, delegitimize the fact that ethnic Belgians do not categorize them as Belgian. Other people who have difficulties identifying as Belgian because of their sense of exclusion do not necessarily develop an identity crisis, but manage to construct a positive, inclusive identity. This in-between identity creates a sort of third, hybrid culture and identity in between Turkish and Belgian, and attaches a positive value to this position, claiming to have the best of both worlds. For these people, boundaries between “Turkish” and “Belgian” have blurred, and they have recreated a new category in which the two are united. People who identify as world citizens, finally, also contest the boundary drawn by the mainstream. Identifying as a world citizen can be seen as an example of *boundary expansion*, because it is about creating an all-encompassing boundary. But, in fact, it can even be regarded as a

rejection of the idea that there are ethnic boundaries, and a plea for a symbolic representation of a world with no ethnic boundaries whatsoever.

Not only symbolic boundaries can be negotiated. The data show that Turkish Belgians also have the power to deal with the *behavioral dimension* of ethnic boundary maintenance, especially when it concerns internally-oriented mechanisms. In chapter eight, I demonstrated that conformity pressure through social control is not inescapable, but that people can respond to it with particular impression management strategies. Broadly speaking, I distinguish between *conformity*, *creativity* and *disregard*. Which strategy people choose is shaped by a great number of interrelated factors, including the severity of the violation, the social structure of the community, gender, one's and one's parents' embeddedness in the Turkish community and the availability of an alternative support network. Of all these factors, gender and embeddedness seem the most crucial; whereas men can basically disregard most expectations without severe social consequences, women are not granted this leniency and have to negotiate their own preferred lifestyle given what is expected from them. Embeddedness in the Turkish community matters in the sense that only those who feel they are outsiders in the community tend to disregard conformity pressure because they do not care about the social consequences. People who do not have this sense of outsidership and do feel part of the community that defines the norms have to take conformity pressure into account (either through conformity or creativity), given that completely disregarding normative expectations results in strong social disapproval and exclusion.

In this regard, I want to draw attention to relationship between boundary maintenance by the mainstream and boundary maintenance by the ethnic group, in the sense that ethnic conformity pressure is most successful in a situation of high exclusion and social closure on the part of the mainstream. When social closure by the mainstream is relatively high, many members of the Turkish population are dependent on their ethnic group for social and material support. As argued by Esser, when there are too many disadvantages and difficulties associated with access to the mainstream society and its benefits, choosing *ethnic alternatives* and investing in the less efficient ethnic capital can be a better or safer option than, for example, looking for friends, a spouse, a house or a job in the mainstream population or economy. But relying on one's ethnic group for social and material support comes at a cost: it requires conformity to the group's norms and values. Hence, in a context of exclusion and lack of security outside of one's own ethnic group, overt conformity to the group's normative expectations becomes essential (Barth, [1969] 1998, p. 37). Moreover, according to Wimmer (2013), high degrees of political salience of an ethnic boundary and high degrees of exclusion and social closure tend to create *thick identities*. These identities are associated with

defending the culture and honor of one's ethnic community, responding to group pressure and defining one's interests in terms of those of the entire ethnic community (Wimmer, 2013, p. 104). In the case of thick identities, Wimmer argues, identity might assume primacy over interest, in the sense that actors choose the ethnic path, even if this comes at a high cost. Consequently, the rationality that Alba and Nee (2003) and Esser (2004) talk about, should be conceptualized as not simply based on utilitarian interests, but also on individuals' need to belong to a community that gives them a sense of belonging and connectedness.

In chapter eleven, we see all of this at work when it comes to partner choice – specifically in interethnic relationships. As already mentioned, there is a strong taboo regarding interethnic relationships, particularly for women. But despite that taboo, some people do choose to marry an ethnic Belgian. Why some are *willing* to engage in an interethnic relationship while others are *reluctant*, can be explained by gender (as an interethnic relationship comes at a higher cost for women) as well as their embeddedness in a Turkish community and contact opportunities with the mainstream population (the willing often see themselves as outsiders and are more in contact with ethnic Belgians).

As I will argue more in-depth in the following section, behavioral mechanisms of ethnic boundary maintenance can also be negotiated. I have not paid attention in this dissertation to how people actively try to prevent discrimination, given that existing research regarding this matter is abundant<sup>1</sup>, but the narratives I presented do suggest that there are different ways people cope with exclusion from the outside. One possibility is that people will avoid contexts in which discrimination or othering might occur, retreating into their own ethnic group. Another possibility is that people are more proactive, and try to devise strategies that can reduce or prevent discrimination. For example, one research participant mentioned that men who fear they will not be admitted to a nightclub look for girls to enter the nightclub with, because this improves their chances of being admitted. Another participant argued that he chose not to let discrimination and exclusion get to him, but to “make himself accepted” – or make an extra effort to demonstrate that he is worthy of respect and acceptance.

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance Branscombe & Ellemers, 1998; Brittan, Toomey, Gonzales, & Dumka, 2013; Edwards & Romero, 2008; Foster, 2000; Gaylord-Harden & Cunningham, 2009; Joseph & Kuo, 2009; Kuo, 1995; Mallett & Swim, 2009; Mellor, 2010; Mossakowski, 2003; Noh, Beiser, Kaspar, Hou, & Rummens, 1999; Padilla, 2008; Ruggiero & Taylor, 1995; Swim & Thomas, 2006; Thompson, 2006; Utsey, Ponterotto, Reynolds, & Cancelli, 2000; Verkuyten & Nekuee, 2001.

## HOW BOUNDARY DYNAMICS AFFECT SOCIO-CULTURAL INCORPORATION

*RQ3: How do ethnic boundary dynamics shape socio-cultural incorporation*

How now do these mechanisms of ethnic boundary maintenance shape individual-level aspects of socio-cultural incorporation after having been negotiated by the individuals involved? There are many aspects of socio-cultural incorporation that could have been studied, but based on what emerged most clearly from the data, I have chosen to study (1) how ethnic conformity pressure shapes cultural incorporation; (2) how discursive exclusion and discrimination by the mainstream shape ethnic and national self-identification; and (3) how both internally- and externally oriented mechanisms of ethnic boundary maintenance shape partner choice.

### *Ethnic conformity pressure and cultural incorporation*

Chapters seven and eight demonstrate that ethnic conformity pressure has the potential to shape how individuals culturally incorporate into society. By pressuring individual members to conform to what is considered to be Turkish, and socially sanctioning behavior that is considered Belgian, the co-ethnic community can make boundary crossing and assimilation a very unattractive option. Or to put it in the words of Esser: by sanctioning individuals who choose the path towards assimilation, the co-ethnic community spurs members to “choose the ethnic alternative.”

But as both chapters seven and eight show, co-ethnic groups are not always successful at enforcing normative expectations, specifically because immigrants and their descendants are not powerless, but rather active agents who negotiate pressures. Drawing on my findings regarding the factors that shape a community’s capacity to enforce ethnic conformity pressure (chapter 7) and those that shape how individuals negotiate it, I hypothesize that conformity pressure has a stronger impact on cultural incorporation – in the sense that it promotes ethnic alternatives – in the following cases: the impact is stronger (1) for women than men; (2) for individuals who are strongly embedded in the community; (3) in communities with a high degree of network closure and normative consensus; (4) and in cases in which boundaries with the mainstream population are more bright and exclusion by the mainstream more frequent, which makes people more dependent on their community for social and material support.

I want to draw specific attention to the relevance of the negotiation strategies *disregard* and *creativity*, because both suggest that even despite ethnic conformity pressure, people do act out elements of what is considered *mainstream culture*, hence creating some sort of hybrid culture that holds middle ground between the assimilative and the ethnic option. In both cases, a kind of hybrid culture is created in which old and new are blended into one new lifestyle, or in which they mutually co-exist. The latter is especially true for people who value their membership in the community, and



try to safeguard their membership by hiding those behaviors that are associated with the other side of the boundary. This *creative* strategy can be seen as a case of code switching, depending on the context. In case of severe violations, such as, for example, an interethnic relationship of a Turkish women with a Belgian man, this can even lead to double lives: the front stage (when monitored by the co-ethnic community) and the backstage (when they feel this is not the case).

### *Boundary maintenance by the mainstream, belonging and identity*

One of the clearest findings of this research project is that experiences with boundary maintenance and exclusion by members of the mainstream strongly shape the research participants' subjective incorporation – including feelings of belonging and acceptance, and ethnic and national self-identification. Even in the absence of explicit racism or discrimination, most participants have a rather strong sense of being different and excluded, and many have these feelings as a result of subtle discursive exclusion practices. I therefore conclude that the more subtle boundary maintaining mechanisms, such as othering and the existence of the word *allochtoon*, are equally important in establishing a sense of exclusion. In fact, because these practices have infiltrated into widespread everyday and public discourse, their impact on Turkish Belgians' sense of belonging or acceptance might be even bigger than the impact of discrimination.

In line with Jenkins (1994, 2008), I show that externally located processes of categorization and exclusion not only affect people's sense of belonging or exclusion, but also their social identities. In chapter nine, I identified five different identity narratives, each of which represents a particular way that people relate to the labels *Belgian* and *Turkish*, and demonstrated the dialectic between external processes of ascription and internal assertion. First, the research participants' identity narratives are closely linked to their narratives of othering and exclusion, which signals that self-identification is shaped by people's perception of how others categorize and treat them. Based on the narratives of the participants, I distinguish between *feeling*, *being* and *doing* Turkish – reflecting the emotional, categorical, and behavioral aspects of identity (See also Verkuyten & deWolf, 2002) – and argue that ethnic boundary maintenance through othering and exclusion has the strongest impact on the *emotional* dimension.

Second, the narratives also demonstrate the importance of a sense of connectedness to one's ethnic group, irrespective of external categorization or exclusion. In line with Cornell and Hartmann's claim that both self-ascription and ascription by others are critical in ethnic identity formation (2007, p. 75), my findings show that people's self-identification results from the interplay of identities that are forced upon or denied to them on the one hand, and *chosen identities* – including reclaimed identities and those based on primordial attachments or civilizational commonalities – on

the other. The fact that people reclaim an identity that is denied to them from the outside (by stressing that they *are* Belgian even though the outside makes them *feel* they are not), or that they develop an identity that focuses on humanity or world citizenship, demonstrates most clearly that people can negotiate, redefine and contest boundaries drawn by the mainstream.

Three theoretical implications follow from these findings. First, these observations can help to explain why some studies do not find a strong link between (perceived) discrimination and the development of a reactive ethnicity: given the different ways people respond to exclusion, there is no direct, straightforward link between social categorization and exclusion by the mainstream and identification in ethnic and national terms. Second, studies that analyze the impact of exclusion on self-identification should not only focus on perceptions or experiences of discrimination and racism, but also on more subtle forms of exclusion, such as everyday racism, othering and ethnic jokes. Given that these practices occur more frequently, and often in familiar and supposedly safe contexts, they might pose a bigger threat to people's self-identification, sense of belonging and well-being than discriminatory practices or blatantly racist utterances. Third, one needs to distinguish between the different aspects of identification (emotional, categorical and behavioral) in explaining the impact of exclusion. As my results show, exclusion seems to mainly have an impact on the emotional dimension of identification – in the sense that people do not *feel* Belgian – and much less so on the categorical dimension.

### *Boundary dynamics and partner choice*

In chapters ten and eleven, I distinguished four factors, all related to ethnic boundaries, that shape partner choice: the extent to which people have internalized symbolic boundaries, third party pressure to marry an in-group member, how people deal with this pressure, and contact opportunities. People who are opposed to interethnic relationships seem to have internalized symbolic boundaries: they think in us-versus-them terms and see the cultures of “Turks” and “Belgians” as essentially different. Some object to interethnic relationships out of a fear of cultural strain, while others do not want to give up their cultural identity (which can be seen as a mechanism of ethnic boundary maintenance). Those who are open to an interethnic relationship, in contrast, recognize cultural differences, but do not see them as essential or necessarily problematic. They stress the importance of communication in dealing with potential difficulties, as well as the need for cultural flexibility.

As I demonstrated in chapter ten, the influence of third parties (most importantly the parents) is certainly declining, but has not disappeared completely. The still-widespread disapproval of interethnic marriages, especially for girls, can be regarded as a boundary maintaining mechanism in the sense that it promotes in-group marriages, hence reinforcing existing social boundaries. But it

would be an overstatement to say that the strong preference for a co-ethnic partner is only a consequence of conformity to parental expectations. In fact, the narratives of the research participants who engaged in an interethnic relationship show that people have agency, in that they can choose to follow their own preferences and can devise strategies to reduce possibly negative consequences. Given this observation, I argued in chapter eleven that one's own preferences and internalized symbolic boundaries are now more important than third-party expectations in explaining partner choice. This claim however, does not take into account that one's own attitude (and the internalization of symbolic boundaries) is strongly related to attitudes and symbolic boundary drawing in one's immediate environment. It is highly likely, for example, that a preference for ethno-cultural similarity is rooted in the fact that throughout their lives, people have been exposed to strong us-versus-them thinking in different settings and through different media. If people constantly hear through the media and in interactions with ethnic Belgians that they are different, and if their peers and family also construct a symbolic boundary between Turkish and Belgian people, it should not surprise that people internalize this symbolic boundary. As such, the idea that a union between an ethnic Belgian and Turkish Belgian is impossible can be explained through Gramsci's notion of *ideological hegemony*: even without explicit pressure to marry only co-ethnics, people spontaneously and unquestioningly do so, because they believe it is the right thing to do.

A final factor that is important is a structural one. People's openness to interethnic relationships is shaped by their chances of meeting an ethnic Belgian. This finding is in line with Kalmijn's claim (1998) that the structural context is important in explaining partner choice, and leads to the conclusion that the social boundaries between the mainstream and the Turkish population add to the low degree of intermarriage. Because social boundaries are strong – both in terms of ethnic inequality and ethnic differentiation – meeting opportunities are limited, which partly explains the low intermarriage rate found in chapter ten. Those who did choose an interethnic relationship were different in the sense that they had *crossed* the metaphorical social boundary. Many of them self-identified as *different* in the sense that they had quite a lot of contact with ethnic Belgians, often as a result of their tertiary education. Their contact with ethnic Belgians also helped to deconstruct potential cognitive symbolic boundaries, and made them more reflexive about assumed differences between “Turkish” and “Belgian” culture.

### *Implications for incorporation research*

As the findings show, a focus on how ethnic boundaries are maintained and negotiated on different levels, and the factors that account for differences, helps to explain why some people choose ethnic alternatives (conforming to the ethnic group's normative expectations, self-identifying as Turkish;

marrying a co-ethnic), others choose to assimilate (disregarding ethnic conformity pressure, identifying as Belgian or marrying an ethnic Belgian) and still others try to reconcile the two paths (devising creative strategies to deal with ethnic conformity pressure or self-identifying as Turkish *and* Belgian). Simply put: focusing on ethnic boundary dynamics helps to explain the continuing or declining relevance of ethnicity in terms of how people organize their lives, their self-understandings and with whom they interact.

The different studies presented in this dissertation demonstrate how mechanisms of ethnic boundary maintenance shape socio-cultural aspects of incorporation, but not in a deterministic manner. Following Alba and Nee's (2003) and Esser's (2004) idea of context-bound rationality, I want to stress the importance of individual agency in linking context to outcome. Ethnic boundary negotiation is the crucial link between mechanisms of boundary maintenance on the one hand and aspects of socio-cultural incorporation on the other. To give some examples, ethnic conformity pressure does not necessarily result in cultural conformity because people use impression management strategies to hide deviant behavior; discrimination and othering practices do not necessarily lead to the rejection of an assimilative identity because people reclaim identities denied to them; and despite a taboo on interethnic marriages, some people do marry across ethnic boundaries, even if this means that they are rejected by their families.

Consequently, the study of ethnic boundary maintenance and negotiation should be an essential part of any study that aims to explain differences in socio-cultural (and, by extension, structural and economic) incorporation. Focusing on boundary dynamics, rather than on how different individual- and contextual-level variables shape incorporation (as is often done in integration/assimilation research) helps to uncover the underlying dynamics that explain in detail *how* and *why* people incorporate the way they do. A focus on boundary dynamics, for instance, helps to explain and substantiate Warner and Srole's claim (1945) that assimilation proceeds faster for some groups than for others. It also enables researchers to more clearly specify the different mechanisms that – in the terms of Glazer and Moynihan (1963) – continually recreate ethnic groups. And it gives insight into how pressures can give rise to code switching in different contexts and contribute to the creation of hybrid cultural patterns. Focusing on boundary processes rather than on the variables that explain who is “integrated/assimilated” and who is less so, helps to uncover the symbolic and structural powers and boundaries that influence individuals on their path toward a particular configuration of socio-cultural incorporation, as well as how these forces and boundaries are negotiated. In other words: focusing on ethnic boundary dynamics helps to understand the process-like character of incorporation, and how structure and agency interact in this incorporation process.

## **EXPLAINING WITHIN-GROUP DIFFERENCES IN BOUNDARY DYNAMICS AND SOCIO-CULTURAL INCORPORATION**

In this last section, I want to highlight the relevance of *gender* and *cohesive ethnic groups* and the limited significance of *social class* and *generation* in explaining variation in the exposure to and negotiation of mechanisms of ethnic boundary maintenance and, consequently, socio-cultural incorporation.

### *Gender*

Gender is by far the most important variable when it comes to explaining differences in ethnic boundary maintenance and negotiation. First of all, women are regarded as the keepers of culture, so, consequently, they experience much more ethnic conformity pressure than men. Their behavior is more closely monitored and in many ways restricted. Failure to live up to normative expectations results in much stronger social sanctions for women than men. In the field of partner choice, for instance, women risk being repudiated by their families when they marry a non-Muslim, while an interethnic marriage for men is considered much less of an issue. Consequently, women who value their membership in the community or want to safeguard the family's honor cannot simply disregard ethnic conformity pressure, and instead have to negotiate their own preferred lifestyle with the expectations of those co-ethnics who have the power to define the norm. But because they have to devise creative strategies to negotiate potential conflicts, women can be regarded as the quintessential agents of change. Women, then, are not only the keepers of culture but also *cultural entrepreneurs* (Bhachu, 1993), who are actively engaging with their cultural frameworks, while simultaneously transforming them.

We see the reverse when it comes to ethnic boundary maintenance by the mainstream, in which case the main targets are men. Based on the research participants' narratives, I found that men perceive a lot more discrimination compared to women. The observation that men more frequently report cases of discrimination could be attributed to the fact that they are more exposed to potential discrimination given that they spend a larger amount of time in public, or to the stereotypical image of Muslim men as "dangerous" and "threatening." The image of Muslim men as a threat not only restricts their access to goods and services (work, housing, leisure activities), but also explains why Belgian parents do not want their daughters to become involved with a Muslim man (Clycq, 2012). These negative attitudes illustrate that the taboo on interethnic (interreligious) relationships is not only prevalent among ethnic minority groups, but that parents who belong to the mainstream try to protect their daughters from "the other."

### *Co-ethnic community*

A second important factor in explaining differences in boundary maintenance, negotiation and socio-cultural incorporation is the social structure of the ethnic community, specifically its degree of network closure and cohesion. Cohesive ethnic communities are often seen as positive for immigrant incorporation because they provide a safety net, especially when the outside context is hostile and exclusionary, and are a barrier to downward assimilation into the “underclass” (Portes & Zhou, 1993). In the case of the Turkish population in Belgium, the positive effect of strong ethnic communities on structural incorporation and social mobility seems to be limited, given that members of the Turkish population often experience an ethnic disadvantage in the labor market and education. In chapter seven, I attributed this to the fact that Turkish communities tend to have very few human and material resources – a context in which a high degree of ethnic capital does not pay off in socio-economic terms (Phalet & Heath, 2011).

But strong ethnic communities do seem to be beneficial in providing Turkish Belgians with an emotional and supportive safety net. The findings in chapters six and nine implicitly illustrate that strong co-ethnic communities provide their members with social support and a positive identity – which is much needed given frequent cases of othering and exclusion by members of the mainstream. As I demonstrated in chapter six, many research participants see emotional and material relatedness as the most positive aspect of being Turkish; people are proud and happy to be Turkish because of the group’s normative commitment to provide emotional and material support. As demonstrated in chapter nine, the strong community not only provides them with support but also with a positive identity; especially in a context that is exclusionary and hostile, a highly cohesive ethnic network provides a sense of well-being and is, consequently, a source of positive identity.

But, as Waters (1990) and many others argue, strong ethnic communities are not “costless communities.” In return for nurturing, warmth, security and solidarity, communities demand conformity and can also be “stifling and constricting” (Waters, 1990, pp. 153-154; see also Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993; Zontini, 2010). By sanctioning behavior that is regarded as *Belgian*, the co-ethnic community can make assimilation into the mainstream a very unattractive option. This is especially true for ethnic communities with a high degree of network closure and cohesion, because they have a higher internal sanctioning capacity, and are, therefore, more successful at enforcing normative expectations. Although I recognize that slower, selective processes of acculturation can be beneficial for incorporation (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001), I also want to draw attention to the constraining side-effects, including gender inequality in freedom of movement and choice, negative psychological consequences that go hand in hand with restricted freedom and the inability to live up

to expectations (See, i.e., Rumbaut, 1994; Wolf, 1997), and the fact that strong ethnic groups can exacerbate marginalization, rather than buffer it.

### *Education and class*

Given the observation that most first generation immigrants were poor labor migrants that had received little or no education in Turkey, there is no heterogeneity in my sample in terms of parental class status. Therefore, paternal social class cannot account for differences in boundary negotiation or socio-cultural incorporation. What does seem to matter in terms of parental social background however, is whether one's parents came from rural, and hence more traditional, regions in Turkey or from a more urbanized area or city. Given that the majority of Turkish immigrants came from rural areas, community formation and normative consensus reflect the more traditional lifestyle that was characteristic of rural Turkey in the 1960s and 70s. In this context, immigrants from urban areas, as well as their descendants self-identify as *outsiders*, and are also often categorized as such, both by ethnic Belgians (who label them as “different” or “no real” Turks) and by the dominant segment of the Turkish community, because of their more liberal and “modern” attitude and way of life. Because they feel like outsiders to the more conservative Turkish community, they do not care about ethnic conformity pressure because they do not feel the need to be accepted by the more traditional members of the Turkish population. The fact that they do not identify with those that have rural roots, does not mean however that they reject a Turkish identity. Most outsiders still see themselves as Turkish but identify more with the more liberal and secular Turks in major Turkish cities.

Parental social class might be of limited relevance, but what is the impact the class status – operationalized as educational status, given the young age of most respondents – of the second- and third-generation Turkish Belgians themselves? Results presented in this dissertation show no straightforward answer, as the higher educated are not necessarily less restrained by mechanisms of ethnic boundary maintenance. First, educational status does not seem to matter for the extent to which people are confronted with ethnic conformity pressure. Also, those who pursue tertiary education seem to be targets of strict monitoring and ethnic conformity pressure. In the case of women, pursuing tertiary education might even mean they come under even closer scrutiny, as was illustrated by the narrative of the woman who explained that girls who study are often labeled as “too loose and free.” At the same time, however, pursuing higher education seems to be regarded by many women as a way to gain more freedom, seeing that all activities related to education are legitimate excuses for being out of the house.

As argued before, educational status also seems to matter when it comes to experiences of othering and discrimination by the mainstream in the sense that the higher educated more frequently report being or feeling excluded, compared to those who did not pursue higher education (cfr. *supra*).

### *Generation*

*Generation*, finally, seems to be of little relevance, at least at first glance. For all boundary dynamics studied, I did not find a straightforward pattern according to generation as I found, for instance, for gender. People from the second and third generation do not differ significantly in terms of the ethnic conformity pressure they experience, how they negotiate it, nor regarding the experience of discrimination and discursive exclusion. One reason could be that in a context of continuous immigrant replenishment – which, in this case, happens through transnational marriages and family reunification – *generation* can no longer be used as a proxy for how far removed one is from what Lieberson calls *ethnic ground zero* (1973). Because transnational marriages most often involve a partner from one's own region of origin, immigrant replenishment not only refreshes ethnic identity and ethnocultural norms and practices (Waters & Jimenez, 2005), but may also reinforce already strong ethnic ties, closure, and the ability to enforce homogeneous normative systems. Simply put, the continuing influx of people from rural areas in Turkey revitalizes the traditional communities and perpetuates the practice of ethnic conformity pressure beyond the second generation.

This immigrant replenishment not only revitalizes communities, but also creates a situation in which generations and cohorts no longer overlap: people of the second generation can be the same age and grow up in the same context as people from the third generation. Given the strong focus on context (boundary maintenance) and on how people respond to that context, I hypothesize that *cohort* is more important than *generation* in explaining individual-level aspects of socio-cultural incorporation. People who were teenagers in the late 1990s and 2000s for instance, grew up in a climate that was much more hostile toward Muslims and ethnic minorities compared with their older brothers and sisters or parents who experienced much less explicit hostility and were sometimes even regarded as *exotic*. The opposite is true for ethnic boundary maintenance, in the sense that younger cohorts seem to have more freedom in pursuing their desired lifestyle than their parents and older family members. Even despite continuing replenishment, a declining proportion of the population tries to enforce strict premigration cultural norms and practices, because a growing number of people are born in Belgium and less concerned about preserving premigration cultural patterns.



### *Implications for (socio-cultural) incorporation research*

The above summarized findings show that gender and socio-structural context are important in explaining variation in socio-cultural incorporation in the sense that they shape the exposure to and negotiation of mechanisms of ethnic boundary maintenance: women have more exposure to internally-oriented mechanisms, less to externally-oriented ones, and ethnic groups are more successful in enforcing conformity pressure if they have higher network closure and are embedded in an exclusionary context with limited interethnic contact. In my study, the role of other factors is less clear, but it might well be that factors such as class, educational level and generation play an important role for other groups in other contexts. Based on these findings, I argue that in order to fully understand variation in socio-cultural incorporation, it is important to focus on how various factors shape differences in boundary maintenance and negotiation. In other words: we need to find out for whom and in which contexts mechanisms of boundary maintenance have a bigger impact, and study how boundary negotiation is shaped by individual-level factors (such as gender, generation, class or educational level) and contextual factors (such as the degree of network closure within a community or the ethnic composition of a city).

By starting an analysis of differences in socio-cultural incorporation with the study of boundary dynamics, and focusing on how these dynamics are shaped by individual-level and contextual factors in a second stage, one avoids two of the pitfalls of segmented assimilation theory. First, by focusing on symbolic and social boundaries in a particular society and on how they are maintained, one treats the (national) context as an object of investigation, rather than taking it for granted (for a similar argument, see Alba, 2005). Second, focusing on how individual- and contextual-level factors shape the impact and negotiation of ethnic boundary maintenance, avoids the Herderian fallacy of treating ethnic groups as bounded units and proxies for a particular mode of incorporation, which ignores the diversification and polarization that exists *within* ethnic groups.

### **LINKING THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE AGGREGATE LEVEL**

The point of departure of this dissertation was that social boundaries between the Turkish and the mainstream populations persist as a result of mechanisms that maintain these boundaries. So far however, I have mainly tried to demonstrate how mechanisms of boundary maintenance shape individual socio-cultural incorporation, and have said little about how this translates into social boundaries. Following Esser (2004), I claim that social boundaries – both ethnic differentiation and inequality - are the intended or unintended consequences of the decisions that actors make, and the effects of these decisions. In other words: individual incorporation translates into social boundaries, in the simplest case, because the individual-level outcomes of actors' decisions aggregate to

distributions of traits within the population. Individual partner choice decisions, for example, affect the aggregate-level intermarriage rate, and people's housing choices result in particular patterns of residential concentration.

But individual incorporation can also shape social boundaries in more complex ways. This complex pattern is particularly prevalent when it comes to explaining how individual *socio-cultural* incorporation translates into social boundaries. Although socio-cultural aspects of incorporation are not as crucial as structural incorporation in the labor market or educational attainment in explaining continuing social boundaries, I do believe they have an important impact on the perpetuation of the social gap between ethnic groups. For example, subjective aspects of incorporation (feelings of belonging, self-identification) can shape people's occupational and educational attainment, by influencing their motivation to succeed or their sense of futility. It might very well be that children who feel excluded or mistreated by teachers or pupils have a lower motivation to succeed (or a higher sense of futility), with worse school results as a consequence. Also, a general perception of exclusion by the larger society can demotivate children to do well in school, particularly if many of the older people in their environment struggle with discrimination. The best-known example in this sense is research on *acting white*: children who feel they have little chance of making it in life based on their ethno-racial background can develop an oppositional culture when it comes to school (Ogbu, 2008), which includes the stigmatization of high-achievers in their group as "acting white" (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986).

Several of my empirical studies suggest that social boundaries are not only the *result* of mechanisms of boundary maintenance and boundary negotiation, but also shape them. As argued in chapters ten and eleven, partner choice, for example, is shaped by the structure of the marriage market. So in a context of high ethnic differentiation, chances are higher that people will marry a co-ethnic because opportunities for contact are higher. Another example includes the negotiation of ethnic conformity pressure, which, as I have shown, is shaped by the socio-structural characteristics of the city. In a city where social boundaries between the different ethnic groups are strong, for example, people might find it harder to disregard ethnic conformity pressure, because they do not have an alternative support network.

Moving beyond my findings, I also hypothesize that symbolic boundaries will be stronger and more durable in contexts where ethnic inequality is high. When ethnic boundaries coincide with socio-economic boundaries, the latter can be attributed to the former, especially if the overlay of these boundaries persists for several generations. To put it more simply, if members of certain ethnic groups experiences higher rates of unemployment, poverty or criminality, it is often attributed to

their (distinct) culture, rather than to mechanisms of socio-economic exclusion. Consequently, ethnic inequalities are used to justify the idea that “they” are essentially different from “us” and as a source of legitimation for further exclusion.

### **BOUNDARY DYNAMICS AS GENERAL SOCIOLOGICAL MECHANISM**

Following Lamont and Molnar (2002), I see the notion of boundaries as one of the most “fertile thinking tools” in sociology, because it is well-suited to capture the fundamental social process of *relationality* (Emirbayer, 1997), and see relations between groups and people as dynamic, unfolding, ongoing processes, rather than “static ties among inert substances.”

A focus on boundary dynamics not only helps to account for social cleavages in ethnic terms, but can be used to explain the persistence of any kind of social boundary, including, for example, those of class and gender. Understanding class reproduction, for instance, requires a focus on how symbolic boundaries are drawn and translated into social closure, as Bourdieu extensively argued (Bourdieu, 1979; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1972). Dominant groups safeguard their higher position and privileges in the class hierarchy by legitimizing their own culture as superior to those of lower classes, and by using this legitimacy to mark a distance/symbolic boundary between themselves and lower classes. They then translate this symbolic boundary into social closure through mechanisms that restrict access to societal privileges for those who have not incorporated the “legitimate” tastes and do not possess the necessary cultural capital. One such mechanism is the evaluation of children’s school performance based on their familiarity with the culture of the dominant class – a mechanism that can be seen as an institutionalized source of disadvantages for working class children. Extending my model of bounded incorporation to this case, I argue that it is important to not only study social boundaries and mechanisms that promote social closure, but also to focus on how working class children and their parents respond to this context, how responses differ along individual characteristics and contextual elements, and how they affect the children’s (later) socio-economic incorporation into society.

A focus on boundary dynamics also helps to clarify continuing gender inequality in society. Both social-constructivist (Butler, 1999; Goffman, 1977; West & Zimmerman, 1987) and structural (Blumberg, 1984; Chafetz, 1991; Collins, Chafetz, Blumberg, Coltrane, & Turner, 1993) theories of gender stratification implicitly focus on boundary dynamics, or could benefit from such a focus. When West and Zimmerman (1987), for example, claim that gender is “a routine, methodical, and recurring accomplishment” and that “doing gender involves a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine natures,” they are essentially talking about the need to constantly reaffirm symbolic

boundaries between men and women in interaction in order to maintain gender boundaries. In other words, the social dichotomy between men and women persist because symbolic ideas about how men and women are supposed to be and act are continually reinforced in interaction through *role enactment* that is congruent with dominant gender role ideologies. Symbolic boundaries translate into social boundaries because those who violate gender boundaries are often punished or stigmatized in the workplace or at home (Epstein, 1988, 1992), or because gender ideologies – particularly the idea that it is part of the female role to take care of children and household chores – are partly responsible for the glass ceiling, because leadership positions are incompatible with taking up a role in the family (Epstein, Saute, Oglensky, & Gever, 1995; Kay & Hagan, 1998).

Structuralist theories of gender stratification also implicitly focus on the relevance of symbolic boundaries for reproducing gender inequality. For example, one aspect of Chafetz's gender equity theory (1990) is that men have more power to define and enforce gender ideologies, norms and stereotypes because they have a better position in the macro-level division of labor. In terms of boundary dynamics, this means that men have more power to mark the symbolic boundaries in a way that favors their attributes and devalues attributes of women. Moreover, they also have more power to maintain gender boundaries and inequality through behavior, given that they can use their resource advantages to control access to elite positions in society, regulate work opportunities for men and women and get the upper hand in micro-level negotiation processes between men and women (for example, regarding domestic chores).

In all of these cases, what matters most in studying inequality is not only to focus on the symbolic and behavioral mechanisms of boundary maintenance, but also to explore how the less powerful in the stratification system negotiate these mechanisms, and how this is shaped by their position in different hierarchies. Given that one's position in different hierarchies (gender, class and ethnic) is important for understanding how boundary maintaining mechanisms are negotiated, I want to stress the importance of taking *intersectionality* (Crenshaw, 1991) into account, by focusing on how the intersection of actors' position in different stratification systems shapes their ability to contribute to the reproduction of inequalities or negotiate boundary maintaining mechanisms.

## **LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

Doing a PhD is essentially about learning how to successfully complete a research project, and becoming aware of the limitations of the research is an essential component of this learning process. Doing a PhD is also about making choices: about deciding what to include and what not, considering

the limited time one has at its disposal. In what follows, I discuss what I could have done better, and what I could have done more of, and I translate these limitations into suggestions for future research.

### **FOCUS ON PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES**

Throughout this dissertation, I focused on second- and third-generation Turkish Belgians' experiences and perceptions regarding ethnic boundaries. In doing so, I paid attention to the subjective experiences of a group that often remains unheard in public and even academic discourse, staying as close as possible to how they themselves experience, perceive and evaluate the world in which they live. Such a focus on people's narratives and perceptions, however, also has its limitations. The participants' narratives should not be treated as accurate reflections of an external reality, but as people's own reality and how they perceive and experience the world around them. People's narratives about exclusion and discrimination, for example, do not mirror actual facts, but rather reflect how they evaluate and interpret encounters with others. The same goes for the perception of pressures from co-ethnics to conform or the perception of a taboo on intermarriage. Following Thomas & Thomas (1928, p. 572) who argued that "if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences," I see these subjective experiences and perceptions as equally influential for how people incorporate, especially when it concerns subjective aspects of incorporation such as self-identification and sense of belonging.

Even if *perceptions* of how the mainstream draws the boundary have value in their own right, it would be valuable if future research could also focus on how members of the mainstream actually engage in boundary maintenance, and on how this varies according to characteristics of the actors and the context. As discussed in chapter four, several studies address the symbolic boundaries between "Muslims" and "Westerners," but very little research has been done on how this is expressed in everyday interaction and public discourse (for an exception in Belgium, see Maly, 2007; Maly, 2009). One could focus, for example, on how ethnic Belgians engage in boundary work in various social settings, such as in the media, amongst members of the in-group, or in interaction with those who are regarded as "the ethnic other." Another line of research could focus on how the immigration context shapes ethnic boundary work by members of the mainstream. Given that more and more European cities are characterized by *super-diversity* (Crul, Schneider, & Lelie, 2013; Geldof, 2013; Vertovec, 2007), a focus on differences in how boundaries are drawn by those who grew up or live in super-diverse cities, and those who grew up/live in less diverse areas could be of great interest not only for the academic community but also in terms of social policy (cf. *infra*).

## **HYPOTHESES TO TEST**

When interpreting the findings presented in this dissertation, one has to bear in mind that they are the result of qualitative research, which is aimed generating, rather than testing hypotheses. Consequently, the conclusions I have drawn regarding the role of boundary dynamics for explaining intra- and inter-group differences in socio-cultural incorporation, should be treated as hypotheses that need to be tested quantitatively.

Several suggestions for further research follow from this limitation. First, future research should focus on the precise impact of conformity pressure on cultural incorporation, and how on this differs according to the various intervening factors that I have discussed. Based on my findings, I hypothesize that ethnic conformity pressure might slow down cultural assimilation and result in what Gans (1997, pp. 878-880) calls “involuntary retention of ethnic traits.” Future research should focus on the strength of this link, for instance by linking actors’ attitudes towards ethnic retention and their cultural practices to a self-reported perceived degree of ethnic conformity pressure.

Second, I have demonstrated that both subtle and blatant forms of ethnic boundary maintenance shape self-identification, but quantitative research is necessary to study the precise impact of both, and differences in this respect. As I argue that practices of everyday racism are experienced as at least equally exclusionary as discrimination, I hypothesize that self-identification in ethnic and national terms is shaped as least as much by subtle as by blatant practices of exclusion.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL AND OCCUPATIONAL ATTAINMENT**

Based on the research participants’ narratives, I chose to focus this dissertation on how ethnic boundary dynamics relate to socio-cultural aspects of incorporation such as self-identification, partner choice and cultural incorporation. In making this choice, I left the impact of boundary dynamics on structural aspects of incorporation, most specifically educational and occupational attainment unexplored. The data I collected, however, do raise some interesting questions in this regard – questions that deserve to be taken up in future research.

First, based on the observation that many participants were as children or teenagers confronted with othering practices and racist remarks in the school context – not only from pupils, but also teachers – it seems valuable to explore the impact of such symbolic boundary drawing on children’s school experience. Also, given the recent controversy about the headscarf ban in schools, it is important to examine how these measures affect girls’ sense of acceptance or exclusion, as well as how this is translated into academic motivation and behavior. It seems plausible, for example, that young people who feel different or not accepted at school based on their ethnic background or religion have lower self-esteem or a higher proclivity toward rebellion, which, in turn, can affect

their results. In this sense, it seems valuable to examine how cases of othering and exclusion shape young people's *sense of futility*. This refers to students' belief that they have no control over their educational success and feel as though the school system is working against them (Brookover & Schneider, 1975). It has been demonstrated that sense of futility is an important factor in accounting for school misconduct (Van Houtte & Stevens, 2008), and even differences in math achievement (Agirdag, Van Houtte, & Van Avermaet, 2012).

Second, future research should take up the challenge of how people deal with (perceived) exclusion and discrimination in the school system and the labor and housing markets. My data suggest, for example, that some people fight to become accepted and see this as their duty, while others are frustrated by the fact that they have to try harder to succeed (see chapter 9). Uncovering different responses, and studying the factors that account for these different responses can help to empower people and aid them in their fight against discrimination (which by no means implies that I deny that discrimination itself should not or cannot be fought –cfr; infra).

### **ONE POPULATION, ONE CONTEXT**

The theoretical value of this dissertation is that it explores the relevance of ethnic boundary dynamics for explaining differences in socio-cultural incorporation, using a case study of second- and third-generation Turkish Belgians. In an empirical sense, then, the findings only tell us something about one population in one national context. Research involving other immigrant populations and in other national contexts could help to broaden and strengthen the findings, and test whether the model also applies.

Research among other ethnic groups could help to strengthen the findings of this dissertation and bring new important factors to light, not because of their different ethnicity, but because a single ethnic group often represents a particular migration history and constellation of various socio-economic factors and modes of reception. In the context of Belgium, for example, it would be interesting to replicate the study among Moroccan Belgians – a population that is much larger, more diverse in terms of socio-economic background (Lesthaeghe, 2000), and the target of even more negative stereotypes and attitudes as compared to Turkish Belgians. It would be equally interesting to, following the anti-Herderian approach, design a study in which respondents have different national ancestries (including the mainstream) and to see whether differences in boundary dynamics, socio-cultural incorporation and the relation between the two run along ethnic lines or are associated with other characteristics. For example, a study on interethnic relationships involving Belgians of Italian, Belgian, Turkish, Moroccan and French ancestry could reveal whether people of these different ethnic ancestries think in a different way about interethnic relationships, or if different

attitudes are explained by other factors – including, for example, educational level, class, cognitive symbolic boundaries or meeting opportunities (For a study with such a design, see Clycq, 2007, which explores Italian, Moroccan and Belgian parents' discourses on socialization).

Given that national context is a constant in this study, future studies in different national settings are needed to study the importance of factors related to the national context. Regarding ethnic conformity pressure, it would for instance be interesting to learn if the mechanisms that were observed in this dissertation are also at work among groups in other national contexts, and to explore additional factors that shape the enforcement of ethnic conformity pressure. In the United States, for example, one could explore whether the enforcement of ethnic conformity pressure depends on the type of area in which one lives; whether it matters if one lives in a deprived inner-city neighborhood or whether the social structure and anonymity of a large city give people more freedom to negotiate ethnic conformity pressure. A good comparison group could be a population of South-East Asian origin, such as for instance the Vietnamese, a group that is rather similar to Turkish Belgians in terms of socio-economic status, family system and in terms of how they define their ethnic identity. Just like Turkish youngsters, the Vietnamese are often pressured to remain loyal to their traditions and ethnic identity (Kibria, 1993; Zhou, 2001; Zhou & Bankston, 1998), and a study on how they deal with this pressure, and what factors account for differences could help to clarify the importance of national and city context.

## **ROLE OF GENERATION**

As previously discussed, my findings do not point to a significant role of generation in mechanisms and negotiation of ethnic boundary maintenance. This is surprising, given that assimilation is conceived of as a generational process (Alba & Nee, 2003), and the assumption that younger generations are expected to differ from older ones in terms of the boundaries they confront and how they negotiate them.

The absence of a clear relationship in my data, however, does not necessarily mean that *generation* is completely irrelevant for understanding ethnic boundary maintenance and negotiation. Perhaps my sample size was too small to explore the relevance of generation, especially given the fact that the sample composition in terms of generation is more complex than what the labels *second generation* and *third generation* suggest. Someone who belongs to the third generation, for example, might have a first-generation father and a second-generation mother, a first-generation mother and a second-generation father or two parents of the second generation. This complexity was further exacerbated by the previously discussed decoupling of generation and cohort: even people who are similar in terms of their parent's generational status, can differ from each other in terms of the cohort



they belong to, and, hence, the context in which they grew up. Studying the impact of generation requires that one takes these complexities into account, something which was impossible in this research project.

Taking generation into account is a challenge that deserves to be addressed in future research. A question I asked myself several times, but was unable to answer based on my data, was whether it mattered if one's mother was second or first generation, in particular for young women who want to negotiate conformity pressures. It might well be that a second-generation mother, who experienced the pressure and limited freedom herself is an important source of support for her daughter who wishes to free herself from these pressures. Also, are those parents who both belong to the second generation more liberal compared to a couple that is mixed in terms of generation? One might argue that a generationally mixed couple is more traditional, given that the second-generation partner chose a partner from the country of origin. But, based on my findings regarding transnational marriages, this might not necessarily be the case, given that transnational marriages are no longer necessarily related to a desire to find a more traditional partner in order to gain more power and freedom in the relationship.

Generation might also play a role in the negotiation of ethnic boundary maintenance by the mainstream. Third-generation Turkish Belgians might be more affected by cases of othering and discrimination because they are less likely to be strongly connected to their grandparents' country of origin and more likely to see themselves as Belgian citizens. Consequently, signs that they are not accepted by the mainstream might be more frustrating and have a much stronger impact on them than on their parents.

## **ROLE OF CLASS**

As discussed in the findings section, there is not enough heterogeneity in my sample in terms of parental class status to analyze the impact of social class on how people experience and negotiate mechanisms of ethnic boundary maintenance. But given that there is a growing middle class of Turkish Belgians – one that often moves out of the inner-city “ethnic enclave” into more residential neighborhoods (Verhaeghe, Van der Bracht, & Van de Putte, 2012) – there is increasing diversity in terms of social class. Future studies can, and should, therefore, take up the challenge of taking different class positions into account when studying mechanisms of boundary maintenance.

Class might for instance play a role in the extent to which people are confronted with conformity pressure, because it allows them to move out of certain districts where social control is high to areas with fewer people of Turkish ancestry. Class might also affect one's experiences with discrimination and othering; people with a higher class position might experience less discrimination because of

their higher social status, but their perception of exclusion might be higher, as was the case for the research participants with tertiary education, because, despite their status and class position, they keep experiencing cases of othering and discrimination as a result of their increased exposure to the Belgian mainstream

Finally, social class might also play a role in how people deal with conformity pressure and exclusion. Because of their higher class position and status, they have more agency than, for example, people who are dependent on the ethnic group for social and material support, and can therefore choose to ignore conformity pressure. In terms of exclusion, social class can be a buffer against negative self-esteem, given that their class position provides them with a positive self-image that helps to fight the negative impact of cases of exclusion.

## **METHODOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS**

One of the potential methodological limitations of this research is that I am an outsider to the research population in terms of ethnicity. As discussed in the methodology chapter, not having Turkish ancestry myself has both advantages and limitations. The most obvious advantage was that research participants more easily disclosed opinions or narratives that might be considered taboo by (more traditional) members of their Turkish community.

A first potential limitation is that people were not as open about certain topics in order not to offend me. The fact that I am an ethnically Belgian woman might, for example, explain why research participants did not portray Belgians as immoral based on the sexual behavior of the women (as was for instance the case in Espiritu's study among Filipino Americans (2001)). As previously discussed, however, I have tried to maximize disclosure by creating a non-hierarchical interview setting in which interviewees felt free to disclose whatever opinion they held. Regarding my ethnicity, I explicitly told the interviewees they did not have to withhold negative opinions about Belgians, as I would not feel offended. Based on the interview dynamic, I argue that, in most cases, this approach seemed successful, but it is up to the reader to decide whether or not I have succeeded in minimizing the impact of my ethnicity on disclosure and potential social desirability.

A second potential limitation is that my own way of thinking was initially rather essentialist, and that I seemed to indulge in othering, by treating people as different based on their ethnicity. I was soon aware of this as a result of continuous self-reflection and have tried not to let my own initial preconceptions influence the data collection and analysis. Letting go of my own cognitive structures regarding ethnicity and seeing the participants' life world through their own eyes, has been an ongoing challenge, and it is up to the reader to decide, based on my writing, whether or not I succeeded in sketching an accurate and reliable image of my research participants' realities.

Based on these reflections, I have three recommendations for researchers that are of a different ethnic background than their research participants. First, one should be reflexive at all times about the impact of one's ethnicity, and scrutinize one's own assumptions about the research population. This is particularly important if the researcher belongs to the mainstream population and the research population is the object of many stereotypes and essentialist ideas. As my own experience has thought me, even researchers with the best intentions still often have prejudices or assumptions about the group they study that can influence the process of data collection, particularly if these assumptions become clear during the interaction with research participants. Second, in order to avoid possible negative effects of one's different ethnic status, one should adopt a democratic interview approach in which people feel free to disclose whatever attitudes they hold, try to gain an insider status and build rapport based on other similarities, such as age, gender, lifestyle or similar interests. Finally, one's different ethnic background should be seen and used as an asset, not as a handicap. For example, having a different ethnic background allows one to adopt the role of the naïve researcher, who can treat her research participants as experts about their own ethnic group. In my case, not being Turkish also helped people to be more open about behavior and attitudes that deviate from what is the norm in their Turkish community.

Looking back at my research experience, I discern two methodological factors that could have improved my study and should be taken into account by researchers studying similar populations or topics. First, I advise researchers to use intermediaries to gain access to the field and research participants. By letting oneself be introduced by someone known and trusted in the community, one enhances the chance of gaining access and building rapport more easily. Second, if I were to start over, I would interview people not once but multiple times because this helps to build rapport (Kezar, 2003) and reduces the arbitrariness of a single interview. In the case of a single interview, the researcher runs the risk that fortuitous factors (a respondent that is tired, in a bad mood or preoccupied with something else) affect interview dynamic and disclosure (both in terms of content and depth). Also, research participants can be nervous or hesitant to disclose sensitive information, because they are not familiar with the researcher or the research practice. By interviewing people multiple times, one can reduce the impact of random factors, and can save more sensitive topics for further interviews so the research participant feels more at ease. Additional benefits are that one can explore the effect of events that occurred in between two interviews<sup>2</sup>, and that participants can reconsider or build on things they have said in previous interviews.

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<sup>2</sup> I for example did an interview with a woman before and after she married her Belgian partner, allowing me to compare her initial expectations with what actually happened and how she reflected upon that. In another case, I

## IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY & PROFESSIONALS

The observation that both individual-level socio-cultural incorporation and aggregate-level ethnic differentiation and inequality are shaped by ethnic boundary dynamics, has important implications for so called *integration policies*, media professionals and other kinds of professionals (e.g. teachers, employers) who come into contact with members of ethnic minority groups. The following recommendations are based on two principles. First, they serve the overarching goal of reducing ethnic inequality and creating an inclusive society in which all citizens, regardless of their religion or ancestry, are treated equally and feel accepted as part of that society. Inequality might decrease without the suggested measures, but what I'm suggesting here is aimed at speeding up the transition from high to lower inequality and from bright to blurred boundaries. Because the recommendations are based on my research, they essentially focus on the role of ethnic boundary dynamics, but this focus does not imply that I deny the importance of education, language training and other forms of emancipation for reducing inequality. Obviously, education is one of the most important – if not *the* most important – tools to enhance equality and emancipation, and I will therefore also specify how my recommendations can be translated into this domain.

Second, large cities such as Brussels, Antwerp, Luik, and Ghent, and even smaller ones such as Genk, are (becoming) *superdiverse* (Geldof, 2013; Maly, Blommaert, & Ben Yakoub, 2014; see [www.npdata.be](http://www.npdata.be) for specific statistics for each Belgian city). Given migration predictions for the future, chances are high that super-diversity will only increase in years to come. In my opinion then, there is no option but to move forward, and to act according to this increasing diversity, not only to avoid ethnic inequality for the people's sake, but because a situation of ethnic boundaries and inequality is costly and detrimental for both society and democracy. For these reasons we need to move away from a culturally homogeneous conception of Flemish/Belgian society in which everyone who is different from a narrowly defined cultural norm risks being stigmatized and excluded. Instead, we need to move towards a situation of pluralism, most importantly by adapting our institutions to the changing population, so people of diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds no longer face legal or institutional discrimination.

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interviewed a man before and after he had graduated from university – the second time because he had told me via Facebook that he had experienced a lot of discrimination while looking for a job. The two interviews allowed me to compare the impact of experiences of discrimination on his well-being and sense of acceptance.

## DECONSTRUCT SYMBOLIC BOUNDARIES

An important first step in the reduction of ethnic inequality is the deconstruction of symbolic boundaries, given that these are the basis of social segregation and exclusionary practices. Policy makers at all levels, as well as those who control media, should (1) themselves avoid drawing symbolic boundaries between those people who have no migration background and those who do, and (2) take active steps to deconstruct common preexisting symbolic boundaries that exist in the people's minds (both among the mainstream and ethnic minorities).

Not drawing symbolic boundaries first implies avoiding us-versus-them discourses and othering practices because this gives people the feeling they are regarded as different from the norm, and not an integral part of society. In this regard, I applaud the decision of Flemish newspaper *De Morgen* and the city of Ghent to no longer use the term *allochtoon*, and urge other organizations, institutions and policy makers to do the same. The word *allochtoon* categorizes those with foreign roots as different, implicitly excludes them, and reduces them to their ethnicity. Several people have criticized the decision, claiming that it creates the illusion that semantic issues will solve the problem. I agree with them that more is needed than merely banning the word, but also want to point out that no longer using the word has consequences that go beyond the reduction of a sense of exclusion. First, as Esser (2004) and Barth (1969) have argued, a sense of exclusion increases the chance that people will choose ethnic alternatives, which, according to Esser (2004), is less efficient in reaching the goals valued in society (in that it reduces the odds of upward mobility). Second, as postmodernists such as Derrida have argued, language structures our interpretation of the world, and, therefore, banning the word from one's vocabulary has the potential to shape how entire generations – if not the current, than at least those in the future – cognitively see and structure the world.

Avoiding us-versus-them discourses and othering practices is also important for teachers and other professionals who work with young people, particularly because they have the power to shape how they see the world and themselves from a very early age. My research participants' narratives show that they remembered more than a decade later how their teachers sometimes linked deviant behavior of ethnic minority pupils to their religion or other ethnic background, and found it to be very stigmatizing and excluding. Rather than drawing attention to people's ethnic background, teachers should try to create an atmosphere in which all children are regarded as equal and diversity is positively valued, rather than a source of stigma.

Not drawing symbolic boundaries also implies that cultural differences should not be essentialized nor overemphasized. Presenting ethnic groups as internally homogeneous and essentially different from each other does not correspond to reality: ethnic groups are largely social

constructions that overemphasize inter-group differences and downplay intragroup differences. Recognizing this is important for professionals who regularly come into contact with people with a migration background, such as, for example, teachers, employers or social workers, because, as someone in a position of authority, they have more power to shape their sense of acceptance and identity. But it seems even more important for those people who reach a wide audience via the media – including politicians, experts and media professionals. Public discourses in which particular ethnic/religious minority groups are presented as internally homogeneous – something which Shadid (2009) labels as the *cultural-generalization frame* – and essentially different from the mainstream – the *ethnocentric frame* – create a strong us-versus-them contrast. This contrast easily trickles down to the individual level, shaping how people with and without a migration background (particularly those who have little or no direct contact with members of other groups), think about each other, which, in turn, creates brighter social boundaries.

The task of policy makers and professionals extends beyond the mere *avoidance* of boundary drawing however; they should also *actively* contribute to the deconstruction of existing symbolic boundaries. The media have an important role to play in this sense, as they reach a broad audience and, hence, have the ability to influence how people think. Unfortunately, the Belgian media are too often “white bastions” that ignore or present diversity in a negative way, contributing to negative attitudes toward ethnic minorities and diversity (De Ridder, 2010). One way in which they can deconstruct existing stereotypes and symbolic boundaries is by not only casting or addressing people in their role of “allochton” or “Muslim,” but also presenting them as ordinary citizens who have an opinion<sup>3</sup>, to interview them as experts, professionals or artists without referring to their ethnic background<sup>4</sup>, and to cast them as actors, journalists, TV-presenters or radio personalities<sup>5</sup>. Although I recognize that much has improved in this regard in recent years<sup>6</sup>, there is a long way to go. At the time of writing, for example, there is much commotion about a promotion video for the city of Antwerp that shows an unrealistic picture of the city’s population. By presenting a “too white” image

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<sup>3</sup> For example in street interviews or in programs such as *Man bijt hond* or *Iedereen beroemd*, which focus on “ordinary” people and their everyday lives. As a side note, the former won the first prize for “best intercultural TV” awarded by the *Minority Forum* in 2007, for their humane, non-stereotypical portrayal of asylum seekers who are living in a church, awaiting a residence permit.

<sup>4</sup> For an example, see the episode of *Reyers Laat* in which Kathleen Cools interviews Ish Aid Hamou about his book *Hard Hart*, without referring to his ethnic background (<http://www.cobra.be/cm/cobra/videozone/rubriek/boek-videozone/140130-mv-ishaithamou-reyerslaat>). The interview was this remarkable that it incited a young sociologist to write a short article in which Kathleen Cools was praised for the way she conducted the interview (Rabau, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> Examples on Flemish national television include Ihsane Chioua Lekhli, who co-presents *De Zevende Dag*, and guest performances of comedian Erhan Demirci in *Volt* and *Café Corsari*

<sup>6</sup> For a large part due to the fact that in December 2010, VRT (Flemish radio and television) set targets to enhance the visibility of minorities and come to an accurate reflection of Flemish society on screen (VRT, 2010).

of Antwerp – one that does not include people of color or women with headscarves despite the fact that about 40 per cent of the population is of foreign ancestry – the idea is created that Belgium is essentially a country of white, secular people, and that all those who do not fit this norm are not an essential part of society.

A way in which policy makers and community and ethnic minority organizations can deconstruct symbolic boundaries is by enhancing contact opportunities between people of diverse origins. One way could be to promote ethnic diversity on the neighborhood level, as a recent cross-national study shows that living in multi-ethnic neighborhoods promotes tolerance (Christ et al., 2014). Using survey data from seven studies across England, Europe, the US and South Africa, the team investigated people's attitudes towards different ethnic groups. They found that racial prejudice among whites drops significantly when they live in ethnically mixed communities, even when they do not have direct contact, a phenomenon they refer to as *passive tolerance*. Enhancing interethnic contact not only creates more tolerance, but can also discourage an uncritical adoption of us-versus-them discourses, particularly among those people who rarely come into direct contact with members of other ethnic groups (including both people belonging to ethnic minority and mainstream populations). I am not at all advocating here for more *couscous nights* or *mosque open houses* that have to bring people of different ethnic origins or religions together. First, such events have little impact because they tend to attract an audience of “believers” – people who are already positive about ethnic diversity. Second, such events potentially reinforce us-versus-them ideas, since they unite people based on cultural differences. What I do argue for is a promotion of ethnic mixing in the workplace, neighborhood, schools and youth movements; and cooperation based on common interests. Social workers could, for example, unite people in a community group that keeps the neighborhood green and clean and organizes a summer festival that is accessible to *all* people in the neighborhood, regardless of their age, political orientation, religious beliefs and ethnicity.

Avoiding boundary marking and the active deconstruction of symbolic boundaries is necessary for two reasons. First, any type of discourse that categorizes people based on their ethnicity and juxtaposes them against *the mainstream*, excludes those who identify with that group and denies them their individuality. It reduces them to an ethnic categorization, and puts them outside of mainstream society with known consequences: people do not feel accepted, do not emotionally identify as and are more likely to “stick to their ethnic group” because they do not feel part of mainstream community. This, in turn, often limits their chances for upward mobility. Second, ethnic dichotomization, ethnic framing and an overemphasis on cultural difference in public discourse shapes how members of the mainstream (especially those who are not used to ethnic diversity) think

about and act toward people of foreign ancestry. This consequence is of particular importance for media professionals, given that public discourses in the media reach a larger portion of the population and are, as a result, more powerful in their effects. It is particularly important, then, that media professionals commit themselves to the deconstruction of symbolic boundaries by avoiding us-versus-them discourses that overemphasize cultural differences and stigmatize ethnic minorities and refraining from casting people with foreign ancestry only in the role of the “ethnic other.”

### **ENHANCE FEMALE AGENCY THROUGH EMANCIPATION**

In this dissertation I described how co-ethnic communities can exert pressure to conform to premigration cultural patterns, particularly on females. Three recommendations for how to deal with cases of oppression or coercion follow from my findings on conformity pressure.

First, it is stereotypical to assume that women who follow religious and cultural practices – including, for example, wearing certain forms of dress, or consenting to arranged marriages – do so only because of coercion. Such a representation does not accurately reflect reality and is problematic for three reasons: it ignores the observation that many women choose to dress in a certain way, or marry a particular partner for their own reasons; it presents women as victims who have no agency and need to be saved (which can lead to legislation that has adverse side-effects; cfr. *infra*); and it stigmatizes ethnic groups and their members, reinforces stereotypes and, consequently, strengthens the symbolic boundary. For these reasons, it is important that policy makers and social workers do not make generalizations but examine on a case-by-case basis. Examining each case individually helps to identify those cases that are indeed problematic (in the sense that women actually *are* oppressed or forced to do something) while simultaneously avoiding punishing those that have made a conscious choice<sup>7</sup>.

Second, social workers should be careful when addressing potential oppression of female actors. As White (1997) argued, extracting Turkish women from family expectations and obligations might facilitate independent decision making and the pursuit of individual goals, but undermine their ability to retain membership in the Turkish community. Turkish girls removed from their families are alienated from their own community, White argues, which for many is a source of identity and emotional and material support, while at the same time often being denied full membership in the mainstream. For this reason, social workers who want to help women fight oppression have to do so in dialogue with the women’s environment as much as possible.

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<sup>7</sup> A conscious choice also includes giving in to parental pressure out of strategic considerations. For example, as I have shown in chapter 10, Turkish Belgian girls can give in to parental pressure to marry a partner from Turkey, because they want to acquire more freedom, even if they do not really want to marry that man.



Third, social workers and policy makers should recognize that people, including women, have agency to respond to pressures. My studies on ethnic conformity pressure have demonstrated that pressures to conform are not necessarily inescapable forces, but that most individuals find ways to negotiate expectations with their own preferences and attitudes. Rather than “saving” women from oppression through, for example, laws that ban the headscarf or a tightening of migration laws in order to prevent forced marriages, social workers and policy makers should focus on enhancing women’s emancipation through education and the creation of a society that includes rather than excludes those of foreign ancestry. Exclusion from the mainstream is one of the most important factors in understanding why people cannot disregard ethnic conformity pressure, and, consequently, mechanisms that promote inclusion are the best way to give people more power to negotiate sources of oppression.

To conclude, I fully agree with Amnesty International’s statement (2012, p. 7) that “states are required to bring an end to discrimination against women in the enjoyment of their rights, which includes eradicating all forms of violence against women, (...) and offering appropriate services to women at risk.” But I equally agree with them that “states should adopt a more rational approach to concerns about women’s equality in minority religions and cultures” – an approach that is not based on assumptions or political agendas but on the views, preferences and experiences of the women themselves. One suggestion that is made in the report, and which I fully endorse, is to make space for women and girls to debate and inform others about the reality of their lives. Spaces (or contexts) in which they are “free to challenge religious and cultural practices or not to,” and in which they can discuss how these practices can be changed or maintained without pressure or constraints imposed by the state or any non-state actor.

## **FIGHT EXCLUSION**

A third set of recommendations revolves around the externally-oriented behavioral dimension of ethnic boundary maintenance. The general implication of my findings is that policy makers and professionals should help reduce legalized, institutional and everyday discrimination, not only to reduce ethnic inequality, but also in order to improve subjective incorporation and make people feel accepted in the society into which they were born. This not only includes fighting direct, but also indirect discrimination, which occurs when a practice, rule, requirement or condition is neutral on its face but disproportionately impacts particular groups.

For policy makers, reducing ethnic inequality starts with avoiding direct and indirect *legalized discrimination*. Reports by *Human Rights Watch* (2010, subsequently HRW) and *Amnesty International* (2012) state that Belgium (or Flanders) falls short of realizing this. First, as HRW

argues, the nation-wide prohibition against wearing a full veil that covers the face in public “violates the fundamental right to freedom of religion, thought, and conscience as well as the right to personal autonomy.” The law prohibits “the wearing of clothing that conceals the face partially or entirely in public places in a way that makes identification impossible.” As such, one could say it is formulated neutrally, but, in fact, it is clearly targeted towards Muslim women wearing a niqab or burka (it is commonly referred to as “the burka ban”) as it disproportionately targets them. The law is an example of how governments, in their attempt to “save women” from oppression, actually impedes their emancipation. To put it in the words of HRW: “rather than help women who are coerced into wearing the veil, a ban would limit, if not eliminate, their ability to seek advice and support. Indeed, the primary impact of legislation of this kind would be to confine these women to their homes, rather than to liberate them.” I agree with HRW that a ban of the veil does not emancipate women, because it seems plausible that those women who are actually forced to wear it, would be kept at home because of that ban.

A second example of indirect legalized discrimination is the tightening of the regulation of marriage migration. Even though the law applies to all Belgian citizens, it mainly targets Turkish and Moroccan Belgians, as they are the ones who more commonly marry transnationally. In response to a similar law passed in the Netherlands, Human Rights Watch has warned that the law “disproportionately impacts two of the largest migrant communities in the Netherlands—Moroccans and Turks—who wish to bring family members to the Netherlands.” Consequently, it might give people of these origins the feeling they are being discriminated against, even by the state they are born in, which potentially reinforces their sense of exclusion. Also, as argued in chapter 10, the law creates socioeconomic and gender inequalities when it comes to choosing a partner: due to financial and other restrictions, only those minority groups who are better off have the ability to freely choose a partner. Given these detrimental side effects, on the one hand, and the spontaneous decline in transnational marriages before the law was passed, on the other, the efficacy of this legislation should be questioned.

Second, in addition to legal discrimination, policy makers as well as other professionals should also combat institutional discrimination. In chapter two, I defined institutional discrimination, following Wimmer (2013), as discrimination that is part of the day-to-day workings of the state administration that lacks a legal basis. But it can be defined more broadly than that. Institutional discrimination of particular ethnic/religious groups occurs when any type organization, including, but not limited to, the government, private corporations and public institutions, directly or indirectly restricts access to the benefits or services it provides to people of a particular ethnicity, color or

religion. A typical example of institutional discrimination is the prohibition of headscarves in all *GO! schools* – the public school system in Flanders. On 11 September 2009, the Board of *GO!* introduced a general ban prohibiting the display of religious and philosophical symbols, a ban that applied to pupils, teachers and anyone else charged with pedagogical tasks. Amnesty International stated that such a ban discriminates Muslim girls:

The general ban on religious symbols introduced by *GO!* has a disproportionate impact on Muslim girls who wish to wear headscarves and discriminates against them in the exercise of their rights to freedom of religion or belief and to freedom of expression. Even if some of the aims of *GO!* in imposing the ban could be considered legitimate, the proportionality and necessity of the ban are extremely doubtful. For instance, the aim of protecting pupils who chose not to wear headscarves from pressure is a legitimate one, but in so far that this problem exists, it could be tackled by strengthening anti-bullying policies- if such policies turned out to be ineffective it might then be justified to impose such bans at the individual school level. (Amnesty International, 2012, pp. 64-65)

Even more broadly defined, institutional discrimination can also refer to the fact that certain institutions (such as for example health care) do not adapt to increasing linguistic and religious diversity in society, resulting in discrimination against members of particular immigrant populations. Examples of such indirect discrimination include observance of Catholic national holidays (but not Islamic ones), and the lack of attention paid to dietary restrictions of particular religious groups in private or public institutions. In a society of increasing super-diversity, it is important that these institutions are prompted to move away from a monocultural and monolingual conception of society, and to develop a more pluralistic approach – one that not only recognizes cultural and religious differences, but also actively adapts the institutions and service-provisions accordingly.

A government that is concerned about fighting ethnic inequality should finally also actively fight all forms of everyday discrimination based on ethnic or religious grounds, not only through soft measures (such as sensitizing publicity campaigns that discourage discrimination), but also through hard ones. Based on a report by the European commission against racism and intolerance (ECRI, 2014), and the 2012 annual report of the *Interfederal Center for Equal Opportunities (Interfederaal Gelijkekansen Centrum* – previously *Centrum voor Gelijkheid van Kansen en Racismebestrijding*; hereafter referred to as *the Centre*), I assert that Belgian policy makers fall short of fully realizing this goal. Ethnic and religious groups, particularly Muslims, continue to face discrimination in key arenas of life, especially in the labor and housing markets (Baert, Cockx, Gheyle, & Vandamme, 2013; CGKR, 2013; Van der Bracht & Van de Putte, 2013; Van Laer & Janssens, 2011). Additionally, both organizations express their worries about a strong increase in xenophobic, islamophobic, racist and anti-Semitic hate speech on the internet (CGKR, 2014; ECRI, 2014). The

Centre's 2012 report shows that it has had several successes in the fight against racially and religiously motivated discrimination and hate speech, but the increasing number of complaints (even in a context of "under-reporting of racist crime" (ECRI, 2014, p. 8)) signal that the situation is less positive when it concerns *prevention*.

Under the motto *better to prevent than to cure*, I agree with the Centre (IGC, 2014) that Belgium needs an intergovernmental action plan against racism, racial discrimination and other related intolerance. Based on my own research, I formulate four recommendations that are important in fighting racism, discrimination and hate speech toward members of ethnic and religious groups, most of which are aimed at *preventing*, rather than *curing* discrimination and hate speech. First, an action plan against racism, discrimination and intolerance should essentially include the above discussed measures that help to deconstruct symbolic boundaries. I agree with critics of such "soft measures" that these alone are not enough, but nevertheless consider them essential, because symbolic boundaries are the source of xenophobia and ethnic or religious stereotypes, which, in turn, are the main grounds for discrimination.

Second, given that discrimination not only includes the denial of certain goods or services, but also *verbal discriminatory harassment*, an action plan should also include a vision on how to fight everyday racism and subtle forms of othering. Cases of everyday racism, including ethnic jokes or a repeated focus on one's ethnic or religious background, are often not perceived as harmful by those who utter them, but, as my study on exclusion and identification shows, powerful in creating a sense of exclusion among those who experience them. For this reason, it is important to raise awareness among people without a migration background that such practices are exclusionary, hurtful, and, therefore, unacceptable. Regarding ethnic jokes in the workplace, for example, the Centre (CGKR, 2013, p. 95) points to the important role of the executive staff and trade unions: given their higher position, they have the power and responsibility to intervene when seemingly innocent remarks escalate, causing serious distress for the victims, or resulting in tension among employees. But not only executives and trade union representatives can address racism and exclusionary practices. Nowadays, companies can also hire an external *diversity coach* who not only advises executives on how to make their organization/company more inclusive, but can also help to deal with ethnic tensions among employees. One way of addressing racism and other exclusionary practices, for example, is to make people experience what racism feels like by putting them into a minority position and discriminating against them accordingly – a practice often used by Seyda Buurman-Kutsal, a diversity coach operating mainly in the Netherlands. This strategy, she argues, has proven

very effective, particularly because of the feedback & dialogue different participants engage in after the experience (Radiol, 2014).

Third, based on the comparison of my own research participants' experiences with discrimination, and the number of reports that the Center receives, there seems to be an enormous under-reporting of discrimination – something that has also been noted by ECRI (2014). For this reason, it is important that the Centre signals in various ways and through various channels (including social, audiovisual and written media) that reporting discrimination is not only necessary but also has real consequences. For this reason, I have serious doubts about the Center's strategy to prioritize dialogue between both parties involved over taking it to court, because, as such, victims get the impression that what has been done to them is not a crime. Considering that discrimination *is* a violation of the law, I believe the Center should help potential victims to actually start a judicial review in court, not only because this supports victims in their experience of having been mistreated, but also because an increasing numbers of convictions can serve as a deterrent against more discrimination.

Fourth, given that discrimination in the labor and housing markets is widespread and difficult to prove (which probably explains underreporting of suspected discrimination and racism), there is a need for *practice tests* that can help to identify and prosecute those employers, employment agencies and house owners who discriminate based on ethnic, racial or religious grounds. The existence of practice tests not only make it easier to actually prove a case of discrimination in court, but can also help to prevent actual discrimination.

## **EPILOGUE: TOWARDS AN *ALL-INCLUSIVE* SOCIETY**

As argued in the introduction, integration is increasingly seen as the responsibility of the immigrants and their children (Blommaert, 2011; Blommaert & Verschueren, 1992), and, consequently, they are the ones who take most of the blame for the so-called *failure of multiculturalism*. What politicians such as Merkel, Letorme and Sarkozy neglect, however, is that in each of their countries, there never was real multiculturalism. Immigrants have always been seen as “the other,” a guest in “our” country and, therefore, a population that needs to adapt to “our culture.” Throughout the past three decades, the keynote idea in political and public discourse has been that those with foreign roots or ancestry stand outside of mainstream society, and that the task of becoming part of it mainly rests on their shoulders: “they” have to learn “our” language, adapt to “our” values, join “our” organizations, make a more than an average effort to find a job and refrain from too much segregation, both in social and residential terms. In times of increasing super-diversity, such a normative monolingual and mono-

cultural conception of European society is not only an anachronism, but, more importantly, also a source of inequality for those who deviate from that norm.

Rather than having created an integrated society that recognizes and adapts itself to the superdiverse character of its population, political actors at all levels and of all ideologies have contributed to the maintenance of ethnic boundaries: they have marked symbolic boundaries between the mainstream and the immigrant populations by engaging in us-versus-them discourses and presenting “Muslim culture” as essentially different and a treat to the social fabric. Instead of fighting ethnic or religious discrimination, they have contributed to it by keeping women who wear headscarves out of schools and offices; and rather than taking measures to give deprived, impoverished youth in French *banlieus*, British suburbs and the “ghettoes” of Brussels a better chance for upward mobility (through better jobs, schooling and a real fight against discrimination) they are criminalizing them based on their religious and ethnic background. As such, they have strengthened and perpetuated ethnicity-based social boundaries, rather than working towards equality, also because public discourse influences how everyday people think and act regarding those of foreign ancestry. When Islam is continually presented as a threat and Muslims as essentially different, it should not surprise that this trickles down to the micro-level, resulting in othering, stereotyping and a reluctance to engage in meaningful relationships with “the other.” In such a context, it should equally not surprise that people with foreign ancestry stick to their group and culture. Given the hostile outside context and strong feelings of exclusion and rejection, the ethnic group is, for many, a safe haven and a safety net that helps to ward off complete marginalization and deviancy.

Those who want to commit themselves to creating an integrated society with no structural ethnic inequality should recognize all of the above, and start reducing ethnic inequality by fighting all mechanisms of exclusion, both symbolic and behavioral. First, it should be clear from this dissertation that fighting exclusion starts with a dissolution and deconstruction of symbolic boundaries. As I have argued, symbolic boundaries are the basis for discrimination and segregation, in the sense that they imply stereotypical ideas about “the other” that incite people to keep that other at a distance, whether it is to protect one’s culture, daughters, property or business. The media (and policy makers that make use of them) have an important responsibility in this regard, since it is through media that images and ideologies about the other are spread among the population. But also professionals also have an important role to play, particularly teachers and social workers, because they have the power to shape how people see themselves and the world on a micro-level. Second, anybody who claims to defend the Enlightenment values – and most politicians, from the left to the

right of the spectrum, seem to claim this – have to fight any form of social inequality, which includes avoiding that – to put it in George Orwell’s terms – “some are more equal than others.” Equality for all means that society and its structures are open and adapted to its superdiverse population, so that all people, regardless of their color, religion or ethnicity can enjoy the same basic human rights. For this reason, policy makers need to address all forms of legalized or institutional discrimination. This seems most important when it comes to the educational system and access to the labor market, given that both are crucial for upward social mobility.

When it comes to fighting ethnic inequality and the blurring of ethnic boundaries, we still have a long way to go, but I believe it is possible. First, as more people come into contact and grow up with (super)diversity, I believe stereotypical ideas about “the others” will begin to fade, at least in the larger cities, which will hopefully reduce discrimination and other forms of exclusion. Policy makers and professionals should not await this natural evolution however, but speed it up using the measures I suggest. Second, increasing super-diversity will force politicians to also address the needs of those who do not fit the current mono-cultural norm, at least if they want to have a shot at winning the elections. As such, the increasing super-diversity might be the most important lever for the creation of an inclusive society. As people increasingly deviate from what is now considered the norm, those norms will be challenged and they will fight for a society in which they are no longer regarded as second or third class citizens. I have good hopes that with the power of the masses and additional efforts of policy makers and professionals, we will be able to bridge the gap and create an *all-inclusive* society that provides equal opportunities for all, regardless of ethnicity, color or religion. A society in which mono-lingualism and mono-culturalism are maladaptive and anachronistic will be translated into one in which successful incorporation is all about *flexibility in diversity*.

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**APPENDIX 1: TRANSLATION EPIGRAPHS**

Source: Fatih, *Contradictio in Terminis. Gevangen tussen werelden die niet hetzelfde zijn* [Caught between worlds that are not the same] (Album release: April 2010).

**THREE GENERATIONS**

Where is my home?  
Where lies my future?  
Where do I get the right to respect, the right to what is mine?  
Caught between worlds that are not the same  
Three generations, three evolutions  
Where lies my future?  
Where do I get the right for respect, the right to what is mine?  
Caught between worlds that are not the same

Three generations...  
Where is our home?  
At which side of the ocean?  
Outsider at every side of the ocean  
In Ghent you are ne vrende, in Emirdag yabanci  
Migri in Tunis, in Tanger etranger  
You don't know what it feels like – living between it all  
Having lost the way like a GPS that is confused

**CONTRADICTION IN TERMINIS (1)**

Belgians see me as a Turk, treat me as a Turk  
Destroyed my father, because you know, he was a Turk  
You narrow-minded short-sighted cuntpeople  
Learn to accept us first, then talk about us  
It's a hopeless job, but they want me to adapt  
Menace to society, because I did not have a place IN it  
As a child, I wrote verses with blood when I was lost  
Now I bleed verses and wipe them on your cheek  
Straightforward attack, ruthless approach  
for all those who per se labels everything with a name  
Call me this, call me that  
Call me si, call me la  
What are you going to call me the day you are at my feet?

**CONTRADICTION IN TERMINIS (2)**

It's because of *piçler* like you that I feel the way I feel  
 Labeling people is all you do  
 You keep fucking with us, keep putting us in boxes  
 You keep putting ignorance into your heads  
 The Turks see me as a Belgian, treat me as a Belgian  
 Because of them my mother went through hell, because she was a Belgian  
*Agzini kapat* never point at me with your finger  
 Before you give me the evil eye, look at your own kids first

**CONTRADICTION IN TERMINIS (3)**

I am  
 Half and half  
 Always been  
 In-between  
 fifty-fifty  
 white or black  
 black nor white  
 I am black on white a  
*Contradictio in terminis*  
 If I want peace, I get war  
 I go backwards when I want to move forward  
 I am a paradox, an antonym  
 I am... I am... who the f\*ck am I?



## APPENDIX 2: LIST OF INTERVIEWS

Period	No.	Informant	Time	Location	Gender	Generation	Birthyear	Residence (childhood)	Education	Acquaintance
1	1	Batuhan	2:47	Office	Male	2	1985	Gent	Tertiary	Personal network
	2	Burak	1:16	Office	Male	3	1985	Gent	Tertiary	Personal network
	3	Leyla & Zeynep	1:56	Office	Female	3	1981	Other	Tertiary	Spontaneous
					Female	3	1991	Other	Tertiary	Spontaneous
	4	Azra (1)	1:48	Participant's home	Female	2	1983	Gent	Tertiary	Intermediary
	5	Ali (1)	2:20	Public place	Male	3	1983	Gent	Tertiary	Intermediary
	6	Damla	1:54	Office	Female	2	1981	Gent	Tertiary	Intermediary
	7	Pinar	2:23	Public place	Female	2	1960	Gent	Primary	Intermediary
	8	Talha	2:05	Public place	Male	2	1980	Gent	Secondary technical	Fieldwork
	9	Tara	1:44	Office	Female	3	1986	Gent	Tertiary	Fieldwork
	10	Mustafa	1:23	Participant's home	Male	3	1988	Gent	Secondary general	Personal network
	11	Ayse1	1:39	Participant's home	Female	3	1990	Gent	Tertiary	Intermediary
12	Aynur	1:36	Participant's home	Female	2	1974	Gent	Tertiary	Intermediary	
2	13	Volkan	/	Participant's home	Male	2	1974	Gent	Secondary vocational	Intermediary
	14	Ayse (2)	1:37	Participant's home	Female	3	1990	Gent	Tertiary	Intermediary
	15	Mertcan	0:55	Public place	Male	2	1988	Other	Tertiary	Fieldwork
	16	Abdullah	0:55	Public place	Male	2	1987	Gent	Secondary technical	Intermediary
	17	Armagan	1:39	Participant's home	Female	3	1986	Gent	Secondary (drop out)	Fieldwork
	18	Azra (2)	0:42	Participant's home	Female	2	1983	Gent	Tertiary	Intermediary
3	19	Mehmet	0:37	Office	Male	2	1976	Gent	Secondary technical	Intermediary
	20	Ramiz (1)	0:47+	Office	Male	2	1985	Gent	Tertiary	Intermediary
	21	Can	1:08	Office	Male	3	1985	Gent	Tertiary	Intermediary
	22	Songül, Eliif, & Selda	1:04	Office	Female	2	1987	Gent	Tertiary	Intermediary
				Female	2	1986	Gent	Secondary vocational	Intermediary	
				Female	2	1987	Gent	Tertiary	Intermediary	
4	23	Kubra	1:09	Public place	Female	2	1984	Mining town	Secondary general	Intermediary
	24	Ayhan	1:03	Public place	Male	2	1980	Mining town	Secondary vocational	Intermediary
	25	Musti	1:49	Participant's home	Male	3	1979	Mining town	Secondary vocational	Spontaneous
	26	Enise	0:50	Public place	Female	2	1992	Mining town	Tertiary	Intermediary
	27	Dilek	1:42	Public place	Female	2	1984	Mining town	Tertiary	Personal network
	28	Serpil & Sedat	1:34	Participant's home	Female	2	1984	Mining town	Secondary general	Intermediary
					Male	2	1986	Mining town	Secondary vocational	Intermediary
	29	Dogan	1:03	Public place	Male	2	1987	Mining town	Tertiary	Intermediary
	30	Achmed	1:43	Public place	Male	3	1984	Mining town	Tertiary	Intermediary
	31	Yasemin	0:45	Participant's home	Female	2	1985	Mining town	Secondary vocational	Intermediary
	32	Arif	0:25	Participant's home	Male	2	1983	Mining town	Secondary technical	Intermediary
	33	Melek	1:02	Participant's home	Female	2	1992	Mining town	Tertiary	Intermediary
	34	Ferdane	0:37	Participant's home	Female	3	1989	Mining town	Secondary vocational	Intermediary
	35	Seyid	0:45	Participant's home	Male	2	1995	Mining town	Middenjury	Intermediary
	36	Yasin	1:24	Public place	Male	3	1984	Mining town	Tertiary	Intermediary
	37	Fatos	0:57	Participant's home	Female	3	1988	Mining town	Secondary vocational	Intermediary
	38	Semra	1:18	Participant's home	Female	2	1992	Gent	Secondary vocational	Fieldwork
	39	Aleyna	1:25	Public place	Female	2	1984	Mining town	Tertiary	Personal network
	40	Adem	1:37	Public place	Male	3	1983	Gent	Secondary technical	Fieldwork
	41	Hatice	0:47	Participant's home	Female	2	1982	Mining town	Secondary vocational	Intermediary
	42	Ahmet	1:22	Public place	Male	3	1985	Gent	Tertiary	During fieldwork
	43	Nur	/	Public place	Female	3	1984	Mining town	Secondary general	Intermediary
	44	Ferhat	1:03	Participant's home	Male	3	1983	Mining town	Tertiary	Intermediary
	45	Armageddon	0:57	Public place	Male	2	1979	Mining town	Secondary vocational	Intermediary
	46	Apo	0:59	Public place	Male	3	1992	Gent	Secondary drop out	Intermediary
	47	Otoman	0:56	Public place	Male	2	1979	Gent	Secondary vocational	Personal network
48	Havin & Özge	0:57	Participant's home	Female	2	1989	Mining town	Tertiary	Intermediary	
				Female	3	1991	Mining town	Secondary vocational	Intermediary	
49	Ramiz (2)	0:50	Office	Male	2	1985	Gent	Tertiary	Intermediary	
50	Emine	0:37	Public place	Female	3	1986	Gent	Secondary vocational	Intermediary	
51	Talha (2)	0:22	Public place	Male	2	1980	Gent	Secondary technical	Fieldwork	
52	Leyla (2)	0:54	Public place	Female	3	1982	Other	Tertiary	Spontaneous	
53	Alican	0:32	Public place	Male	2	1971	Gent	Tertiary	Fieldwork	
54	Ramazan	0:47	Public place	Male	3	1987	Gent	Secondary technical	Intermediary	
55	Ali (2)	0:44	Office	Male	3	1983	Gent	Tertiary	Intermediary	
5	56	Berfin	1:09	Public place	Female	3	1991	Gent	Tertiary	Personal network
	57	Zehra	1:18	Public place	Female	2	1985	Mining town	Tertiary	Intermediary
	58	Eser	1:49	Public place	Female	3	1988	Gent	Secondary vocational	Personal network
	59	Junior & Nele	1:24	Participant's home	Male	2	1978	Gent	Tertiary	Personal network
	60	Emmalyn Rose	1:54	Interviewer's home	Female	2	1981	Gent	Secondary vocational	Intermediary
	61	Hava	1:47	Participant's home	Female	3	1992	Other	Tertiary	Spontaneous
	62	Apo & Lies	0:58	Public place	Male	3	1992	Gent	Secondary drop out	Intermediary
	63	Zeynep (2)	0:18	Public place	Female	3	1991	Other	Tertiary	Spontaneous
	64	Damla & Sam	0:43	Public place	Female	2	1981	Gent	Tertiary	Intermediary
	65	Senay & Freddy	1:07	Participant's home	Female	2	1980	Gent	Tertiary	Personal network
	66	Mahmut & Nora	1:51	Interviewer's home	Male	2	1984	Other	Tertiary	Intermediary

## APPENDIX 3: TOPIC LIST PERIOD 1

### Topiclist interview

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#### Intro

- o Mezelf voorstellen en opzet onderzoek uitleggen
- o Interview toelichten
  - Vertrouwelijkheid benadrukken: alles volledig anoniem, geen naam – enkel van waar (groot)ouders afkomstig zijn in Turkije + leeftijd + geslacht.
  - Zoveel mogelijk te weten komen over hoe jij over bepaalde dingen denkt, maakt niet uit wat je zou moeten denken
  - Terminologie uitleggen: "gemakkelijke" termen gebruiken (Turken en Belgen)
  - Vragen kunnen raar overkomen maar ik mag niets veronderstellen
  - Zo weinig mogelijk onderbreken maar niet verplicht voelen om oneindig te vertellen
  - Mag vragen om te pauzeren
  - Ik ga opnemen, omdat ik dan aandachtig kan luisteren
- o Pseudoniem laten kiezen + gegevens invullen

#### Background (10min)

- o Migratiegeschiedenis familie

#### Ouders (30min)

- o Kan je eens beschrijven hoe je familie eruit ziet?
- o Kan je vertellen wat je familieleden doen in het dagelijks leven?
- o Relatie met ouders/broers/zussen?
- o Opvoeding (vragen naar transmission of values!!!!)
  - Wat vinden/vonden ouders belangrijk? (vraag naar individualisme/collectivisme)
  - Verschillen in opvoeding bij broers/zussen?
  - Ben jij anders dan je ouders? Anders dan broers en/of zussen?
  - Belangrijk dat je je Turks gedraagt?
  - Conflicten in opvoeding?
  - Kan je zelf gelijkenissen/verschillen uitleggen/verklaren

#### Turks versus Belgisch (50min)

- o Hoe zie jij relatie tussen Belgische cultuur (maatschappij) en Turkse cultuur (gemeenschap)?
  - Zie je die twee als aparte dingen of is dat gemengd?
  - Tekenen: mensen van Turkse origine; autochtone Belgen; jijzelf



- o Hoe is het om als jongen/meisje van Turkse origine in België op te groeien?
  - Heb je gevoel in twee culturen te zitten?
  - (Waar plaats je jezelf?)
  - Voel je verwachtingen van 'Belgische samenleving'?
  - Voel je verwachtingen van 'Turkse gemeenschap'?
  - Conflicten? (vb) Hoe ga je daar mee om? (vb)
- o Voel je je soms negatief over/slecht door je Turkse afkomst?
- o Discriminatie?
- o Hoe reageer je daarop? Verschil met vroeger? Andere mensen?

### Waarden en normen (1h10)

- o Wat vind jij belangrijk in je leven? (vraag naar waarden – kaartjes!)
- o Wat is een 'goede' mens? (vraag naar normen)
- o Opvoeding eigen kinderen
- o Verschil tussen Turken en Belgen in wat ze belangrijk vinden?
- o Waar plaats je jezelf?
- o Conflictueuze situaties? (vb) Hoe ga je daar mee om? (vb)
- o Hypothetische situaties voorleggen!

### Sociaal netwerk (1h30)

- o Netwerk laten samenstellen
- o Verschil in omgang/activiteiten tussen B en T vrienden? (vb)
- o Gevoel dat je vrienden mee je persoonlijkheid bepaald hebben?
- o Andere persoon als je geen Belgische vrienden zou hebben?

### Buurt (1h40)

- o Vertel over buurt waar je woont (vraag naar beschrijving)
  - Welke "soort" mensen wonen in je buurt? (vraag naar samenstelling)
  - Ken je hier veel mensen?
- o Hoe lang woon je hier? In andere buurt gewoond?
  - Woon je graag in die buurt? (vraag naar evaluatie) Waarom (niet?)
  - Zou je liever in andere buurt wonen?

### Sociale controle (1h50)

- o Hoe groot is je vrijheid om te doen wat je wil doen? (vraag naar beperkingen op keuzevrijheid)
- o Heb je het gevoel dat je doen en laten door anderen gecontroleerd wordt?
  - Op welk vlak? (vb)
  - Door wie en hoe? (vb)
  - Hoe ga je daar mee om? (vb)

### Afsluiter

- o Afsluitende vraag: nog iets dat je wilt vertellen? Iets dat je aan mij wil vragen?
- o Vertrouwelijkheid benadrukken
- o Andere respondenten zoeken (vragen naar familie + flyers geven)

## APPENDIX 4: PAMPHLET

Gent

## Türklerle tanışmak istiyorum!

**In deze brochure:**

- > Mijn onderzoek
- > Doe jij mee?
- > Hoe alles verbopt
- > Ja ik doe mee!



**Mijn onderzoek**

**Merhaba!**

Ik ben Klaartje, en ik doe onderzoek aan de vakgroep sociologie van de universiteit van Gent. In mijn onderzoek ga ik na hoe de cultuur van Turkse migranten verandert over de generaties heen. Ik vind het vooral interessant om te kijken hoe Turkse Belgen de verschillende culturen combineren, hoe ze zich voelen en welke problemen ze ervaren.

In tegenstelling tot wat je nu misschien denkt gaat mijn onderzoek niet over "integratie". Ik wil dus niet weten of jij je als Turkse Belg goed hebt "aangepast" en leeft volgens de Belgische waarden en normen. Wat ik wél interessant vind, is hoe je je voelt als Turk in België, of het moeilijk is om bepaalde keuzes te maken, wat mensen van jou verwachten en hoe je daar mee omgaat, enzovoort.

Ik wil met andere woorden gewoon eens uit de mond van de Turkse mensen zelf horen hoe het voor hen is om hier te leven, en wat de moeilijkheden zijn. Ik vind immers dat er veel verwacht wordt van "allochtone mensen", maar dat er veel te weinig geluisterd wordt naar wat zij zelf ervaren en willen.

Mensen vragen mij vaak waarom ik zo geïnteresseerd ben in Turken. Wel, het is eigenlijk zeer eenvoudig: ik heb ervoor gekozen om mij te focussen op Turkse Belgen om de zeer eenvoudige reden dat ik zelf van Gent ben, en de Turken hier de grootste minderheidsgroep zijn. En het is natuurlijk mooi meegenomen dat ik daardoor nu en dan naar Turkije moet gaan en overal verwelkomd word met koffie, thee, koekjes en een grote glimlach!

**Doe jij mee?**

Ik doe mijn onderzoek op basis van veldwerk en interviews. Dat betekent dat ik zoveel mogelijk tijd doorbreng met Turkse mensen, en met een aantal mensen gesprekken heb over de Turkse gemeenschap, cultuur en hun eigen levenservaringen.

Iedereen kan mij helpen en jij dus ook! Maar waarom zou je dat doen? Wel, misschien ben je het beu dat moslims altijd in een slecht daglicht staan of dat mensen een verkeerd beeld hebben van de Turken in België. Of misschien wil je gewoon eens honderduit vertellen over je problemen, of zoek je een luisterend oor dat je niet veroordeelt.

Overweeg je het om mee te werken? Draai dan deze pagina om en kom meer te weten over hoe het allemaal verloopt.

## Hoe alles verloopt

### 1. Alles is anoniem

Ik zal ons interview opnemen met een digitale recorder, maar niemand behalve ik zal dat ooit horen, en ik zal ook tegen niemand vertellen wat jij mij verteld hebt. Andere mensen zullen later stukjes van jouw verhaal kunnen lezen, maar door je een nieuwe naam te geven (die je zelf mag kiezen) zullen zij nooit weten, dat jij dat hebt gezegd.

### 2. Jij bent de baas!

Ik wil weten hoe jij denkt, hoe jouw leven eruit ziet, en eigenlijk bepaal jij dus hoe het interview eruit ziet. Dingen die voor jou heel belangrijk zijn, daar mag je heel veel over vertellen, over andere dingen zal je dan weer niet meer dan één zin kunnen vertellen...

Dat jij de baas bent, betekent ook dat je gerust eens een pauze mag inlassen, of zelfs, als je het echt beu bent, mag stoppen met het gesprek.

### 3. Jij bent mijn leraar

Ik ben zelf niet van Turkse afkomst. Ik weet al heel veel dingen, maar er is nog veel meer dat ik niet weet. Als ik een vraag stel, dan is dat dus vaak echt om uitleg te krijgen over hoe JIJ als persoon van Turkse afkomst iets ervaart.

Je hoeft geen schrik te hebben dat je het "juiste" antwoord niet weet, want er zijn geen juiste of foute antwoorden. Dus als ik vraag: "Hoe denk je dat dat komt?" dan vraag ik naar JOUW mening, en het doet er niet toe of dat dan in de werkelijkheid ook zo is.

### 4. Verschillende gesprekken van een half uur tot twee uur.

Ik vind het belangrijk om mijn tijd te nemen om jou te leren kennen. Door mekaar een aantal keer te zien, krijg ik niet alleen een beter beeld van jou, maar kan jij je ook steeds meer op je gemak voelen. Tijdens een eerste gesprek, dat ongeveer een uur duurt, probeer ik een algemeen beeld te krijgen van wie jij bent en hoe jij denkt. In volgende gesprekken focussen we telkens op een specifiek thema. Heb je echter liever één groot interview, dan kan dat perfect, maar dan zeg je dat best aan het begin van onze samenwerking.

### 5. Beloning

Omdat ik het heel erg appreciateer dat je wil meewerken aan mijn onderzoek, krijg je 2 filmtickets (voor de Decascoop of voor Sfinx, je mag zelf kiezen). Het enige wat je daarvoor moet doen is over je leven praten en je mening geven over een aantal onderwerpen, meer niet.

### 6. Je hoeft je nooit te schamen om iets te vertellen

HET IS HEEL BELANGRIJK DAT JE ALTIJD ZEGT WAT JE DENKT. Je hoeft niet bang te zijn dat ik jouw mening of jouw gedrag ga afkeuren. Je moet je dus niet schamen om dingen te zeggen die anderen zouden afkeuren, zelfs niet als het beledigend is ten opzichte van mijzelf, Belgen of mensen die ik ken.

### 7. Vertel in geuren en kleuren

Ik krijg graag lange antwoorden! Dus probeer zo uitgebreid mogelijk te vertellen.

Als ik moeilijke vragen stel waar je niet meteen kan op antwoorden, mag je gerust tijd nemen om na te denken, en je moet niet inzitten met lange stiltes.

### 8. Probeer zo open mogelijk te zijn

Mijn vragen kunnen soms vrij persoonlijk zijn en sommige mensen zijn daardoor afgeschrikt. Dat is heel erg begrijpelijk want je kent me eigenlijk niet goed, maar ik wil je alvast zeggen dat je je nooit hoeft te schamen, en dat je zeker niet bang hoeft te zijn dat ik dat ga doorvertellen of iets slechts ga denken.

Denk gewoon dat ik een vriend/vriendin ben waarbij je je hart eens kan uitstorten – ook al ken je mij helemaal niet. Maar als je iets echt niet wil vertellen dan heb ik daar zeker begrip voor.

## Ja, ik doe mee!

Wil je meewerken? Super! Laat me dat maar snel weten.

Je kan me bereiken via 0474/07.48.18 of via mijn emailadres [klaartje.vankerckem@ugent.be](mailto:klaartje.vankerckem@ugent.be)

Een kort berichtje volstaat, ik bel je dan wel terug om een eerste afspraak te maken.





**APPENDIX 6: EXAMPLE OF A TWENTY STATEMENT TEST (FICTIVE)****Twenty Statement Test (TST)**

Schrijf op elk lijntje een antwoord op de vraag “Wie ben ik?”  
Geef in totaal 20 verschillende antwoorden. Antwoord alsof je de antwoorden aan jezelf geeft, niet aan iemand anders. De volgorde is niet belangrijk.

**Wie ben ik?**

1. Türk
2. Socioloog
3. Belg
4. Grappas
5. Man
6. Kayseriaan
7. Achvist
8. Husband
9. Vriend
10. ICT-programmeerachtig - ding
11. Intellectueel
12. Europeaan
13. Cultureel Mediam
14. Spel denker
15. Onderwijzer
16. Nomaad
17. Feester
18. Liberal - Communist
19. Arrogant (zeggen ze)
20. Vuwand

## APPENDIX 7: LABEL CARDS

At the beginning of the interview, each participant received the following label cards, and was asked to pick those that (s)he felt was applicable to him/her:

Atheist/Moslim	(Atheist/Muslim)
Man/Vrouw	(Man/woman)
Vriend/Vriendin	(Friend)
Broer/Zus	(Brother/Sister)
Mens	(Human)
Dochter/zoon	(Daughter/son)
Mama/papa	(Mother/father)
Echtgeno(o)t(e)	(Husband/wife)
Vrijgezel	(Single)
Student	(Student)
Zelfstandig/arbeider	(Self-employed/manual worker)
Werkloos/bediende	(Unemployed/white collar worker)
Wereldburger	(World citizen)
Allochtoon	(Allochton)
Belg	(Belgian)
Turk	(Turk)
Turkse Belg	(Turkish Belgian)
Belgische Turk	(Belgian Turk)
Gentenaar/Genkenaar	(From Ghent/Genk)
Limburger/Antwerpenaar	(from Limburg/Antwerp)
Oost-Vlaming/West-Vlaming	(from East-Flanders/West-Flanders)
Vlaming/Brusselaar	(from Flanders/Brussels)
Europeaan	(European)

In addition to these, I sometimes added extra label cards, namely when people had written down additional social identities on the twenty statement test (these include, for example, feminist, lesbian, sociologist, socialist).



## APPENDIX 8: INTERVIEW GUIDELINES

Interviews - aandachtspunten

1. Notek eigen assumpties, facten, verkeerde veronderstellingen, ... + invloed op interview
2. Hoe reageert respondent op mij?
  - algemeen gedrag (n verwachtingen)
  - ziet mij als onwetkend? anders?...
  - zie mijn IO door zijn/haar ogen
3. Ga op zoek in sociaal wettelijk gedrag of antwoordstijl
4. Toon respect e openheid
5. Aandacht voor ≠ contexten
6. Doornagen!
  - voorkeelden
  - einde den extra vragen (prompts)
  - "beschrijf eens" - vragen
  - "jeling" - vragen
  - definitie / contrast - vragen

- Vragen in gedrag / opinie / ... anderen  
 - Vgl<sup>n</sup> met redenen  
 - kennisvragen.

**PROBES** ! Initial responses rarely tell the whole story.

Algemeen • "Kan je dat een beetje meer in detail beschrijven?"

Rechin • "Wat bedoel je met?"

Vgl • "Op welke manier is/was dat anders?"

Bedenen • "Waarom?"  
 • "Waarom zeg je dat?"

Reachi • "Wat was je reactie?"

guelgen • Welke effect / gevolg had dat?  
 • Wat zijn voor- & nadelen?  
 • Mening anderen aanhalen + reactie vragen

## APPENDIX 9: EXAMPLE OF POST-INTERVIEW REPORT

MAART 2009

## 3 MAART – [LEYLA] &amp; [ZEYNEP]

's avonds heb ik een interview met twee zussen [Leyla] en [Zeynep]. Ik was met hen in contact gekomen nadat [Zeynep] op Facebook een van mijn oproepen had gezien om mee te werken aan mijn onderzoek. Toeval wou dat ze bij mij les statistiek volgde, en ze kwam me na de les vertellen dat zij en haar zus wilden meewerken. Aangezien ik geen van beide meisjes echt kende van bij aanvang, was ik wat bang dat ze zich op hun ongemak zouden voelen. Dat gold vooral voor [Zeynep], omdat ze bij mij als studente statistiek volgt, en er dus een soort van ongelijke relatie tussen ons bestaat in termen van macht. [Leyla] had ik dan weer nog nooit gezien, wat ertoe zou kunnen leiden dat ze zich wat onwennig en terughoudend zou gedragen. Toen ze binnen kwamen leken ze inderdaad wat op hun ongemak, maar dat ging snel voorbij eens we wat aan de praat raakten. Feit dat ik eten had voorzien, en het hele interview heel los startte zal daar waarschijnlijk wel wat mee te maken hebben.

Kennismaking

Interview  
dynamic

Het feit dat het een dubbelinterview was, leverde niet veel problemen op. Bij de eerste vraag spraken ze wel af dat [Leyla] zou beginnen, en de volgende vraag werd dan beantwoord door [Zeynep], maar daarna ging dat eigenlijk heel spontaan. Het viel wel op dat [Leyla] gemakkelijker het woord nam en zich veel meer op haar gemak voelde. Misschien dat [Zeynep] iets minder vertelde dan ze anders zou doen, omdat haar zus het hoge woord voerde. Maar anderzijds leek ze mij sowieso niet het type dat veel praat (in elk geval niet zoals haar zus). Als ze al niet veel zei, dan was dat waarschijnlijk omdat ze het ernee eens was, want als haar mening verschilde, begon ze er wel spontaan over. Nu en dan heb ik ook expliciet gevraagd of ze het er mee eens was, vooral wanneer [Leyla] al had aangegeven – zowel verbaal als via lichaamstaal – dat [Zeynep] waarschijnlijk van mening zou verschillen.

Ik heb in elk geval niet het gevoel dat een van beiden aarzelde om bepaalde dingen te zeggen, ze vertelden zelfs zeer gemakkelijk over de zeer slechte relatie met hun vader – een onderwerp dat voor andere mensen toch wel heel gevoelig zou zijn. Waren duidelijk heel open en schaamden zich op geen enkel vlak om vrijuit te praten. De zussen hielden zich ook niet in ten opzichte van elkaar om dingen te vertellen, zelfs niet als ze dus van mening verschillen.

Disclosure

Non-verbaal gedrag tijdens interview: Hun blikken gaven duidelijk aan dat ze mekaar heel goed kennen en mekaar steunen. Vooral van [Leyla] naar haar jongere zus [Zeynep]

toe. Die laatste leek wel veel introverter/beschaander, omdat ze heel vaak naar de grond zat te kijken. Maar mijn indruk was dat dit haar karakter was en zeker niets met de interviewsituatie had te maken.

### 5 MAART - [AZRA]

Vandaag heb ik een eerste interview bij een respondent thuis. Ik kende [Azra] absoluut niet, en ons enige contact was 1 telefoongesprek om deze afspraak te maken. Omdat het bij haar thuis was, had ik pr[Al]ines meegenomen, kwestie van in het begin al zeer informeel over te komen en sympathie te winnen. Een gemeenschappelijke vriendin had ons in contact gebracht. Op geen enkel moment heb ik gevoeld dat dit gebrek aan eerder contact ervoor zorgde dat ze dingen niet vertelde. Op één moment vroeg ze wel uitdrukkelijk of het wel anoniem was, omdat ze iets ging vertellen over haar vorige relatie. Hieruit maak ik op dat ze zich op andere momenten zeker niet geremd heeft gevoeld, en toen ik haar de anonimiteit garandeerde, sprak ze ook vrijuit over die relatie. Ik heb wel gemerkt dat ik het zelf moeilijk heb om zeer persoonlijke vragen te stellen – wat niet betekent dat ik ze niet stel: het voelt gewoon wat ongemakkelijk aan; alsof ik voor roddelpers schrijf of zo.

Het interview verliep zeer rustig, en ze toonde geen enkele keer verveling/ergernis/..., ondanks feit dat het wel om 13u moest gedaan zijn (ze moest gaan werken). Ze nam ook ruim haar tijd, zeker bij de vragen over waarden en normen, wat mij garandeert dat haar antwoorden zeer doordacht waren. Bij de vraag over verschillen tussen Turken en Belgen wat waarden betreft had ik de indruk dat het zo lang duurde omdat ze net zo zeer genuanceerd dacht. Ze heeft het niet met zoveel woorden gezegd, maar uit haar gedrag bleek dat ze vindt dat er binnen de groepen zeer veel heterogeniteit is.

Het einde was nogal abrupt, maar ik ben niet gestopt voor ik voor mezelf gegarandeerd had dat alles behandeld was. De laatste twee topics lijken niet behandeld te zijn, maar die kwamen tijdens het interview zodanig vaak ter sprake dat ik alles te weten ben gekomen wat er daarover te weten viel.

Non-verbaal gedrag tijdens interview: zeer relaxt. Geen spoor van zenuwen op opgejaagdheid

Kennis making

~ disclosure

Fear to ask  
it. questions

Interview  
dynamic &  
body language

## APPENDIX 10: CODING STRUCTURE

THEME: CULTURE AND BOUNDARIES	SOURCES	REFERENCES
<b>Adaptation attitude</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Code switching</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Criteria of difference - boundary markers</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>93</b>
alcohol	4	7
artistic and educated	1	1
being successful and educated	1	2
chaos versus discipline	7	7
denial of difference	1	1
eating proscriptions	2	2
emotional versus rational	6	10
gender (in)equality	7	8
importance marriage and relationships	11	17
individual versus group oriented	26	47
autonomy vs. heteronomy (hierarchy)	11	21
family relatedness	14	16
generalized reciprocity & solidarity	12	13
sociability	12	12
open- versus narrowmindedness	2	3
religion	6	8
virginity and limited freedom girls	22	31
going out	14	22
premarital relationships	13	16
<b>Cultural transmission</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Gender segregation</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Intergenerational cultural change</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Language</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Socio-cultural positioning (doing)</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>96</b>
creolization	14	17
cultural retention	11	11
culture-related difficulties	18	23
finding the balance	2	3
<b>Turkish Belgians versus Turks</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>THEME: ETHNIC CONFORMITY PRESSURE</b>		
<b>Consequences of violation (Group sanctions)</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>35</b>
gossip	6	7
loss of honor, bad reputation	9	19
reduced marriage options	5	6
repudiation	3	3
social exclusion	7	9
<b>Description ECP</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>65</b>
belgification	11	12
<b>Factors shaping ECP &amp; control</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>48</b>
gender	26	39
marital or relationship status	4	7



moderating role of higher education	3	3
presence men in family	1	1
<b>Focus ECP (group codes)</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>92</b>
divorce	2	2
food and drinking proscriptions	13	20
hanging out with Belgians	4	4
interethnic marriage	14	17
loyalty & obedience	5	5
marrying a virgin (men)	1	1
normativity of marriage	5	6
provide for family (men)	2	2
religiousness	7	7
responsibilities older brother	6	6
smoking	1	1
virginity and restricted freedom for girls	41	73
appearance and clothes	8	10
going out	14	23
premarital relationships and cross-gender interactions	16	22
<b>Negotiating ECP &amp; control</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>Social control and gossip</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>90</b>
agents	6	8
attitude parents	15	20
description gossip	34	43
description social control	20	29
evolution	2	2
impact	5	5
motivation	8	9
<b>THEME: IDENTIFICATION</b>		
<b>Brother-sister identification</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Country affiliation</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>51</b>
involvement in Belgium	1	1
longing for Belgium	3	3
longing for Turkey	8	9
transnational ties	19	39
Turkey versus Belgium	3	3
value Belgium	5	6
value Turkey	9	10
<b>European identification</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Feeling at ease</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Feeling at home</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Flemish identification</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>
meaning Flemish	1	1
<b>Gender identification</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Global-human identification</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Local identification</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Muslim identification</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Student identification</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Turkish - Belgian identification (being &amp; feeling)</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>141</b>
allochtoon	23	31
context dependence	4	4
double identity	2	3

identity crisis	6	8
identity pride	6	8
importance ethnic identity	8	8
none of both	4	4
significance Belgian	14	19
significance Turkish	21	36
significance Turkish Belgian	16	22
value bicultural identity	1	2
<b>THEME: INTERETHNIC RELATIONS</b>		
<b>Assimilatory pressure</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>But you are different</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Counterdiscourses and strategies</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Ethnic boundary manifestation</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>87</b>
categorization	8	9
discrimination	17	24
ethnic framing	16	23
islamofobia	4	4
prejudice and generalization	9	10
not being taken seriously by authorities	1	1
racism & nativism	11	18
<b>Image of Belgians (boundary markers)</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Importance self-representation</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Institutional adaptations</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Lack of knowledge</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Positive interethnic experiences</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Sense of acceptance</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Sense of belonging - feeling different</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Social boundaries</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>THEME: PARTNER CHOICE</b>		
<b>Age at marriage</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Arranged marriages</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Divorce</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>17</b>
Factors leading to divorce	2	6
<b>Extramarital relationships</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Homosexuality</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Interethnic relationships</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>89</b>
(negotiating) differences	17	33
communication	1	1
cultural - religious adaptation	0	0
positive aspects	1	1
attitude family	33	67
overestimation reaction	3	4
attitude peers	6	9
attitude towards other groups and cultures	8	15
Belgian toygirls	6	6
coming out	2	3
dealing with expectations	7	21

hiding relationship	2	4
meeting opportunities	3	4
outsider - different	2	4
personal attitude & experience	38	74
getting along	4	4
good person	1	1
importance of language	6	7
importance of previous experiences	5	7
importance of religion	12	15
need to convert	4	5
internalized taboo	6	6
irrelevance of ethnicity	6	6
retention Turkish culture	8	9
similarities & differences	23	37
social consequences	2	4
<b>Meaning of marriage</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Parental preferences</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>53</b>
ethnicity	3	4
region of origin	1	2
reputation	4	7
<b>Partner preferences</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>68</b>
education	10	10
ethnicity	11	14
gender roles	4	5
importance of religion	14	16
region of origin	10	12
reputation of potential partner	12	14
<b>Perception of scarcity</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Pre-marriage period</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
acquaintance duration	9	13
engagement period	3	4
falling in love	2	2
marriage pressure	7	8
meeting possibilities	21	24
premarital relationships	34	56
awareness of family	10	12
end of premarital relationship	4	4
<b>Transnational marriages</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>119</b>
attitude and involvement family	10	12
difficulties	5	10
legislation change	1	1
marriage requests	4	5
motivations	22	44
Negative experiences	2	2
therapeutic marriage	3	5
Third parties	4	4
respect for parents	1	1
perception of incidence & change	10	20
personal attitude	38	62
negative aspects	23	34
positive aspects	8	10
risk perception	7	11
power issues	1	1
searching for security clues	1	4
types of people involved	2	8
<b>Wedding</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>

THEME: TURKISH COMMUNITIES IN BELGIUM		
<b>Conservative versus modern</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Differences by city of residence</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>13</b>
freedom girls	3	3
language	1	1
marriage	1	1
openmindedness	3	5
<b>Differences by region of origin</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>23</b>
conservative versus openminded	4	4
cultural practices	4	6
cultural retention	3	3
negative image Emirdag	4	6
stereotypes	1	1
<b>Minority organisations</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Religious heterogeneity</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Socio-structural characteristics community</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>45</b>
composition by region of origin	7	9
ethnic composition	10	12
ethnic segregation	2	2
gossip	3	3
group adaptation	6	7
interethnic relations	3	3
region of origin network	10	10
SES composition	2	2
social closure	10	10
social cohesion	3	3



## APPENDIX 11: THE USE OF QUOTES AS VIGNETTES

Vignettes were not used in the interviews until a first round of data analysis (on about seven interviews) yielded analytical and empirical observations that suggested hypotheses we wished to test and refine. Rather than explicitly ask respondents leading questions about phenomena relevant to ethnic conformity pressure if they did not mention them on their own, we opted to use vignettes based on quotes drawn from the already existing interviews:

### *Vignette 1 – Ali talking about “ethnic conformity pressure”:*

Turks say things like [...]: “Assimilate, [...] watch out for this, don't do that. Try to stay Turkish.” In fact, that's the biggest, um..., contradictory point of view. The Flemish want [...] you to renounce your whole culture of origin. You know. To say: “I don't have anything to do with that. I'm Belgian now.” If you're in a situation like that [...], you won't be accepted—socially accepted—by the Turks. They don't like it.

### *Vignette 2 – Batuhan talking about “social control”:*

I was walking with my girlfriend one day—my parents didn't know about it. Holding hands... you know, a friend of my father's saw it, and right away [he was telling him]: “You know what! Your son was walking hand in hand with a girl!” And my dad was, like..., you know... I come home and he says: “Well, it seems that...” And he knew about it after, like, ten minutes. You know..., yes, in that community social control is pretty strict. And... one day I was smoking and my dad—again—ten minutes later he knew about it! And [he said]: “I hear you smoke!” I told him: “You've gotta go back to your source and tell him to shut up!”

Three considerations led us to use existing narratives rather than direct questions or hypothetical situations:

1. *Legitimacy*: The use of quotes gave us greater legitimacy in delving into the topic of ethnic conformity pressure. Since Belgian society often stigmatizes Turkish Belgians precisely for their high degree of group pressure, Belgian researchers could run the risk of giving offense merely by asking questions on the topic. By having informants reflect upon the comments of other Turkish people, we hoped to avoid being (seen as) offensive and stigmatizing.
2. *Apprehensiveness*: The language code of many of our informants was “restricted” (Bernstein 1964), so abstract concepts could not always be used (some of them, for instance, did not understand terms and concepts like “identity” and “social control”).

We could have provided descriptions or explanations, but our wish to avoid the perception of a power imbalance ruled this out: even an interviewer with no intention of claiming power and enforcing rigid views can often be seen as more powerful, especially by informants occupying a subordinate position in society. Such informants seldom contest what the researcher says, even if they disagree. The use of actual narratives not only let us avoid using difficult terms, but also made it easier for informants to react to what was said in the quote, to contest it, or give it a new meaning.

3. *Richness*: Quotes in the vignettes touched upon different aspects of the topic, so asking informants to reflect on them helped generate rich answers and “thick descriptions.” If an informant overlooked part of a vignette, the interviewer could refer back to a quote to delve deeper into certain topics.