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# The Fine Art of Boundary Sensitivity. Successful Second Generation Turks and Moroccans in the Netherlands

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## Abstract

This article investigates in what ways the highly educated second generation of Turkish and Moroccan descent in the Netherlands deal with the increasingly impermeable, bright boundaries in various fields in Dutch society, including the labour market. We find evidence that these individuals employ a strategy of sameness and difference throughout their careers to deal with societal and work-related boundaries. Their emphasis on professional sameness opens up ways to relate to and instil confidence among colleagues with a background of native parentage. They avoid giving up parts of their identity through assimilation by keeping their differences in place where it matters most to them. This juggling of sameness and difference seems to be an individual and situational balancing act, based on an awareness that boundaries exist, and a sensitivity towards dealing with them.

**Keywords:** second generation, professionals, labour market, social boundaries, sameness/difference

## Introduction

The topic of migration in the Netherlands has received ample attention in Dutch public discourse for quite some time now. This attention has mainly been directed towards negative aspects related to migration and migrants, and specifically towards migrants with an Islamic background.

Stemming from migrants is the so-called “second generation”. This group consists of children of migrants who are themselves born in the country of settlement: in our case, the Netherlands. This second generation, and again the Islamic group in particular, also receives quite some negative attention in public discourses (cf. Slootman and Duyvendak forthcoming; Entzinger 2009: 8; Ketner 2009: 81; Vasta 2007: 714-715).

Because of these predominantly negative discourses, and a concurrent call for ethnic minority adjustment to ethnic majority norms

as the solution to problems related with ethnic minorities in society (Vasta 2007: 714; Ghorashi 2006: 16), ethnic boundaries in various fields in Dutch society seem to have become more distinct and impermeable over the years, or as Alba (2005: 20) calls it “brighter”, allowing no ambiguity about membership, and drawing a straight demarcation between those within the boundary lines and those outside (cf. Vasta 2007: 736). These increasingly bright boundaries can easily act to exclude (Alba 2005: 24).

In contrast to the dominant discourses about problems, as well as the actual problems that exist among the second generation, a sizeable number of the Moroccan and Turkish second generation, both male and female, is doing well within education (cf. Crul and Heering 2008; Crul, Pasztor and Lelie 2008: 25; SCP 2011) and the labour market (Entzinger 2009: 8; SCP 2011).

In this article we will primarily focus on the central question *what strategies highly educated second generation people of Turkish and Moroccan descent apply to gain entrance to and succeed in the Dutch labour market*. This focus on the labour market, and particularly on the different phases of the successful second generation's labour market careers, has two main reasons. Firstly, most of the research on successful second generation youth has been done in the field of education. Research on the labour market position of successful immigrant youth is still scarce. Secondly, we expect bright boundaries to be especially in place in the labour market, as the parameters for being qualified are fuzzier there than, for example, in the education system with its rather clear points of measurement. We can expect discrimination in hiring people with an immigrant background, a lack of possibilities of being promoted on the job and problems with acceptance of people with an immigrant background in leadership positions.

We will make use of the Dutch TIES<sup>1</sup> survey data from 2008 on the second generation in Europe and interviews of the Pathways to Success Project<sup>2</sup> from 2012 on successful second generation people in Amsterdam and Rotterdam. The two research projects show that the overwhelming majority of the highly educated second generation has a job and most of them have a job in line with their education. This result in itself is already interesting, since research has shown that the second generation is not always able to fulfil their educational promise with corresponding jobs (Alba 2005: 41) and that a so-called "glass ceiling" is in place for the second generation in the Netherlands (Entzinger 2009: 19).

<sup>1</sup> TIES stands for The Integration of the European Second generation, a large scale international study on the second generation in Europe, conducted in eight countries encompassing 15 European cities during 2007 and 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Pathways to Success Project entails in-depth interviews executed in 2011 and 2012 among successful second generation Turks and Moroccans in the two largest cities in the Netherlands: Amsterdam and Rotterdam.

We will continue this article with a theoretical discussion, followed by the methodology and an analysis of the interviews and how our findings relate to the theoretical outlines. We will end with a conclusion based on our central research question.

## **Theoretical Framework of our Study**

### *Ethnic Boundaries*

Boundaries in societies between different groups of people have long been in place, such as the boundaries between those who are affluent and those who are not, between men and women, and between people with different religious beliefs, to name just a few. Cultural and ethnic differences have often been the subject of research, among other things, to understand identity processes and processes of in- and exclusion.

The focus on how ethnic boundaries are drawn came under discussion when Barth claimed in 1969 that boundaries are not merely a given; they are social structures, making the boundaries themselves of more importance than the 'cultural stuff' (Barth 1994: 12). Barth explains how boundaries are drawn through an analysis of the power processes involved. Barth modified this viewpoint in his later work (see, for instance, Barth 1994), stating that both the boundaries and the 'cultural stuff' are important in understanding ethnic identity processes. He points out that central and culturally valued institutions and activities in an ethnic group may be deeply involved in their boundary maintenance by setting internal processes of convergence into motion (Barth 1994: 18). Boundary processes can thus not be properly understood by solely looking at how boundaries are created; one also has to pay attention to the people and their habits – that are partially shaped by cultural content of experiences – inside the boundaries.

### *Bright and Blurred Boundaries*

Boundaries seen as partially social constructions can help to understand why some boundaries seem more fixed and difficult to cross than others. This is because boundaries are, at least to

a certain extent, made to delimit people who either belong to a given group, or who don't. In other words, the processes of power, which result in in- and exclusion, essentially determine the rigidity of boundaries. This rigidity of boundaries plays a central part in a new theory about the importance of boundary crossing or blurring (Alba 2005).

Alba speaks of 'bright boundaries' when referring to boundaries that leave little to no room for questions about belonging, and which draw a sharp distinction between individuals being within the boundary lines and those who are not (ibid: 24). These bright boundaries come about through institutionalized interrelations between 'normative patterns' (ibid: 26) that indicate who belongs and who does not. Bright boundaries require people who are outside of the boundary to fully assimilate to the cultural norms and habits that are predominant within the boundary lines. Bright boundaries thus call for 'boundary crossing', which involves individuals adopting the norms and values of the "other side" of the boundary, enabling them to become included in the group of which they want to be a part. This boundary crossing changes nothing about the nature of the boundary. It demands a personal change of the individual wanting to gain entrance to the group (ibid: 23; Wimmer 2008: 1039).

Crossing a bright boundary can be a challenge for individuals. Not only does it mean that boundary-crossers have to leave behind what is familiar to them in terms of cultural habits and values, but it also imposes the threat that they might become an outsider of their former group, while maybe always remaining some sort of outsider within the new group (Alba 2005).

Boundary crossing offers a way to deal with bright boundaries; yet, it is not the only way in which individuals can try to establish access to the dominant group. Alba (2005: 23) also mentions 'boundary shifting' and 'boundary blurring'. Boundary shifting touches on boundaries changing in such a way that those who were once outsiders become insiders and it '...requires large-scale preliminary changes that bring about a con-

vergence between ethnic groups' (ibid: 23). An example of boundary shifting is the inclusion of Judaism within the dominant Western religions, both in Europe and in the United States. Such a large-scale change does not happen overnight and, according to Alba, anything similar is not likely to happen anytime soon for new migrant groups, if they are to happen at all in a time of continuous migration (ibid: 23-24). Furthermore, boundary shifting seems to imply an absence or, at least, a sharp decline of the brightness of boundaries. One of the ways through which this decline can come about is by means of boundary blurring.

Unlike boundary shifting, boundary blurring does not involve a large-scale societal change in order for so-called "outsiders" to belong, although it may set in motion processes of boundary changes. Neither does it call for so-called "outsiders" to give up on their ethnic identity in order to belong, as is the case with boundary crossing. Blurring boundaries '...implies that the social profile of a boundary become[s] less distinct (...), and individuals' location with respect to the boundary may appear indeterminate' (ibid: 23). Blurred boundaries allow for belonging in combination with multiple ethnic identities without asking for a 'zero-sum choice between identities' (Slootman and Duyvendak forthcoming), as is the case with bright boundaries. Blurring boundaries thus entails diminishing the brightness of a boundary, resulting in less clear demarcations between those who belong inside the boundary, and those who do not. This gives way to more permeable group boundaries, which, moreover, allow for greater chances of the "outsiders" identifying with the new group (Ersanilli and Saharso 2011: 912).

Boundary blurring thus seems to be an alternative to boundary crossing (at least for those people wanting to gain entrance to the dominant group) and, in many cases, is a more feasible option than boundary shifting. Yet, how does the social profile of a boundary actually become less distinct? In other words, what is needed for social boundaries to become less bright and

more blurred? According to Alba, a possible explanation for blurring a boundary is when boundaries are considered 'porous and allow for the incorporation of cultural elements brought by immigrant groups' (ibid: 25). And while this explanation can be considered valid for the United States and its century-old history of large migration flows, how can boundary blurring be achieved and explained for societies such as the Netherlands, where the extensive labour migration after the Second World War demarcated the beginning of a modern migration society? The Netherlands has become increasingly intolerant towards migrants and ethnic minorities (Vasta 2007), claiming an 'imagined national community' (ibid: 736) in which the Dutch of native parentage 'own the place (...) because they were there first' (Slootman and Duyvendak forthcoming). They ask for a zero-sum decision between ethnic identities (ibid; Ghorashi 2010) and make it 'near impossible for ethnic minorities to integrate into and become part of a Dutch national identity' (Vasta 2007: 736).

#### *Boundary Drawing in the Netherlands*

In the Netherlands, as well as in other North-Western European countries, discourses and policies related to migrants (and the second generation) have changed over the years, becoming more negative and leading to more exclusion in various fields of society (Ghorashi 2006; Vasta 2007; Entzinger 2009; Ersanilli and Saharso 2011; Slootman and Duyvendak forthcoming). This exclusion is manifested, among other things, through discrimination of immigrants and their children in the labour market (cf. Foner and Alba 2008; Siebers 2009a).

This clear social distinction between immigrants and their children, on the one hand, and people of native parentage on the other (Alba 2005: 20), seems to affect Muslims the most (cf. Ghorashi and Sabelis 2013). This is partly because Northern European societies generally view religion as a problematic factor when it comes to immigrant adjustment and belonging. Moreover, Islam as such receives the most atten-

tion (Crul and Mollenkopf 2012; Foner and Alba 2008: 368). These exclusionary (as opposed to integrated) practices play a crucial part in facilitating or hampering the second generation's feelings of belonging and participating in society (Crul and Schneider 2010).

#### *Dealing with Bright Boundaries*

Recent research in the Netherlands by De Jong (2012) among highly educated second generation youth of Moroccan descent shows how they try to find ways around the bright boundaries. She found that the students show an awareness about the multiplicity of their (ethnic) identity, and, moreover, an awareness about which parts of their identity to highlight or not in particular situations and contexts. The students in De Jong's study see attending higher education as a means to become part of mainstream society and as a way to escape the mostly negative discourses related to their ethnic group. At the same time, they do not want to denounce parts of their ethnic and religious identity. They do, however, usually keep these parts private, mindful that expressing precisely these features might hinder them in their attempt to belong. They emphasize as such their "sameness" based on being fellow students, but they do not solely adapt to Dutch norms, values and practices, as they simultaneously try to maintain the values of the ethnic (and religious) group to which they belong through their parents' background. By staying true to the values of their ethnic group, they stay loyal to their parents, gaining trust and freedom from them that is needed for their participation in higher education.

The students in De Jong's study thus try to belong to the majority culture by choosing to keep their ethnic and religious identity intact but private. They do not openly portray their differences compared to the majority group in their dealings with the people of native Dutch parentage because they realize that their religious and ethnic identity might frustrate their attempt to be seen as the same, thus hindering their attempt to belong to the majority group.

These findings are in line with research done by Siebers (2009a) in a study on employees of the Dutch national tax administration. He found that first generation ethnic minority employees actively employed the strategy of wanting to be seen as a 'good colleague', stressing, as did the second generation in De Jong's study, their sameness in relation to their native Dutch colleagues. These migrant employees are aware that showing their difference, whether explicitly through particular clothing such as a head scarf, or more implicitly through respecting religious customs while in the work environment, such as abstinence of alcohol during company parties, can compromise the sameness relationship with their native colleagues. This awareness of the risks involved in showing "difference" is reflected in the idea that sameness – instead of equality – is the organizational norm (Ghorashi and Sabelis 2013; Holvino and Kamp 2009; Van den Broek 2009; Puwar 2004), and therefore 'the other' is tolerated as long as the sameness is not challenged.

The studies conducted by De Jong and Siebers show the central importance of de-emphasizing ethnicity in various public spheres, while simultaneously keeping some aspects of ethnic and religious identity intact. In environments in which boundaries are particularly bright, at times they also emphasize similarities based on other social divisions (cf. Wimmer 2008: 1031) as an individual strategy. For the strategies to be 'successful', the individuals need to be flexible in operating in different contexts and be keenly aware of the boundaries and the sensitivities involved. The second generation seems particularly apt to do this. The second generation possesses the ability to 'sometimes negotiate among the different combinations of immigrant and native advantage and disadvantage to choose the best combination for themselves' (Kasinitz et al. 2008: 7). This capacity to negotiate between various aspects of one's identity permits people of the second generation to preserve important elements of their ethnic background, while at the same time enabling them to bring to the fore identity

aspects linking them to members of the ethnic majority group.

To explore more precisely the strategies the second generation employs, we will look in detail at different phases of their labour market careers. A first hurdle in their labour market careers is the transition from an educational institution to the labour market. The unemployment rates of immigrant youth for years have been higher than those of youngsters of native parentage background, which is even more so the case since the economic recession. Several explanations have been offered, most importantly discrimination and the lack of network contacts "in the right places" (Crul and Doornik 2003: 1057; Bovenkerk *et al.* in Vasta 2007: 723), as well as a general lack of places to do apprenticeships, leaving it up to young people themselves to enter the labour market (Crul and Vermeulen 2003: 981). It has also been argued that internalized negative views could be detrimental to their self-esteem as well as their job performance (Siebers 2009b: 63-64; Ghorashi and Ponzoni 2013).

Transition to the labour market could be different for the highly educated second generation than it is for immigrant youth overall. One such difference might be that while discrimination for the highly educated second generation is still in place, it's less permeating than it is for the second generation youth with lower levels of education (Bovenkerk *et al.* in Crul and Doornik 2003: 1057). Less discrimination for the highly educated is a premise that the second generation youngsters of Moroccan descent from De Jong's study (2012) seem to take as point of departure for their future prospects in Dutch society. Yet, the opposite could also be true, resulting in an emerging elite who is more easily frustrated by the lack of opportunities and discrimination against them (Entzinger 2009: 22).

### Methods

As mentioned above, the data in our article comes from two studies: mainly from the 'Pathways to Success Project' (PSP), and in part from the study 'The Integration of the European Sec-

ond Generation' (TIES). Starting off with the latter, the survey data for TIES were gathered in 2007 and 2008 in 15 cities in 8 European countries, among which are Amsterdam and Rotterdam in the Netherlands. In these two cities, 1000 people of second generation Turkish and Moroccan descent between the ages of 18 and 35 were interviewed about their lives (Crul, Schneider and Lelie 2012), as well as a comparison group consisting of people of native born parentage. The sample was drawn from administrative register data from the cities Amsterdam and Rotterdam, which included the respondents' birthplaces and the parents' birthplaces. The second generation sample drawn from the register data is representative for the two second generation groups in both cities (Groenewold and Lessard-Phillips 2012).

From the Dutch TIES data it came to the fore that a sizeable group of the second generation of Turkish and Moroccan descent was attaining higher education. This outcome made us realize that part of the second generation is becoming increasingly successful in the Dutch Education system and may also be successful in the Dutch labour market. As a consequence, we became interested in finding out about their pathways to success during and after finishing higher education, resulting in the Pathways to Success Project.

For the Pathways to Success Project (PSP) we thus focused on the second generation people of Turkish and Moroccan descent who obtained a university of applied science diploma (BA) or a university (MA) diploma. Additionally, we included people who did not have a BA or MA diploma but who work in a professional position managing at least five people. On top of this, we included people who earned more than €2000 net per month. This definition of "success" aimed at objectifying the notion of success.

The interviewees in the PSP study had to match with (at least) one of the three categories, but many fitted overwhelmingly in the first category (which overlapped with the two other categories): they were successful because they

had finished higher education and had found a job in accordance with their educational level.

The positions in which the interviewees work can be condensed into the following sectors: social sector (including legal services), education sector, health sector, business managers, financial sector and ICT sector. 114 semi-structured interviews among second generation people of Turkish and Moroccan descent between the ages of 28 and 38 were conducted in 2012 in the two largest cities in the Netherlands: Amsterdam and Rotterdam for the PSP. The 54 interviews in Amsterdam were done by employees of the statistics bureau of the Municipality of Amsterdam (O+S). The 60 interviews in Rotterdam were done by Master students in Sociology and supervised by a PhD candidate associated with the project. Unfortunately, due to a lack of funding, there is no native-born parentage comparison group in the PSP study.

We started off with contacting people who had participated in the TIES study, during which time they were attaining or had finished higher education. This group proved to be difficult to track down after five years; many of them had moved. Others had little time in their busy schedule to participate in the study. This caused us to make the decision to extend our search for interviewees through snowball sampling. We asked the former TIES respondents who did participate in the PSP if they could come up with other second generation people of Turkish or Moroccan descent who would meet our criteria of success, and if so, if we could contact those people. Furthermore, through the personal networks of our interviewers in Amsterdam and Rotterdam, some of whom were of second generation Turkish or Moroccan descent themselves, we also found respondents.

The PSP interviews took approximately one to one-and-a-half hour per interview. The questions were semi-structured, leaving room for further inquiries into certain topics, but also ensuring that all domains that we wanted information on were covered in the interviews. This was espe-

**Table 1: Pathways to Success division between cities and gender.**

	Rotterdam		Amsterdam		Total
	Women	Men	Women	Men	
Turkish 2 <sup>nd</sup> generation	17	14	13	13	57
Moroccan 2 <sup>nd</sup> generation	16	13	13	15	57
Total	33	27	26	28	114
Total	60		54		114

cially important since we worked with different interviewers.

All interviews were voice-recorded and literally transcribed by the interviewers. The transcriptions, along with the voice-recordings, were sent to us and we prepared the texts for qualitative analysis. For the analysis, we coded all interviews along the lines of our codebook using the program 'Kwalitan'. This coding enabled us to obtain an overview of the nature and frequency of responses by all 114 interviewees. Furthermore, it enabled us to analyse possible differences between men and women, second generation Turks and Moroccans, as well as people living in Amsterdam or Rotterdam.

We aimed at obtaining a sample as equally divided as possible, between the cities, as well as between men and women, leaving us with the distribution as seen in Table 1.

## Analysis

### *Transition from Education to the Labour Market*

The first point we looked at in our study was the transition point from school to work. This point has become less clearly defined since it is not uncommon nowadays that people return to education after entering the labour market. This is also true for second generation youth (Keskiner 2013). In addition, young people enter the labour market while engaged in fulltime study. They work student jobs or they need to do an internship before they enter the labour market full time.

These experiences often play an important role (as we will see) when entering the labour market. Nevertheless, the transition from full time school to work for highly educated professional youth appears to be problematic. The highly educated second generation has less difficulty accessing jobs than their lower educated peers, but they deal with more problems than young people of native background. The TIES survey conducted in 2008 shows that 23% of the Turkish and Moroccan second generation with a higher education diploma experiences unemployment for a short period after leaving fulltime education. This is only true for 16% of the respondents of native parentage in the TIES survey. The duration of unemployment is usually short (only a few months) but it is an indication that some TIES respondents did experience difficulties entering the labour market. We will show below the various ways in which the successful second generation of Turkish and Moroccan descent from the Pathways to Success study have dealt with these difficulties.

Moving from being a student to being a professional happens at various paces and the effort it demands seems to differ among the highly educated group from the Pathways to Success research Project. Some of the respondents state that the effort required was minimal. They report facing no boundaries at all when entering the labour market. They almost immediately got a job or already acquired a job before finishing full-time education. Most of them, however, entered the labour market before the financial crises hit,



**Table 2: Successful Turkish and Moroccan second generation: encountered discrimination while looking for a job.**

	Never	Almost never	Sometimes	Regularly	Often
Turkish 2 <sup>nd</sup> generation	53%	16%	18%	8%	4%
Moroccan 2 <sup>nd</sup> generation	40%	13%	18%	12%	8%

Source: TIES survey 2008

when there was a general lack of highly skilled people. Other interviewees indicated considerable difficulties, and they describe at length the process of sending in application letters and receiving rejections, one after the other, often-times not knowing what the precise reasons for the rejections were. For these interviewees the transition was strenuous. In this regard, some respondents also refer explicitly to the negative media images of immigrants:

This is where the downside of the negative media image kicks in. Of course there is an economic crisis as well, we have to be honest about that. But I have really had to struggle for half a year and react to every job opportunity in like 40 to 50 companies before I finally got a chance. In the end, I got a job at an international company. I think that is pretty characteristic. (XX - translation)

The respondents can only guess what the motivation is for not inviting them to an interview or for not hiring them. In the TIES study only a minority expresses that they were confronted with discrimination while looking for a job (see Table 2).

Some of the Pathways to Success people explain more in detail how difficult it is to point the finger at discrimination experiences. It often concerns small incidents and questions during the interview that seemed to be strange, akin to subtle discrimination which is less visible and is quite ambiguous for those experiencing it. It is often not recognized as discrimination (also see Van Laer and Janssens, 2011). If discrimination is mentioned at all, the overall tendency is that the

respondents tend to ignore it because they do not want to be seen as passive victims because of this (cf. Van den Broek 2009):

Look, discrimination will always be there. It is second nature to humans, so yes, you have to take notice, it exists, it is there but I do not have to play along with it. I do not have to become a victim because of it. (XX - translation IW)

All Pathways respondents have succeeded in finding their first job in the end. Some, however, had to use alternative strategies to increase their chances. We highlight some of the most important strategies.

Students in higher vocational education (leading to a BA diploma) in the Netherlands are obliged to do an internship in an organization. The duration of internships can go up to one year. Of the Turkish and Moroccan second generation youth with a higher education diploma in the TIES survey, 15% found their first job through an apprenticeship and 14% found their current or last job through apprenticeships.

In Pathways to Success, internships offered relevant work experience and positive recommendations, leading to employment in- or outside the internship company.

My final internship project was with the KLM [Royal Dutch Airlines – IW], and then they just said: ‘do you want to stay to do more research in this area but also in other areas?’ (XX - translation IW).

Obtaining employers’ confidence is crucial for finding a job, especially for a first job when the interviewees usually still lack references by for-

mer employers. Knowing an employer personally, or through a friend or former classmate, can be helpful for creating confidence in the candidate, thus increasing the chances of getting invited for an interview and being offered a job. The respondents learn along the way that sometimes you only get to be invited if you have a contact within an organization.

The TIES survey found that about a quarter (27%) of the successful Moroccan and Turkish second generation respondents obtained their first job through a friend, colleague or family member. Using network contacts is also considered by the vast majority of the Pathways interviewees as being a crucial strategy for entering the labour market. Network contacts can help to establish a link with an employer, increasing the likelihood of getting invited for an interview:

I got a coach who could introduce me to his network contacts. He then presented me to someone he knew in the courthouse, and that is how I got a job interview and my first job. (...) I tried before, my letter was the same, my CV was the same, but I could not get a job interview. (XX - translation IW)

Yet asking for help and using contacts for finding a job touch on issues of pride, and some of the respondents dislike not being judged on the basis of their merits but on the basis of whom they know.

Interviewees also stress that their first jobs were not handed to them, even when they were introduced to their employer by a network contact. They still had to go through job interviews, assessments and trial periods, proving them-

selves worthy for the job, and relying first and foremost on their own abilities and not on who introduced them.

The strategies of using (extra) internships and network contacts often only come into play when the “normal” way of entering the labour market has failed. Both strategies open up boundaries by allowing the second generation to portray their professional identity for the first time, through which they manage to de-emphasize their ethnic background as the prevalent identity marker (cf. Wimmer 2008), showing their “sameness” as professionals, and finding common ground with the ethnic majority professionals as a consequence (cf. Siebers 2009a). These strategies offer a way to cross bright boundaries in the labour market, and to become part of the professional ingroup (cf. Alba 2005).

#### *Acceptance in the Workplace*

Getting hired in a job is not the same as being accepted by your fellow colleagues in the workplace. In the Pathways to Success interviews we asked about acceptance and discrimination in the workplace. Most interviewees claim to have had little to no experience with discrimination in the workplace, while simultaneously mentioning that they have noticed a change in the public and political atmosphere in the Netherlands towards ethnic minorities. Almost everybody mentions that the tone has become more negative and prejudice towards ethnic minorities has increased. In the TIES survey, the question of discrimination in the workplace was also asked.

**Table 3: Successful Turkish and Moroccan second generation: encountered discrimination in the workplace.**

	Never	Almost never	Sometimes	Regularly	Often
Turkish 2 <sup>nd</sup> generation	51%	22%	22%	2%	3%
Moroccan 2 <sup>nd</sup> generation	43%	22%	25%	6%	4%

Source: TIES survey 2008

As the TIES survey clearly demonstrates, a minority of interviewees report that they are often confronted with negative discourses and prejudices at work. Negative discourses and discrimination in the circles in which the successful second generation move are often subtler than in lower class environments. The PSP respondents are therefore reluctant to call it discrimination:

Yes there are remarks. Certain remarks, I do not know if you can truly call it discrimination because it is so subtle. You do not feel good about it, so that is why you think there is something wrong. But it is not like... you cannot prove that it is discrimination. It is really a grey area. (XX - translation IW)

Either open or subtler, the discourses in society and the effects they have on the workplace can become a serious obstacle in feeling accepted in an organization as a colleague. Those who mention it also assume that the harsh opinions of co-workers stem from the negative political climate in the Netherlands (see also Siebers 2010). They report how public and political debates seep through in the workplace of their organizations:

Yes, as I said before, on the work floor, mostly with clients. But also inside the company you hear things and you experience things having to do with your religion. That is, at this moment in time, all very negatively portrayed [in public] and since I have an Islamic background, you hear things here and there and it makes you think: should I make a comment about this or not? (XX - translation IW).

Similar to the outcomes in the TIES survey, the women within the Pathways to Success Project wearing head scarves most often report about remarks concerning religion.

Of course things happen but I do not know, I do not know... you are with someone, and you just come from a meeting with that person and you go for lunch together, and then she starts about your head scarf. Don't you have anything else to talk about? You get it? It is not discrimination or anything but it does give you the feeling like they still see you as the woman with the head scarf and not as X [name interviewee – IW] who happens to wear a head scarf." You see? That happens every now and then. (XX - translation IW)

Respondents of the Pathways to Success Project report that openly expressed racism or discriminatory remarks are extremely rare, especially in the context of the workplace. In the most openly racist cases, it is not colleagues, but clients or customers, that are the perpetrators of racism.

Respondents deal with experiences of racism in different ways. What they all have in common is that they consciously choose if and when to react. Some of the respondents choose to confront people in a very direct manner:

People make wrong remarks about head scarves or something like that. Then I will be the first to respond. (...) And you hear Muslims this, Muslims that. Then I will clearly say: "listen, I am one too and I feel addressed and I do not agree with you." (XX - translation IW)

Other respondents position themselves above such remarks or they will prove them wrong in practice:

Sometimes things are said that are hurtful. (...) When I was younger, I reacted ardently to these things. But not anymore, I do not do that anymore (...). (...) When things are said about Islam, of which I think they are incorrect, then I explain, so I deal with it more easily. That is because when you grow older, you are able to explain things better, you are stronger. (XX - translation IW)

Yes, I have had the feeling that I was treated differently than people who had done the same as I. Same functional level, same age (...). (...) I did not get projects as easily. That you are excluded in a subtle and perhaps unintentional way, that certain things are not granted to you. (...) My strategy or tactic is to show them that I can do it. If you do not grant me a project, I will go get it myself. (XX - translation IW)

Above all, interviewees are very cautious to describe incidents as racism. They often stress that they are not sure if they are not accepted because of their Turkish or Moroccan backgrounds or because of the fact that they are young, women, fresh out of university, working in a profession dominated by older men: "50 plus, bald or white haired." (XX – translation IW).

The successful Turkish and Moroccan second generation seems to be aware that they have to be very careful in the Netherlands to call some-

thing racism, as racism as a pattern in society is not an accepted viewpoint (cf. Vasta 2007; Ghorashi 2014) and, therefore, it is not without danger for their careers to confront people at the workplace with accusations of racism. It can easily backfire on them. They often just cope with it or choose to ignore it, positioning themselves in both of these reactions as active agents, refusing to be victimized by discrimination (cf. Van den Broek 2009).

Another strategy for gaining acceptance in the workplace for the second generation is through emphasizing their professional identity. Initial resistance by some colleagues is often overcome over a course of time because of their professional success:

In the beginning it is startling for them that you have this position. And then they hear your story and see what you have accomplished, how many customers you have, what you have built. And then you can see that they do have respect for you. Yes. (quote by XX - translation IW).

Acceptance in the workplace for the second generation can thus be accomplished by showing that they are capable professionals and good colleagues (Siebers 2009a), and in that sense, no different than their colleagues of native Dutch parentage. They emphasize sameness to weaken the fixation on difference, and they become accepted by their colleagues based on the quality of their profession (cf. Wimmer 2008). Their professionalism acts as a binding element with colleagues of native Dutch parentage, allowing for acceptance and a feeling of belonging in the workplace.

I noticed because I was THE guy who was hired for sales but ended up with the managers. To a large extent they [other managers – IW] had an attitude towards me. The good thing is, people like us who are faced with some resistance, we bite the bullet. I did not respond to their attitude but I worked like crazy. I booked really impressive results. And now they take me seriously as a manager. (XX - translation IW)

The vast majority of the interviewees expresses a wish to climb the career ladder further. The

highly educated second generation of Turkish and Moroccan decent is very ambitious. They managed to enter the labour market and are mostly content with their current position – which is, in most cases, a position in line with their education – but they have a clear vision for the future: they know where they want to go and they plan to get there.

One of the driving forces behind the ambitions of the second generation is that they want to keep developing themselves. They want to grow, become better at what they do, specialize, explore new fields, work abroad, earn more money, gain more influence, start their own company. Most of the interviewees who do not yet have a management position express that they would like to move into such a position. They look for possibilities in their own organization, but if they feel like they will not get a fair chance, they will also look for possibilities elsewhere. Many respondents advanced their careers by changing jobs.

At a certain moment, I had had a promotion after three years, I started wondering: do I still like this? Am I going to grow further? Do I want to become a manager or not? You know, I will just go and work for another company, closer to home, more meaningful, more interesting. That I am challenged more, that it is professional, that I can develop myself. (XX - translation IW)

They constantly look for new challenges and they change their pathways to new and better positions:

Yes, something better came along. You know, you are young, you have to be flexible. You have to climb [the corporate ladder – IW] as fast as you can, especially when you are young, you know. I am now at a position that took other people 30 years to get at. I believe that you have to stay focused and seize your opportunities. (XX - translation IW)

Even those who are already in high-level position express they want to achieve new goals, more often unrelated to financial gains or prestige.

So I have everything, and yes, it is weird but at a certain moment in time, then yes, you want to achieve more. You know? Not in terms of money or

anything but more in terms of being more successful in reaching your goals and yes, I think you can achieve anything you want, you only have to do it. (XX - translation IW)

From the interviews, it is clear that the uncertainty of many respondents as they enter the labour market is, over time, replaced by self-confidence and a firm belief in possibilities. This attitude can partly be explained by learning the rules of the game and playing along with them:

And yes, I know the tactics now. Let me put it this way, I have been through so many job interviews, I actually just say what they want to hear. (XX - translation IW)

Positive experiences in the labour market also play a role in building self-confidence (cf. Siebers 2009b: 63-64; Ghorashi and Ponzone 2013). The interviewees are making themselves visible: they become noticed as professionals, are good at their job, ambitious, hardworking and looking for opportunities. They do, however, know they “[h]ave to work twice as hard.” (XX – translation IW) because they have a Turkish or Moroccan background.

#### *Acceptance of Leadership Position*

The true test of acceptance in the workplace is being supported in a leading position by colleagues. More and more, successful second generation professionals are moving into leadership positions. In the TIES survey, one in five second generation respondents that are active in the labour market have a higher education diploma and supervise people below them. They often supervise people of Dutch descent. A supervisory role could be seen as the ultimate test of acceptance by colleagues of Dutch descent. Do they encounter resistance to their authority?

Interviewees in our Pathways to Success Project state that having grown up in the Netherlands, they are used to Dutch customs and feel “Dutch” in their professional behaviour. They are accepted in their leadership position partly because of their fitting style of professionalism and work ethics, as for example expressed through the leadership style of second genera-

tion managers, which is one of working together on a joint outcome, informal, friendly and little emphasis on hierarchy:

Just Dutch, let us do this and if I have something to say, there is always a platform to deliberate. (XX - translation IW)

This leadership style is in line with the feeling of acceptance that interviewees experience because they speak the same professional language as their colleagues. By speaking the same professional language, people become more enthusiastic and willing to cooperate. Two interviewees also explicitly refer to the organizational culture in which there is no room and no tolerance for political views when it comes to ethnic minorities. In these organizations, it is all about doing your job and doing it well. And as long as you do it well, you get the credit. “No matter what you look like” (XX- translation IW).

Acceptance, in this case, thus becomes strongly related to being a professional, skilled colleague, instead of belonging to the same national, ethnic or religious group. It is precisely this sort of acceptance that the highly educated second generation is looking for; the kind of acceptance they can achieve by being good at what they do at work:

They look at your knowledge and skills and no attention is paid to your background or ethnic background. (XX - translation IW)

This so-called colour-blind strategy seems to be in concordance with the diversity approaches that are dominant in Northern European societies. These approaches hold the expectation that “the other becomes the same” and difference, in whatever form, is denounced and considered undesirable, as pointed out by various authors discussing diversity in organizations (Puwar 2004; Holvino and Kamp 2009; Ghorashi and Sabelis 2013). Furthermore, the colour-blind strategy closely resembles the strategy of de-emphasizing ethnicity, as described by Wimmer (2008), through which boundary blurring occurs.

Putting one's professionalism and work identity to the fore thus enables the second generation to emphasize their "sameness" in relation to their colleagues of native parentage. Yet, de-emphasizing ethnicity is not entirely what the successful second generation seems to be doing. However sensitive they are to the bright boundaries, their situational choice to downplay their difference does not mean that they do not stand up for their ethnic or religious distinctiveness when they feel the need to.

### *Staying True to Oneself*

Seeking recognition for the different aspects of their identity (professional, ethnic and religious) is important for the interviewees, since they feel that parts of their identity occasionally conflict with work or organizational related issues; they do not want to compromise certain aspects of their identity.

They do, however, sometimes need to make compromises, feel the need to adjust, and leave certain aspects of their identity in the background. These actions are born out of fear of conflict, based on different expectations, opinions or ignorance from colleagues. Interviewees do not want to hide or conceal parts of their identity, but do find themselves sometimes putting them "on hold" during working hours:

Sometimes you have to put on some sort of mask, while still staying really close to yourself. People know about me that I am religious but do I express it? No, you would not be able to tell by the way I dress or anything. (...) I will always be honest about being religious and Muslim. (...) I do not give in on that. (XX - translation IW)

Giving up, no. But distance, yes. And with which I mean that I do not give up on my principles, values and standards. But when I am at home, I can pray on time. And of course, that is not an option in an institution like that. (XX - translation IW)

Interviewees find ways to manage day-to-day interactions with colleagues without touching upon sensitive topics. Sensitive issues often have to do with religious aspects, such as fasting during Ramadan, observing Islamic holy days or

not drinking alcohol. The most often mentioned uncomfortable situation at work is when alcohol is served at company drinks. Such a situation makes the cultural and religious differences obvious to colleagues:

For example, I do not drink alcohol. When everybody is drinking a beer and I have a coke, it just stands out. (XX - translation IW)

That is [drinking alcohol – IW] something I don't do. I will have a drink, coffee or tea. But I will not drink alcohol and that sets you apart. (XX - translation IW)

Difference can, however, also become an asset in the workplace, especially in cases where the customers or clients are of ethnic minority background as well:

I do notice with youngsters, especially when they are youngsters with an immigrant background, that (...) there is a click (...). (...) Some will say: 'I will not cooperate with the psychologist'. And then they see me and they think 'Ah, she is one of us. It should be OK then'. (XX - translation IW)

The strategy of juggling sameness and difference is, in essence, what the successful second generation of Turkish and Moroccan descent is doing. They only put to the fore their ethnic or religious background when conflicts are imminent and unavoidable, displaying their difference at the risk of losing acceptance at the workplace. They therefore do not cross boundaries, and leave behind their ethnic group's customs and fully embrace those of the majority group. Their strategy also does not amount to what Alba calls boundary blurring: 'participati[ng] in mainstream institutions [while maintaining their] familiar social and cultural practices and identities (...)' (Alba 2005: 25). Due to their awareness that difference can potentially jeopardize their professional status, they only display personal, social and cultural practices when there is no way to avoid difference, or when difference could be considered an asset for the organization. In addition, they do not expect boundaries to blur; they only hope to be respected for their own individual choices. The strategies they use are individual and context-based. The strategy of

'sameness' through de-emphasizing ethnicity and emphasizing social similarities (Wimmer 2008) opens up pathways to success for the second generation, as it provides them with means for acceptance in organizations that are in the Dutch context, which is still predominantly focused on sameness instead of equality, let alone diversity.

### **Boundary Sensitivity as Alternative to either Boundary Crossing or Boundary Blurring**

We have shown in this article that the Turkish and Moroccan second generation respondents from the Pathways to Success study have employed various strategies during the different phases in their labour market careers. Through these strategies, they have seemingly overcome bright boundaries that are in place in the labour market in the Netherlands, especially for ethnic minorities of Islamic background. What the strategies have in common is that the successful second generation does not want to be passive victims in the face of discriminatory practices or remarks at their workplace. They actively engage with exclusionary practices in different manners by performing a complex balancing act in which they, on the one hand, stress their quality and professional identity as being similar to the majority group members and, on the other hand, they want to be respected for who they are ethnically and religiously. Their refusal to fully assimilate sometimes makes their professional position in the labour market a vulnerable one.

We argue that rather than a process in which the successful second generation crosses ethnic boundaries or blurs boundaries, they circumvent boundaries by being very sensitive and competent in dealing with the limitation of boundaries. This sensitivity has become second nature for them (cf. Den Uyl and Brouwer 2009), through which they juggle sameness and difference, resulting in what we would call "boundary sensitivity": an individual and contextual strategy, circumventing bright boundaries with the aim of gaining acceptance while staying true to oneself. With this strategy, the successful second genera-

tion avoids boundary crossing, which holds the inherent risks of losing the link with the ethnic group of the first generation, as well as never truly becoming accepted by the majority group (Alba 2005: 26). The strategy is also pragmatic, since they are aware that boundary blurring – where difference is accepted and belonging to the majority group goes hand in hand with belonging to their own ethnic group – is, in most organizations, and in the present Dutch anti-immigrant context, not a viable strategy (ibid: 25).

The highly educated second generation is particularly apt to develop a strategy of 'boundary sensitivity' because they have grown up learning and reading differences, resulting in multiplicity competence. The strategy of boundary sensitivity is their answer to the bright boundaries in Dutch society. It is this subtle yet fine art of boundary sensitivity that resolves the apparent paradox of a growing successful, highly educated Turkish and Moroccan second generation group in a country context with bright boundaries. They actively make use of the sameness and difference strategy depending on each situation, thereby circumventing bright boundaries and establishing themselves through de-emphasizing ethnicity. They manage to maintain and show difference, sometimes even conflicting differences, and thus display boundary sensitivity to gain entrance and acceptance in the Dutch labour market.

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