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# Tilburg Papers in Culture Studies

## Paper 31

### **‘Traces of hate’**

**How the dominant migrant-hostile discourse in Dutch media and politics influences inter-ethnic relations between employees in Dutch work settings**

by

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August 2012

## **‘Traces of hate’**

# **How the dominant migrant-hostile discourse in Dutch media and politics influences inter-ethnic relations between employees in Dutch work settings**

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### **Abstract**

In many countries, migrants are located in unequal positions in the labour market compared to majority people. The impact of dominant discourses on migrants and migration in politics and media has been identified as a contextual factor that boosts ethnic inequality in career advancements. This study shows that the migrant-hostile dominant discourse in Dutch media and politics triggers the construction of ethnic boundaries in interactions between Dutch majority employees and colleagues with a migration background in work settings. These ethnic boundary constructions constitute the missing link between this discourse on the one hand and exclusion processes migrants have to face in work settings on the other hand. This study was carried out in the spring of 2011 and is based on 23 interviews with first and second generation migrants in The Netherlands, who are inspired by Islam and have a Moroccan background.

### **Keywords**

discrimination, ethnic minorities, migrants, labour market inequality, ethnic closure, discourse, ethnic cleansing

### **Introduction**

In many countries, migrants are located in unequal positions in the labour market compared to majority people (Heath, 2007; Van Tubergen, 2004). Universalistic approaches in terms of cognitive processes (cf. Roberson & Block, 2001) or racism (Nkomo, 1992) producing discrimination or pointing to conflicts over resources (Blalock, 1956) have their limits. Contextual factors need to be called in to explain the exclusion processes migrants have to face at work (Heath, 2007; Reskin, 2000 and 2003). The impact of dominant discourses on migrants and migration in politics and media has been identified as such a contextual factor (Ghorashi & Van Tilburg, 2006; Siebers, 2010). There is a growing body of literature on such dominant discourses (see Prins & Slijper, 2002; Thränhardt & Bommers, 2010).

However, little is known about how such dominant discourses actually work out in the interactions between colleagues in work settings, with migrants' careers being harmed as a result. Our study shows that the migrant-hostile dominant discourse in Dutch media and

politics triggers the construction of ethnic boundaries (Barth, 1969; Wimmer, 2008a and 2009) in interactions between Dutch majority colleagues and colleagues with a migration background in work settings. Answering to Reskin's (2000; 2003) call for studying intermediate mechanisms, our study demonstrates that these ethnic boundary constructions constitute the missing link between this discourse on the one hand and exclusion processes migrants have to face in work settings on the other hand. In such ethnic boundaries, ethnic identity becomes salient and ethnic closure takes place as a consequence of interactions between majority colleagues and migrant colleagues triggered by issues and events in Dutch media and politics, especially those voiced by Geert Wilders

This study was carried out in the spring of 2011 and is based on 23 interviews with first and second generation migrants who are inspired by Islam and are connected to their Moroccan backgrounds. Therefore, they are the prime discrimination target of the current Dutch dominant discourse in media and politics, as voiced by spokespersons like Geert Wilders and Ayaan Hirsi Ali. They have primarily been questioned about their experiences with the impact of this discourse in their work settings in semi-structured and open-ended interviews.

This paper starts with an overview of the explanations of ethnic inequality in the labour market and discusses the rise of a migrant-hostile discourse in Dutch policies and political voices as transmitted by Dutch media. Next, the conceptual and methodological approach of our study will be outlined. Finally, the findings will be presented and discussed.

### **Migrant-hostile discourses and ethnic closure at work<sup>1</sup>**

Ethnic inequality marks the labour markets of many countries receiving transnational migration flows (Hofmeister & Breitenstein, 2008). First and second generation migrants face more difficulties in getting access to jobs, authority, wages and career advancements than people with a majority background (Heath, 2007; Van Tubergen, 2004). Human capital, critical race, conflict and cognition theories have provided the groundwork for basically universalistic explanations of such ethnic inequality (Blalock, 1956; Heath & Cheung, 2007; Nkomo, 1992; Reskin, 2003; Roberson & Block, 2001; Satzewich, 1989).

However, several studies suggest that context matters in producing substantial variation in ethnic labour market inequality (Brief, Butz & Deitch, 2005; Brief, Umphress et al., 2005; Heath, 2007; Van Tubergen, 2004). Although relatively little is known about specific contextual factors that influence the mechanisms that produce such inequalities (Heath, 2007; Reskin, 2000 and 2003), discourses on migrants and migration in media and politics have been identified as contextual factors producing ethnic inequality (Ghorashi & Van Tilburg, 2006; Siebers, 2010). Based on research among employees of the Dutch national tax administration, Siebers (2010) identified the rise of a migrant-hostile discourse in Dutch politics and media since 2000 as a factor that aggravates ethnic inequality in career advancement. His study shows that tensions among colleagues triggered by public events that express this discourse fuel career insecurities of migrant employees that leave a negative impact on their career advancements.

Reskin (2000 and 2003), however, argues that we not only need to identify contextual factors that push for ascriptive inequality, but also need to pay due attention to the processes or the mechanisms that connect these factors to their outcomes, in this case ethnic inequality

in the labour market. In other words, not only ‘why’ questions need to be raised, but also ‘how’ questions. From here the question is raised how such a migrant-hostile discourse actually works out in fomenting exclusion processes migrants are confronted with in the labour market and at work. The aim of the current study is to contribute to answering this ‘how’ question in the case of The Netherlands. For this purpose, the development of this discourse will be traced in a brief outline first.<sup>2</sup> Within this discourse, we distinguish government policies and the spokespersons who have come to voice this discourse.

### ***The rise of migrant-hostile policies in The Netherlands***

Since the Second World War, The Netherlands have become a country of immigration. People have come from former colonies, such as Indonesia (Van Amersfoort & Van Niekerk, 2006) and later Surinam and the Dutch Antilles. Labour migrants and their families left Southern European countries as well as Turkey and Morocco and currently Eastern European countries to find a job in The Netherlands. Asylum seekers from a variety of regions in the world have sought refuge there. Consequently, many Dutch cities are characterized by what Vertovec (2007) has coined super-diversity, i.e. a complex and fragmented situation that can no longer be understood in terms of an ordered pattern of bounded migrant communities existing side by side. Nevertheless, ethnic inequality in labour market participation continues to be structured along ethnic categories, especially between majority people on the one hand and first and second generation migrants from so-called non-Western areas on the other hand (Tesser & Dronkers, 2007). The latter constitute 1.9 million people, or 11.4 per cent of the Dutch population (Statline.cbs.nl).

Migration became an issue in politics and media with economic recession and mounting unemployment rates among migrants in the 1980s and when it became clear that migrants were here to stay. Government responses since 1983 (*Minderhedennota 1983*) focused on equal treatment, proportional representation in society and support for migrants’ ‘ethnic-cultural identities’ (Entzinger, 2003). On the one hand, migrants were defined in cultural terms, as members of communities, with their own culture, religion and language. The government financed special education ‘in their own language and culture’ to support their cultural life (Entzinger, 2003). On the other hand, only those who represented a deficit in terms of equal treatment and proportional representation became the object of policy and public opinion attention (Rath, 1991). The policy terms ‘non-Western allochthones’ and ‘ethnic minorities’ came to refer to those groups with relatively low participation rates in, for example, education and the labour market.

Both parts of the approach of migrants in politics and media were met with increasing criticism and impatience in the 1990s. On the one hand, the cultural definition imposed on migrants stipulated that they could only be understood in their own culturally specific terms. This cultural relativist standpoint ruled out cross-cultural criticism and imposed cross-cultural silence (see Prins, 1997). Such a framing turned out to be impossible to maintain within one and the same society (Rath, 1991). On the other hand, impatience emerged over migrants’ overrepresentation in ‘bastard spheres of integration’ (Engbersen and Gabriëls, 1995) like crime and welfare dependency. Therefore, the government stopped supporting migrants’ culture in the 1990s and introduced new policies to accelerate their ‘integration’ in societal fields, like a soft draft of Affirmative Action legislation in the labour market. Moreover, the

1990s saw a steadily increasing influx of up to 55,000 (1994) asylum seekers a year for which existing facilities were inadequate (Trouw, 23 March 1995).

Gradually, the paradigms vis-à-vis the governmental policy and views on migration and migrants/ethnic minorities were shifting (Entzinger, 2003). Two new laws issued around the turn of the century, the Aliens Act (*Vreemdelingenwet*) and the Civic Integration Newcomers Act (*Wet Inburgering Nieuwkomers*), constitute landmarks in the rise of a new discourse shaping government policies (Ghorashi 2006). The first act and its subsequent refinements reflect a shift in emphasis in the asylum seekers debate from a human rights perspective to stressing the need to keep out ‘fortune-hunters’ (Geuijen 2004). Rendering asylum applications as difficult as possible and sending asylum seekers back have become prime policy objectives. The number of asylum applications has gone down from 55,000 in 1994 to 9,700 in 2007 ([www.cbs.nl](http://www.cbs.nl)), and less than half of the applications are eventually granted ([www.nu.nl/politiek/2493475](http://www.nu.nl/politiek/2493475)) after procedures of many years. Any drop in these figures is welcomed by the ministers in charge as a success, despite the fact that crucial aspects of these policies represent a gross violation of both international and domestic law.<sup>3</sup> In addition, naturalization options have been severely restricted (Entzinger, 2003) and double passports have become an issue of questioning one’s loyalty to the Dutch state. Permits to stay for migrants other than asylum seekers have also become subject to very tight conditions.

Those migrants who cannot be expelled and who can legally be obliged to do so have to pass civic integration programmes and exams. A benign way of justifying the 1998 Civic Integration Newcomers Act and its successor argues that they are supposed to help migrants to find their way in Dutch society and therefore prescribe Dutch language courses.<sup>4</sup> However, in practice and in the phrasing of subsequent policy documents the emphasis is on forcing migrants to assimilate (Penninx, 2006; Vasta, 2007) into ‘Dutch culture’ (Ministerie van VROM 2007a and 2007b). The 2003-2006 integration minister Rita Verdonk proposed to express migrants’ degree of cultural assimilation in special vignettes. Passing such an exam has social and legal consequences. The new government since 2010 intends to make migrants’ stay and their entitlement to social benefits dependent ([www.rijksoverheid.nl/regering/het-kabinet/regeerakkoord](http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/regering/het-kabinet/regeerakkoord)) on their passing these acculturation exams. This entails a hierarchization of citizenship along culturist lines into first and second class citizenship (see Schinkel and Van Houdt 2010).

### ***Migrant-hostile voices in The Netherlands***

Policies have been developed closely intertwined with voices expressed by leading persons in public and parliamentary debate. In the year before his party took office, the leader of the conservative liberals (VVD) Frits Bolkestein proclaimed in September 1991 that ‘Our multicultural society has its limits, that is, when the above mentioned political principles [separation of church and state, freedom of speech, tolerance and non-discrimination - eds] become at issue... The integration of ethnic minorities ... can only be managed with *guts*... There is no room left for permissiveness or taboos’ (Bolkestein 1991). He assumed there was a ‘*silent majority*’ reluctant to express their mistrust and suspicions out of apprehension to be accused of discrimination (Entzinger 2003). With his speech, Bolkestein made way for a new discourse in Dutch media and politics, which Prins (2002, 2010) has termed ‘*new realism*’.

The new realist (Prins 2002, 2010) or culturist (Schinkel, 2007) framing of migrants as people who represent values and norms that supposedly are incompatible (cf. Stolcke, 1995) with assumed Dutch liberal values and norms is a recurrent theme in many leading voices since the early years of this century. It especially picks out Islam to epitomize this opposition. This discourse was taken up by an article in one of the leading newspapers (*NRC Handelsblad*) on January 29, 2000, by Paul Scheffer. He argued that the prevailing cultural relativism with its respect for ethnic-cultural identities had hampered the claim for assimilation and endangers the liberal democratic ideology. He subsequently called for a revival of Dutch historical awareness as a precondition for dealing with migrants. It created the groundwork for the El Moumni-affair in May 2001 (Prins, 2002) in which spokespersons of the new discourse openly opposed their so-called Dutch liberal values to the views of this Imam ([www.novatv.nl/page/detail/nieuws/39/Het+interview+met+imam+El-Moumni](http://www.novatv.nl/page/detail/nieuws/39/Het+interview+met+imam+El-Moumni)) that homosexuality is a sin, a disease and very dangerous for society, and that infected people will contaminate others. In this framework and driven by the September 11 events of the same year, populist politician Pim Fortuyn managed to challenge established political parties, in part by mobilizing against minorities. While he called Islam a ‘backward culture’, warned against ‘Islamization’ of Dutch society (Prins, 2002) and called for the abolition of the constitutional article that bans discrimination (*de Volkskrant*, 9 February 2002), his party became by far the strongest party in the local council of Rotterdam in March 2002. Only his assassination (6 May 2002) could stop him from doing something similar in upcoming national elections.

In the aftermath of these events it has become a standard discursive practice in media and politics to associate migrants with all sorts of problems – crime, fraud, ghettoization, and societal decay – without feeling the need to support claims by facts. Somali immigrant Ayaan Hirsi Ali replaced Pim Fortuyn as the prominent spokesperson of this mobilization against Muslims and blames Islam for many societal problems. As an MP, she joined filmmaker Theo van Gogh to produce a film with Qur’an texts painted on a naked female body that supposedly legitimize violence against women. She received death threats and Van Gogh was actually murdered on 2 November 2004 by a radicalized Muslim. That event triggered a spiral of violence against Muslim schools and mosques and retaliation against churches.

After Hirsi Ali had left the country in 2006, Geert Wilders took over as leading migrant-hostile voice in politics and media. Wilders does also promote the ‘*radical freedom of speech*’ (Prins, 2010) as the most important civil right of an egalitarian, liberal and democratic society such as the Netherlands. In doing so Wilders not only uses the discursive style of hyperrealism, he also emphasizes that he is allowed to express his opinion on Muslims and Islam. Wilders practices ‘frankness’ no longer for the sake of ‘truth’, but for its own sake (Prins, 2010). After analysing 11 506 newspaper articles, Jean Tilly (2008) writes about hysteria through which Dutch public debate has gone astray. Where Van Gogh had already called Muslims ‘goat fuckers’, Wilders has adopted insulting and imputation of especially Muslim migrants as standard practices of his political style. In doing so, his political style is not very dissimilar from Joseph Goebbels’ portraying of the Jews (cf. *Zembla* April 25, 2010).

He started to speak about ‘Moroccan street scum’ associating the Moroccan background of youngsters with crime and violence. He has called for a ‘skull rag tax’ (a tax on

headscarves, in Dutch *kopvoddentax*) and depicted the headscarf as a sign of oppression of women by Islam. In his *Fitna* film, he accuses Islam as such for terrorism and for attacking The West and calls Islam a political ideology and the Koran a fascist book. He presents himself as someone who stands up for ordinary Dutch people and mobilizes against ‘mass immigration’ and ‘Islamization’ of society. He claims that migrants ‘cost society 7.2 billion Euros a year’<sup>5</sup> and calls for mass deportation of Muslims (cf. [www.pvv.nl](http://www.pvv.nl)). In his Copenhagen speech of June 15, 2009, he not only argued for the incompatibility of Islam and European ‘Judeo-Christian and Humanistic’ roots. He also said: ‘To the cultural relativists, the Shariah-socialists, I would proudly say: ‘Our Western culture is superior to Islamic culture’ ([www.pvv.nl](http://www.pvv.nl)). Characteristic of almost all his statements is to create an opposition between Islam and Western / Dutch values, between the categories of migrants and the Dutch (embodied by his typically Dutch couple called Henk and Ingrid), and to rally against migrants and Islam.

He was one of those who inspired Anders Behring Breivik (cf. Andrew Berwick (Anders Behring Breivik) 2083. *A European Declaration of Independence*. London, 2011) who killed 76 people in Norway on July 22, 2011. Following Geert Wilders, Breivik had framed these people as ‘cultural Marxists’, accomplices in the supposed Islamization of Europe (*NRC Handelsblad* July 25, 2011). Geert Wilders was the great winner of the June 9, 2010, general elections in which he won 24 of the 150 seats in Parliament. The subsequent minority government depends on his support in Parliament.

## **Approach**

The aim of this study is to show how this migrant-hostile discourse, as expressed in relevant policies and by prominent voices, influences interactions between migrant and non-migrant employees in work settings. In doing so, we draw on the ethnic boundary constructions approach that draws on the groundbreaking work of Fredrik Barth (1969) and that recently has been developed further by Andreas Wimmer (2008a, 2008b, 2009). These authors argue that ethnic group formations have no natural ontology, but require explanations for their emerging. They focus especially on the construction of boundaries between ethnic groups in which cultural elements like rituals and symbols are being used or even invented for the purpose of making such boundaries plausible. Such boundaries contain basically two elements. First, ethnic identity becomes salient among those involved; people start to identify themselves and others in ethnic terms. Ethnic identity refers here to issues of origin, descent and belonging as well as to religious, cultural and linguistic elements (cf. Verkuyten, 2005). Second, ethnic boundaries also assume ethnic closure, i.e. the reorientation of social interactions privileging ethnic in-group interaction and discouraging interaction with ethnic out-group members as well as privileging ethnic in-group members and excluding ethnic out-group members in the distribution of resources, such as jobs and promotion opportunities.

We have adopted an ethnographic approach to our study, since such an approach is particularly suited to explore complex real-life events and processes, and relevant context factors (Gellner & Hirsch, 2001) as well as the individual experiences of interactions in these real-life settings (Boeijs, 2005). Respondents were selected on the basis of their Moroccan background and their inspiration of Islam. We expected that they will be most confronted with the impact of dominant discourse in media and politics since that discourse focuses



particularly – though not exclusively – on migrants that have a first or second generation Moroccan background and who are somehow inspired by Islam.

Due to the sensitive subject of the research we assumed that getting access to respondents might not be easy, therefore non-probability sampling methods were applied (cf. Babbie, 2004). First the networking-method was used. We contacted several key-persons for cooperation in finding respondents (cf. Boeije, 2005). Through these key-contacts a network of respondents was expanded by means of snowball sampling. After the interview, respondents were asked if they knew other persons who might be willing to participate (cf. Babbie, 2004; Boeije, 2005). Efforts were made to maximize representativity by setting up a broad network and selecting different respondents from this broad network. The total sample included 23 respondents: 9 men (2 first generation and 7 of the second generation) and 14 women (11 first generation and 3 of second generation), spread over educational levels and age categories. The mean age of the respondents was 35.6 years, ranging from 24 to 55.

Data collection took place in the Spring of 2011 in various work settings and organizations throughout The Netherlands by means of semi-structured face-to-face interviews. The choice for this data collection method is twofold. Firstly it meets the exploratory character of this research and allows for a deeper understanding of the experiences of respondents and the underlying mechanisms and dynamics. Secondly, it is most suitable to gather information about a sensitive subject and allows for an open ambiance with trust and openness.

Interview questions aimed at reconstructing what actually happened in respondents' real-life events in work settings of interaction with colleagues in which issues and topics presented by the media and politics were discussed. Questions also focused on the ways the respondents deal with these events and their consequences. Respondents were asked to elaborate in further detail on what actually had happened, who did or said what in what sequence, and discussed the consequences, the reactions of colleagues involved and ways of dealing with these events.

We invited the respondents to stay close to the actual events and their immediate consequences in their answers. Regarding the ways they deal with experienced events, especially when these experiences were somehow problematic, they tended to talk in more general ways. However, we invited them to return to specific events, since we were interested in what actually happens in those events and how they experience these events instead of more evaluative accounts and general statements. Almost all interviews were conducted in a separate room, with only one researcher and the respondent (or several respondents in case of one group interview). In some cases, interviews were held in a public space, like a restaurant or café. An effort was made to look for a table as quiet as possible, so interviews would not be interrupted or disturbed. Respondents indicated that they did not have a problem with the interview-setting as such, gave open answers and shared vulnerable and sensitive information. The interviews took place in a positive atmosphere as respondents were willing to share their experiences and their views. Some respondents remarked that they did not feel like being questioned, which supports the choice for a semi-structured interview.

Risks of essentialism — assuming that different meaning-making and identification would necessarily result from using etic categories in sampling — and the risk of reproducing dominant, possibly ethnicizing classifications lurk behind an approach in which dominant classifications as 'Moroccans' and 'Muslims' were used for sampling. We believe, however,

that these risks have been neutralized since these classifications were not taken for granted. Respondents were explicitly asked about the kind of (emic) classifications they prefer and consider appropriate and what they mean to them. In addition, our empathic attitude provided encouragement for the respondents to speak without reluctance or fear that information will be transmitted to their fellow employees or their own community.

Data analysis followed the steps indicated by Miles and Huberman (1994): data reduction, data display and drawing conclusions. First, we used our central interview questions as codes to sort out the manifest content of our data in separate files. Next, we developed subcodes in each of the data files in an open inductive way and constructed overviews of the commonalities in the data per code. Finally, we looked for common patterns in our data on the experiences of events and interactions at work triggered by the migrant hostile discourse in Dutch media and politics and their aftermath, to identify the dynamics and to discern ways in which our respondents deal with them. In this way, we were able to draw overall patterns and relationships between these various events, the ways in which our respondents deal with them and to find the underlying meaning-making (cf. Babbie, 2004).

## **Findings**

In this section, we will present these overall patterns. They will be illustrated by descriptions of specific events and relevant statements. So, each quote represents a wider pattern in our data.

### *Non-recognition of subscribed identity claims*

Respondents were selected for their, at least partial, identification with their Moroccan cultural background and the fact that they feel somehow inspired by Islam. They prefer to relate to both their Moroccan and Dutch backgrounds in a rather selective and fluent way, drawing upon those elements from both backgrounds that inspire and serve them, a way coined in the literature as creolization (Hannerz, 1992) or bricolage (Lévi-Strauss, 1962). However, the discursive context they live in draws a clear categorical opposition that renders this balancing out both identifications and drawing upon both sources a difficult endeavour. A female respondent, age 44, first generation, said:

When I'm amongst Dutch people and they're talking about Moroccans, I'm defending the Moroccans and when I'm in Morocco, I defend the Dutch. So you're always in the middle... you see, so much pain. Then you get the feeling... you're nothing, you're nowhere, you're not Dutch, you're not Moroccan.

In talking about their religion, they use subtle and delicate expressions and talk about it in subtle and delicate terms. They stress that their religion is not about oppression or fundamentalism, but about their own personal choices and meaning-making in a non-essentialist way. In the words of a female, age 32, first generation respondent:

Faith means support, especially support in difficult times. And it also gives me peace... I truly believe in Islam, but I belong to the moderate Muslims; not the extreme religious ones. I do practice the five most important things that you're supposed to do as an upright Muslim, although praying is not always possible. And I believe in my own way... For example if you read the Qur'an, I consider it to be a guide that can change along the way, which is subject to change... It's not a stable essence, it changes. I keep the basics, but I try to let it evolve over time, instead of interpreting it as to how it was written back then... For

example, I'm convinced that I don't have to wear a headscarf to be a good Muslim. Or to visit a mosque on a daily basis to feel like a good Muslim.

Our respondents feel that the current dominant discourse in Dutch media and politics does not recognize this subscribed religious identity. Talking about media representation of Islam, a male, age 39, second generation respondent told us:

Taking things related to Islam completely out of their context and taking them in an absolute way, well, if you hear that as a layperson, then you start to believe that. That is a very regrettable thing, but it happens almost every day, among others by Geert Wilders.

### *Categorizing, stigmatizing and fear*

This non-recognition results from the categorizing and stigmatizing impact of the dominant discourse. Media and politics provide both the means and the motives for such categorization and stigmatization: they transmit reports about events and statements to our respondents and their colleagues at work that trigger discussions, questions and remarks between them and the discourse provides the discursive ways in which they interpret these events and statements and talk about them as well. In the words of a male, age 31, second generation respondent:

September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, well from that moment on you're always talking in terms of us versus them... Well, at some point you're bothered by things you read [e.g. in newspapers - eds]: imagine that a person with a Moroccan background has done something, well then it's blown out of proportion and with that more or less the whole group is being held responsible for their identity, which in turn causes that everybody is collectively responsible. As a group, you are in the bad books of society.

A female, second generation and 24 years old respondent told us that a close colleague, who was reading the newspaper about the murder of Theo van Gogh, reacted to her: 'So what do you think about Theo van Gogh being murdered by your people?' A female, first generation and 44 years old respondent accounted of a female majority colleague who had said to her after the same event: 'My husband told me: you must take care because many of those people work with you', also referring to our respondent.

Apparently, majority colleagues conceive these events of September 11 and the murder of Theo van Gogh in such a way that they first take the Moroccan or Muslim perpetrators of these crimes as specimen of the assumed category of Moroccans or Muslims, 'them' versus 'us'. Second, terrorism and crime are seen as attributes of these categories as such. Third, our respondents are seen as 'representatives' - as one respondent framed it - of these same categories and therefore can be held responsible for these acts of crime and terrorism. This categorizing and stigmatizing line of reasoning is clearly expressed by the voices discussed above, most belligerent in Geert Wilders' *Fitna* film. This line of reasoning finds its origin in these mediatized voices, as our female, second generation and 24 years old respondent indicated:

Every time when I came to work in the afternoon I found a printed out newspaper article put on the table – about Moroccans, about foreigners, about asylum seekers, every time it had a negative message... After two months my [majority - eds] colleague told me: "Yes, cause you cunt-Moroccans ruin everything all the time over here". I had to think about this sentence for two days before I understood it. Did she really say that?..

“You.” Where am I ruining everything? I do not even have the time to do so... Then it was quiet for a month and then it came repeatedly: “You Moroccans... I am sorry to say so, but those cunt-Moroccans, terrible people, I don’ t mind if they’re shot”.

Apparently, aggression is not only evoked by statements by Geert Wilders and other voices and his film *Fitna*, these majority colleagues also use media reports to legitimize their aggression toward our respondent. Note that the expression ‘cunt-Moroccans’ was first coined by a social-democrat alderman of the Amsterdam city government and was widely covered by Dutch media. The alderman had to resign partly due to this incident, but the stigmatizing word apparently has taken over by our respondents’ majority colleagues.

The articulation of categorization, stigmatizing and anxiety having to fear aggression by their colleagues triggered by events in media and politics is a recurrent theme in our respondents’ accounts. As a 44 years old first generation and female respondent told us when referring to the murder of Pim Fortuyn:

When it was on the news that he was murdered – I really thought ‘Oooh, please Allah, don’t let it be a Moroccan!’ And how happy I was when it was a Dutchman. Because you see it in the eyes of people on the street. Really. That really hurts... We do not count, you are nobody, you are nowhere.

There is feeling of relief among our respondents when a crime turns out not to be committed by someone whom the dominant discourse would position in the same ethnic or religious category as they themselves. They fear for their own safety when such incidents occur. In the words of a 37 years old first generation and male respondent referring to an incident on Queen’s day 2009 when a man drove with his car into a crowd looking at the queen killing eight people: ‘Like Queen’s day... I swear if the perpetrator would have been a Moroccan, then this country would have been too small. Then nobody would have been safe anymore.’ Our respondents feel they must be prepared for violence when such incidents occur and use words like the ‘need to hide’ or to ‘take cover’. Aggression not only takes physical shape, but also symbolic. The last words of the quote above illustrate the denial of identity and belonging resulting from categorization and stigmatization: ‘We do not count, you are nobody’.

### *Hostile jokes, questions and remarks by colleagues*

Geert Wilders and other voices discussed above associate the categories of Moroccans and Muslims with negative connotations like terrorism, crime and female oppression. These connotations become the subjects of jokes, questions and remarks on the part of majority colleagues towards our respondents who, apparently, are taken as representing these categories.

The association of Moroccans with crime triggers ‘jokes’ like: ‘That bling-bling, can’t you fix me a watch? You know how to do that, right?’ Suggestions by Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Geert Wilders that female Muslims are oppressed by their husbands provokes ‘jokes’ such as at a staff party when a majority colleague told a female respondent: ‘Ha, are you allowed off the chain?’ In theory, such jokes could have been just an expression of humour and some of our respondents do manage to take them as such, but in the eyes of most respondents they are

less innocent. Such jokes activate the dominant migrant-hostile discourse. In the words of a 35 years old female and second generation respondent:

Certainly, jokes are being made... I can be joking too about Islam, about PVV and that's okay. However, with some persons you feel this certain trace... they intend more by it then normally is the case with jokes... a trace of hate.

Our respondents also have to face serious questions and remarks by their colleagues at work. After terrorist attacks transmitted in de media our respondents get questions like: 'What do you think of these things, being an Islamic woman?' Again in theory, such questions could have been motivated by genuine interest in the part of majority colleagues, but suggestions made by Geert Wilders and others that Islam can be held responsible for terrorism turns such questionings into interrogations in which our respondents have to defend themselves as suspects. In the words of a 40 years old, first generation and female respondent:

After September 11<sup>th</sup>, I really tend to hide myself... Of course the incident itself, but also that you were held responsible for that... and every day over and over again I heard the discussion [with her colleagues - eds]... It is so hard how the whole world reacted, so terribly hard, that I had troubles to keep going.

Another recurrent theme of questioning especially our female respondents have to face refers to the accusations by Ayaan Hirsi Ali's and others that Islam legitimizes the practice of being married off. A 33 years old female and first generation respondent gave us the following account of an interaction with colleagues:

Being married off is a nice example. They [my colleagues - eds] ask me that a lot. Apparently, they have read something somewhere again and then they ask me 'Are you going to be married off as well?' Well, what do you think yourself? I have to admit that I don't take these kind of questions seriously; instead I make a joke 'Yes, I will be married off. I think it's nice, because I like surprises'.

Dominant discourse in media and politics connects this issue of being married off with wearing a headscarf. Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Geert Wilders portray the headscarf as a symbol of female oppression by Islam and Muslim men. Our respondents feel the need to counter such notions. In the words of a female, age 38, first generation respondent, wearing a headscarf:

It's all voluntarily and no pressure of 'I'm a Muslim, so I must wear a headscarf', no not at all. If you wear a headscarf without an intrinsic motivation, then it isn't necessary, then you must not do it.

Our female respondents do not experience their headscarves as a problem in relation to Muslim men, but they do so in relation to majority colleagues. A female, age 55, first generation respondent, not wearing a headscarf, told us that she feels insecure about what her colleagues might think about her when she would wear one: 'I don't know... do they accept that or not?.. You know what the problem is?... It's how people look at you.' Majority colleagues tend to associate wearing a headscarf with being submissive, incapable and not very clever. A 44 years old female and first generation respondent told us that she had to leave her former job as a cleaning lady due to negative remarks by her colleagues about her headscarf. She said about her current job as a doctor's assistant:

After working as a cleaning lady, you must start all over again, among other people. You have to proof yourself, because they [her colleagues - eds] see a person with a headscarf and think: she's not capable, she knows nothing. Unfortunately, there are a lot of people who think that way.

Such reactions of her colleagues are closely related to the dominant discourse in media and politics as voiced by Geert Wilders. A female, 33 years old and first generation respondent told us:

You get very strange reactions: 'Why? In God's name why do you start to wear that thing? You have the freedom, the choice to walk around without a headscarf and still you choose to wear one. Why?' You get these reactions quite often. But then I think that they don't understand what it's all about. They consider the headscarf as sign of oppression... but it's not like that. It has a whole different meaning, it is about yourself, your body and being female and how you want to deal with that. That's why I am really relieved to work at an Islamic school, because I do not have to constantly defend myself for wearing a headscarf.

Her majority colleagues calling a headscarf a 'thing' connects to Geert Wilders calling 'it' despicably a 'skull rag', as we discussed above. Moreover, Geert Wilders and others paint the opposition between Dutch society where people would have 'freedom' to walk around and do what they like and the Muslim community where women are forced to wear a headscarf. Welcome to society and take off this 'thing', is the message these reactions from colleagues transmit. However, our respondent's experience is very different. She experiences freedom in her work in an Islamic school because there she is free from the need to 'defend' herself against such reactions.

Such questions about the headscarf are made by majority colleagues recurrently, as a 31years old and second generation female respondent told us: 'I expect that question every time. Every time when there is a new colleague, I expect that question.' If these majority colleagues do not have constructed their assumptions of oppression out of their own experiences with Muslim women, the only source to retrieve such negative images is mediated discourse.

To be sure, our respondents do appreciate questions of majority colleagues regarding aspects of their faith, especially about those religious aspects that are less highlighted or stigmatized by dominant discourse, such as praying five times a day and the Ramadan. Several of our respondents do like informative questions on these subjects by their colleagues or even jokes like "Are not you lying under the table yet?" at Ramadan days. However, such questions turn out to be less well-intended when the same questions are posed again year after year by the same colleagues. Then they suspect a more general negative attitude towards their faith. One of our respondents said she explicitly takes holidays during Ramadan to avoid such questions.

*'... but you are different'*

Daily contact and interaction between majority colleagues and our respondents may constitute an effective source to counter the negative impact of voices like Geert Wilders. Our respondents may get the opportunity to proof that these voices are wrong and manage to develop relations with their majority colleagues that sometimes are cooperative and satisfying. It seems daily interactions that are not disrupted by incidents triggered by the

dominant discourse in media and politics are not experienced as negative by our respondents. That explains why several of our respondents have managed to create a situation in which majority colleagues frequently tell them that they are exceptions, that these negative images in media and politics do not stick to them personally.

However, such remarks are particularly frustrating to them. In the words of a 35 years old female and first generation respondent:

It's always like this, people hear things coming from the media about Islam and they always say 'but it's not about you, because you're different' – so it's always about someone else. And that frustrates the most. They're addressing you, but 'it's not about you'. Oh, terrible! And that's so frustrating! You have just told something about a group of people, of which you are being part of, and at the same time you're stating 'I don't talk about you'.

Respondents told us that they are frustrated here for have basically two reasons. First, by identifying them as the exceptions, majority colleagues simultaneously confirm the categorical and stigmatizing opposition between Muslims or Moroccans and majority people. They are the exceptions that confirm the rule that as such is unacceptable. This example shows how difficult it is for majority colleagues to escape from thinking in such categorical oppositions. Second, as indicated above, our respondents do feel inspired by Islam and do feel attached to their Moroccan background in their own particular ways, so putting them aside as exceptions denies this attachment to Islam and their Moroccan backgrounds and entails non-recognition.

### *'I really saw Wilders there! It was Wilders talking!'*

Our respondents not only account of incidents in which the claims of the migrant-hostile discourse in media and politics are reproduced, they sometimes make explicit references to voices like Geert Wilders. In the words of a 41 years old, female and first generation respondent, who works in a hospital:

I have given a lecture once [to my colleagues - eds]. Well, I was really taken by surprise. While giving my lecture together with an Imam about culture and cultural experience; then suddenly it was us versus them: 'Yes, but you... you have to... it's Holland, you have to adapt.' I truly heard politics in my lecture room... When this happened I really fell to [pieces]. But this was not the objective of the lesson: it should be about the patient... But when referring to a mother who doesn't speak Dutch [a majority colleague replied - eds] 'Goddamn, she's been living here for 20 years and still doesn't understand the language. She must go back to school!' That was the moment for them, two autochthonous people... and they could express whatever they want... I had to proceed with my lesson. I said: 'We are not here to educate, we're here to help the patient'. That hurts... Was really politics, eh?! It was just Wilders! I really saw Wilders there! It was Wilders talking! Truly politics: 'Adapt, integrate... Back to your own country! They must be sent back; that aggression should be removed from this country'. But it was not the intention of the lesson, so I said 'We are discussing patients; let's get back to the purpose of the lesson.' So I wanted to proceed with the lesson, but I noticed that people were again changing the subject and before I knew it there was another attack: 'Yes, but.. they have to adapt themselves! I don't need to know their experience.' But I tell them: 'You have to treat the patient with respect and thereby respect his norms and values. Customized care.'

First, this quote expressed the impact of the assimilation demands the dominant discourse requires from migrants, as specified in the above mentioned civic integration policies. These

assimilation demands require migrants to adapt and learn the Dutch language. The supposed need to integrate, adapt and adopt Dutch norms and values as well as the idea of incompatible cultural values between migrants and the Dutch majority are recurrent themes our respondents hear in the statements of their majority colleagues. It shows that the policy objectives and the prominent voices discussed above are experienced at work in a very much intertwined way. Second, it clearly illustrates that the migrant-hostile attacks our respondents have to face are explicitly instigated by Geert Wilders and other spokespersons of the dominant discourse. It shows how disruptive they work out for collegial interactions at work.

Geert Wilders and his PVV party also directly intervene in collegial relations in elections times, like the Parliamentary elections of June 9, 2010. A 35 years old female and second generation respondent told us:

Somebody at work – I still don't know who it is – has pronounced to think about the Islam as just an appalling religion, a ridiculous religion and consequently it's a definite reason for voting PVV. You know, that should be possible, but... it does say something about how they think about my religion. Maybe even my descent. If you're voting PVV, then it's clear, the bottom-line is mainly 'We must stop Islam; it cannot grow any further.'... When someone proclaims to have voted PVV and is standing completely behind the choice of doing so; this affects me more directly.

Our respondents clearly experienced colleagues' votes for the PVV as an act of aggression towards them. As a male 37 years old and first generation respondent said: 'When you're voting PVV, you're voting against me'.

### *Coping strategies*

Our respondents suffer from the consequences of being confronted with interactions with colleagues triggered by the dominant migrant-hostile discourse in media and politics. Some react to these experiences by taking a distance, not feeling called upon, like a female, 32 years old first generation respondent told us: 'I don't have to feel responsible... I just don't want to be associated with this'. Distancing can also take the form of making jokes that ridicule the remarks by majority colleagues like the answer of the 33 years old respondent quoted above after being asked whether she also will be married off. She said: 'Yes, I will be married off. I think it's nice, because I like surprises'.

However, most of our respondents went through a phase in which they tried to answer questions and to explain how they felt about issues raised by their colleagues inspired by Geert Wilders and others. A 38 years old, first generation and female respondent told us:

When I was working as a doctor's assistant, I hadn't entered the work floor or I was overwhelmed by every single news fact and message from the media regarding Muslims. And then you have to defend yourself. It was expected that you would defend the perpetrator. In the beginning I tried to explain everything, but it wouldn't stop! And the questions became more and more extreme and at some point I was defending Moroccans in the media every single morning. I thought by myself, this isn't normal. From now on, I'll stop doing so. I noticed that it frustrated me. Why do you come to me? Why do you address me? Do you see me like that? You get that idea from your colleagues 'Oh you see me like that, because I'm Moroccan I will do or think alike?' My colleagues asked me 'Why are Moroccans doing that? Why do they place a bomb somewhere? Why are Muslims doing that?' I don't know... I can't explain that. And they thought that was



very weird ‘But you are Muslim too, aren’t you?’ And then I thought, well that’s where you’re wrong. I am not responsible for someone else’s actions.

Some respondents manage to create a state of exception for themselves, as discussed above, but most of them feel that their explanations have little effect on their colleagues. In the words of a 33 years old, first generation and female respondent:

I don’t mind that they are asking these questions. What I do mind is that the moment they are asking the question, they already have an answer in mind. They do ask you the question, but their intention is more or less to see how you think about it, if you’re on the same page, but the answer they already have... I don’t like the reactions if people laugh a bit or when my answer is not taken seriously. That’s regrettable.

Apparently, talking back does not make much sense if majority colleagues already have their ready-made answers of the questions they pose to our respondents. So, not only do media and politicians trigger these questions by majority colleagues, the media and politicians have also provided them the migrant-hostile answers to these questions. Our respondents find it difficult to make their colleagues change their minds on these explanations. They lose this battle against dominant discourse. They sometimes adopt the same categorizing and stigmatizing framework by accusing the Dutch majority people for negative behaviour like incest and violence.

Sometimes, however, they do manage to break through the stigmatizing categories. For example, one of our respondents who works at a school was confronted with the director who said that they have a problem because the feast of St. Nicholas and the *id-al-fitr* feast of breaking the fast were on the same day. She was able to convince the director, though, that there was no need to think in terms of culturally incompatible categories. She first organized St. Nicholas day at school with the parents after which the Muslim parents took their children home for the *id-al-fitr* feast.

However, such successes are scarce. At a certain point, our respondents stopped providing answers to remarks and questions of majority colleagues and stopped talking back. In the words of a 40 years old female and first generation respondent:

You feel that you are continuously fighting; fighting against prejudice and erroneous images fuelled by the media and that makes me angry. I have the feeling that we – I say ‘we’, that’s very wrong of me, I know – we Moroccans are held responsible for the whole community. I feel like I’m defending a whole population and that absorbs so much of my energy. The last 10 years I have had the tendency to defend into extremes. I tended to convince people that the allochthonous people – to say it like that – weren’t that bad. But at a certain point, I stopped doing that. I did not get anywhere... it was counter productive... Discussions could last for hours resulting in a headache. Moreover, I’m quite an emotional person, so I was likely to take things personally. But when I noticed it was counterproductive, I decided to stop convincing people.

She told us that she subsequently started to fence herself off, she even ended her cable-TV subscription at home and put her television in the basement. At work, her attitude changed:

At a certain point, I was just ignoring the outside world. When colleagues were discussing the incidents, I just ignored them. I was just doing my job and pretend that I did not hear them. It is so extremely cruel.

Many of our respondents used words that suggest denial and suppression of media events and political issues as well as of the questions and remarks by colleagues triggered by these events and issues. The words they use include ‘at some point you forget’, ‘I won’t let me be influenced that far’ and ‘you sort of become immune, that you just think, well, never mind. I just go on’. There is a pattern in the accounts of most of our respondents: first they were tempted to talk back but after a while they stopped doing so out of frustration and resigned into suppression, avoidance and denial.

### *Consequences*

It may be related to such processes of denial and suppression, but not all our respondents accounted of serious consequences as a result of these interactions between colleagues triggered by dominant discourse in media and politics. However, most of them do use strong emotional terms like being hurt, anger, fear, frustration and pain to describe the imprints these interactions leave on them.

As indicated above, non-recognition of their ways of dealing with their Moroccan and Islamic backgrounds constitutes a first *leitmotiv* in their experiences of these interactions. They feel that their identity and even humanity is denied by such interactions. As a 44 years old, first generation female respondent said: ‘We don’t count, however hard you do your best, we don’t count’. A female, 33 years old and first generation respondent told us that she feels majority colleagues’ reactions deny her human nature: ‘Although I’m wearing a headscarf, I’m really just like you. Just very normal in the inside... People tend to forget that.’ Another respondent used terms like degradation and ‘He despises me’ to depict a colleague’s attitude when discussing relevant issues in the media.

A second common thread in our respondent’s experiences of the consequences of interactions triggered by dominant discourse is that they feel that their right to be and belong in The Netherlands is questioned. A 32 years old female and first generation respondent, after a colleague had told that he had voted for the PVV reacted:

‘It affected me in the sense that I felt I’m not wanted. Because of that I withdrew myself even more; I didn’t belong here’.

A 44 years old, first generation female respondent said that her son had asked her: ‘If Wilders wins [the elections – eds], do we have to go back to Morocco? But I was born here’. Similar fear for expulsion to Morocco is expressed by several of our respondents. A first generation female and 41 years old respondent accounted of a majority colleague who had said to her that Moroccans need to assimilate and if they don’t ‘Just send them back that lot’. Consequently, they feel they continuously have to stress that they are Dutch. A 37 years old first generation male said: ‘I come from The Netherlands, I am really Dutch and I feel like a real Dutchman’. A 31 years old male and second generation respondent pointing out that after all these years – many Moroccans were invited to come and work as ‘guest workers’ in The Netherlands in the 1960s and 1970s - they still are considered as guests, not as people who have a right to stay.

We did not explicitly invite our respondents to discuss the career consequences they experienced as a consequence of these interactions between colleagues triggered by dominant

discourse, but their accounts do contain several clues of exclusion. Several respondents told us that they left their previous job because of such interactions. One respondent said that she would not apply for a management job because she feared that she would not be accepted as a manager because of her headscarf and the negative connotations it carries due to dominant discourse. Moreover, one respondent who works in a first aid station in a hospital told about majority colleagues who, if they were in charge, would no longer treat patients with a Moroccan or Muslim background. These clues of explicit exclusion constitute a third thread in our respondents' accounts of the consequences of the dominant discourse in media and politics for interactions at work.

The fourth *leitmotiv* constitutes the use of an explicit war-like language of violence and fear. They feel they need to 'defend' themselves in such interactions and to 'fight' against dominant views behind the questions and remarks of their colleagues or to 'hide' from such questions and remarks. Above we already came across a statement by a majority colleague quoted by one of our respondents in the framework of media coverage of Moroccans and Islam: 'I don't mind if they're shot', referring to those 'cunt-Moroccans'. 'Hate' is another word used by several respondents to qualify interactions between colleagues triggered by Geert Wilders' performance and statements. A 35 years old female and second generation respondent told us how she felt when she heard that colleagues had voted for the PVV:

So, what I believe, my parents, and my descent, that's something you want to see being exterminated. And how that's being accomplished doesn't matter, as long as it's put to a stop. And that's hard.

Note that she used the word 'exterminated' (*uitroeien*, in Dutch; *ausradieren* in German), directly referring to the Holocaust. Several respondents said they actually do expect having to face physical violence, having to fear being attacked in the train when wearing a headscarf and feel watched all the time when wearing their headscarf in public. Some avoid being seen publicly mingling with Moroccans.

## **Discussion and conclusions**

To qualify as a dominant discourse, the current migrant-hostile discourse must first of all express a degree of internal integratedness and internal consistency between its various elements. In our discussion of the discourse in Dutch media and politics we have shown how a number of issues – the assumed need to close the borders as much as possible for migrants, the culturalization of migrants as bearers of deviant norms and values, the linking of those norms and values to all sorts of negative qualifications related for example to crime and terrorism as well as the forced assimilation strategies – have become both the recurrent and dominant themes in the voices of this discourse and the guiding principles of government policies. The discussed voices and government policies coincide in these issues. For example, the main topics raised by Geert Wilders – immigration stop, nationalism and Dutch culture promotion, security concern and anti-internationalism (De Landtsheer et al., 2011) have already become the priorities of Dutch policies regarding migrants and migration over the last decade. Moreover, our data show that in the statements of majority colleagues towards our respondents policy key words like 'integration', 'adaptation', 'learn the language' and 'adopt

Dutch norms and values' are intertwined with claims by voices like Geert Wilders that Islam promotes terrorism, crime and female oppression.

To qualify as a being dominant, a discourse also needs to become constitutive of the everyday experiences and relations of individuals and the local practices that govern their lives (Prins & Slijper, 2002: 316-317). Well, our data show that most of our respondents do not experience frustrating interactions between colleagues triggered by this discourse in media and politics on a daily basis. In line with De Vries & Pettigrew (1998) and Siebers (2010), we found that our respondents are not dissatisfied with overall relations between colleagues. However, both studies also indicate that such overall satisfaction can coincide with experiences of serious discrimination. Siebers and Poels (2010) had similar findings. It seems that minority members try not to let such negative interactions determine their overall relations with colleagues. This is supported by Ruggiero and Taylor's (1997) experimental findings that people tend to suppress experiences of discrimination to maintain their perceived self-esteem and self-control. The coping mechanisms of our respondents confirm that tendency. Thus, it may be the case that the occurrence of frustrating interactions between colleagues due to the discourse in Dutch media and politics is actually more frequent and has a stronger impact than accounted of by our respondents.

In any case, the moment this hostile discourse in Dutch media and politics does become salient in interactions between majority colleagues and our respondents it produces clear hostility expressed in questions, remarks, jokes and statements that refer to relevant events in media and politics. They render the Moroccan and Muslim identity of our respondents salient, thus the first indicator of ethnic boundaries applies to our data (cf. Wimmer, 2008a and 2009). Salient but not recognized, though. These questions, remarks, jokes and statements call upon them as Muslims and Moroccans, but in such a way that their own understanding about themselves and their identities is not recognized. They feel strong contradictions between their subscribed and ascribed identities.

These questions, remarks, jokes and statements activate identities ascribed in discourse in media and politics with oppositional ethnic classification schemes of Muslims and/or Moroccans versus Dutch majority people. First, these classifications put individuals in opposing ethnic group categories, 'talking in terms of us versus them' in the words of one of the quotes presented above. Second, these categorizations express essentialization and stigmatization as they reduce the characteristics of these categories to a limited set of solid essentials. In the words of a 39 years old, male and second generation respondent: 'So they take out the rotten fish and introduce them as representatives of Islam. That's regrettable.' Third, these classifications are stigmatizing since these essentials are clearly and unmistakably negative – 'rotten fish' – and are subsequently applied to each and every individual that these classifications position within this ethnic category.

The questions, remarks, jokes and statements of majority colleagues our respondents are confronted with reflect these basic classification schemes embedded in the dominant discourse as expressed by voices like Geert Wilders and others as well as basic policy objectives. These majority colleagues pose questions and make jokes and remarks that are triggered by this categorizing, essentializing and discriminating thinking prompted by these voices and objectives. Our respondents feel they have to fight an uphill battle to counter these voices and change their colleagues' minds. The emotional consequences of their experiences

are severe and lead to events in which relations between colleagues are seriously disrupted, as our respondents made clear. The mental and social aspects of what Wimmer (2008a and 2009) calls ethnic closure certainly apply.

In other words, the concept of ethnic boundary construction (salient ethnic identity plus ethnic closure) is appropriate to conceptualize the experiences of our respondents. Media and politics provide both the means and the motives for such erection of ethnic boundaries between our respondents and their majority colleagues: they transmit reports about events and statements to our respondents and their colleagues at work that trigger discussions, questions and remarks between them and the discourse provides the discursive ways in which they interpret these events and statements and talk about them as well.

Siebers (2010) shows that the impact of such interactions in work settings triggered by the dominant discourse in media and politics has negative consequences for the career development of employees with a migration background. Ghorashi and Van Tilburg (2006) point to the same conclusion. Both Dutch studies focused on employees with a migration background in general, not just those who are connected to a Moroccan or Muslim background. It does not seem farfetched to suggest that such ethnic closure effects will be particularly apparent in the longer term career development of those who are the prime object of migrant-hostility in the dominant discourse, i.e. those whom this discourse connects to a Moroccan or Muslim background. On the other hand, Siebers (2010) found that the impact of events triggered by dominant discourse on career development is not limited to employees with a Moroccan and/or Muslim background only. Apparently, all employees who are defined by official categories as non-Western have to suffer the consequences of this discourse.

The appropriateness of the concept of ethnic boundary construction to the experiences of our respondents raises questions about the relevance of other concepts like discrimination and ethnic cleansing. Discrimination is certainly a relevant concept here since our respondents feel excluded in both informal interactions and in getting access to career opportunities due to their ethnic and religious backgrounds. Apparently, these backgrounds do make a difference in getting access to these resources, which is forbidden by law in many modern countries like The Netherlands.

Ethnic cleansing is about the expulsion of an 'undesirable' population from a territory due to religious or ethnic discrimination, political, strategic or ideological considerations, or a combination of these (Bell-Fialkoff, 1993; Jenne, 2011). It can vary from violent genocide, like the Srebreniça massacre in 1995, to non-violent removal of ethnic others. Ethnic boundary constructions are a prerequisite for such ethnic cleansing; ethnic cleansing occurs on the basis of distinctions between people into ethnic in-group and out-groups legitimized by solid negative essentials attributed to ethnic out-groups. Our respondents do not experience acts of ethnic cleansing in the sense of actually being expelled to Morocco, like what happens to many asylum seekers who come to The Netherlands and subsequently are sent back.

Nevertheless, in their experiences the groundwork for such expulsion has been laid by the impact of dominant discourse in Dutch media and politics in the shape of ethnic boundaries. Moreover, we found that at least some of them are actually expelled from their jobs or feel intimidated not to take career steps, they do feel that their right to stay in The Netherlands is questioned and fear to be expelled to Morocco in the future as a consequence of, for example, Geert Wilders' policy influence. We also found that they feel their identity and even humanity

is denied in some cases and that they do frame their experiences in war-like terms, even to the point of actually fearing physical violence towards them in public. They certainly feel ‘undesired’ by the dominant discourse in media and politics that is being transferred to them by their majority colleagues. Apparently, at least some of the preconditions for ethnic cleansing are put in place in the experiences of our respondents at work.

The current study contributes to the existing literature by demonstrating that ethnic boundary constructions constitute mechanisms (Reskin 2000 and 2003) that connect the impact of the migrant-hostile discourse in media and politics on interactions between colleagues at work on the one hand and aggravating ethnic inequality in career advancements on the other hand (cf. Ghorashi and Van Tilburg, 2006; Siebers, 2010).

## Notes

- 1 In the literature, explanations of closure towards migrants in the labour market tend to use the concept of racioethnicity for minorities in general, including both ethnic and racial groups, both immigrants and groups with a long-standing presence such as African-Americans (e.g. Roberson & Block, 2001). However, several studies suggest that contemporary exclusion processes migrants face in Europe are better understood as cultural fundamentalism (Stolcke, 1995) and culturism (Schinkel, 2007; 2010) than as racism. Therefore, we prefer the more specific term ethnicity that refers more specifically to such cultural notions and processes instead of the more general term racioethnicity.
- 2 This discussion of the current dominant discourse on migrants and migration in Dutch media and politics is based on studying political statements and governmental acts and policy papers, reports of parliamentary debates, films like *Submission* and *Fitna* and media texts such as television interviews, public speeches, newspaper articles and websites over the last ten years and supported by a number of studies, including Entzinger (2003), Ghorashi (2006, 2010), Penninx (2006), Prins (1997, 2002, 2010), Rath (1991), Schinkel (2007), Schinkel and Van Houdt (2010), Snel and Stock (2008), Shadid (2006), Siebers (2010), Sniderman, Hagendoorn & Prior (2003), Tilly (2008), Van der Valk (2003), Van Dijk (1993) and Vasta (2007).
- 3 These policies have been condemned for systematic violations of e.g. human rights by agencies like Human Rights Watch (*Trouw* April 9, 2003), The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (*de Volkskrant* October 28, 2006) and the European Court of Human Rights (*de Volkskrant* January 12, 2007). Already in 2006, the national Ombudsman declared that the government has refused to carry out sentences of the judiciary in more than a thousand cases (*Zembla* May 21, 2006).
- 4 The civic integration programmes replaced government policies to counter ethnic inequality in the labour market. All such policies, like the soft Affirmative Action legislation introduced in the 1990s, were abolished in the early 2000s.
- 5 A claim not supported by Nyfer (2010), the study commissioned by Geert Wilders’ PVV party to calculate the costs of immigration.

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