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From ‘people just like us’ to the ‘fundamentally other’: Managing ethnic boundaries and religious borders through shifting labels

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Abstract

In Flanders (Belgium) racism is strongly condemned, as in many countries, and tolerance is widely promoted as essential in such multiethnic societies. However, basic everyday processes of categorization and othering confront us with specific contradictions that need to be managed. These processes of inclusion and exclusion are often based upon negative stereotyping of the other, yet they clash with one’s general self-image of a tolerant and non-racist person. The family context proved to be a relevant context to study this management of the representation of the self and of the other. A discourse analysis of 27 interviews with Belgian and Italian origin parents in Flanders, clarifies how the shifting of labels is applied to construct ethnic boundaries in relation to Turks and Moroccans and to construct religious borders in relation to Muslims. Whereas ethnic boundaries seem malleable and fit for ‘bridging’, religious borders seem much more rigid and crossing them is presented as trespassing. In the end,

the discourses seem to stress an instrumental use of the (re)labeling of the other which offers parents a solution to achieve the same end-results - the exclusion of the other from the family context - without fearing stigmatization as a racist.

Keywords: Ethnicity - Religion - Ethnic Boundary versus Religious Borders - Power

Introduction

Few parents would probably admit in in-depth interviews with an unfamiliar researcher that they hold racist beliefs or think the interethnic friendships of their children are ‘something bad’. Yet, when discussing the upbringing of their children some deep-rooted beliefs and representations of ‘the other’ not seldom surface quite spontaneously. Moreover, the discourses studied in this article reveal that sometimes quite contradictory representations of the other are constructed by parents when managing their goals in everyday life experiences and situations. This is often done in such a way that it is presumed not to reflect negatively on these parents themselves. A telling example which was the trigger to focus on this issue, is the following narrative of a 35-year-old Italian origin woman, who herself belongs to an ethnic minority in Flanders (Belgium):

My daughter, she was not even four years old, in second year kindergarten and she came home and she said: 'I hate Turks.' That's a four-year-old child! I went to her school for that. I said to her: 'You can't say that. They are people just like us.'

In this narrative she explicitly states that saying racist things is wrong and that she explicitly wants to make clear to her daughter that her Turkish classmates are 'people just like us'. However, further in the interview when discussing 'Turkish-Italian interethnic marriages' the same woman states that she would not allow that and wants to exclude '*actually everything that has to do with these Muslims*' as you cannot trust them. It is interesting to note that in the two quotes above, the focus is shifted from the ethnic affiliation of 'the other' to his religious affiliation. When viewed in terms of equality on the basis of ethnicity, the same relation is reconstructed as an unbridgeable fault line when it is framed in religious terms. The question this article tries to answer is how these seemingly contradictory representations of 'the other' can be present in one person's discourse, and to a large extent concern the same other, and yet do not feel to that person as contradictory. One of the crucial questions that stands out is: why are Turks (or Moroccans) people just like us, and when do they become Muslims who are fundamentally different from us?

To understand these processes and gain insight in their underlying mechanisms, in-depth interviews were conducted with 27 Belgian and Italian origin parents in Flanders, the semi-autonomous northern part of Belgium. Although not primarily focused on the issues mentioned above, various parents spontaneously raised them in the interviews revealing it is an issue they think about and/or struggle with in the upbringing of their children.

Identity construction, boundaries and borders

From the 1960's onward, research on ethnicity and ethnic groups was concerned with the construction of boundaries, emerging from interactions between individuals (Barth, 1969). Barth (2000: 17) distinguishes three levels of abstraction when discussing such boundaries: *'(1) literally, boundaries divide territories 'on the ground'; (2) more abstractly, they set limits that mark social groups off from each other; (3) and finally, they provide a template for that which separates distinct categories of the mind'*. This multilayered conceptualization comprises different elaborations of this concept within the disciplines of anthropology, sociology and social psychology, but also argues that these three levels are often interrelated and co-constructive. However, what lies at the heart of social differentiation and the construction of social identities such as ethnicity, is the distinguishing between an in-group and an out-group (Jenkins, 2008a; Turner and

Reynolds, 2001). At the same time, identity construction never only relies upon the relations between interacting individuals and it is not solely constructed in reference to an out-group or 'the other'. As Roosens (1994) argues, ethnicity, and its emergence into abstract notions of ethnic groups, is particular in the sense that it also concerns a construction process based upon an inward perspective conceptualized as the family-of-origin-metaphor. Ethnicity is felt as to be in your blood, and as such, as something you share with your co-ethnics whom you imagine to be of the same (ethnic) community as you (Anderson, 1983; Gil-White, 1999; Bentley, 1987). This can have far-reaching consequences, e.g. with respect to social and political rights, especially in the case of nation-state building processes which are often based upon imagined notions of consanguinity (Wimmer, 2006). When discussing these representations within a more general and European context, it becomes clear that a specific reference to being born on European soil, is often still (implicitly) used to legitimize claims on dominant and/or privileged positions (Roosens, 1998; Bourdieu, 1993). As a result these processes of differentiation and categorization generate specific ethnic ways of seeing the world - the cultural schemes on the discursive level or the categories of mind - which interrelate with the 'doing being ethnic' practices of individuals in everyday life (Brubaker et al., 2004).

The cultural stuff and cognitive schemes are therefore crucial in giving meaning to these perceived ethnic differences. Cultural differences (or similarities) are - next to

interindividual and intergroup interactions - necessary ingredients to create cultural boundaries (Erickson, 2010). Differences in language, religion or food can be used to construct these boundaries, but these meaning-giving processes do not always have to lead to a negative view of the other (Turner and Reynolds, 2001). Differences can co-exist while being more or less unproblematic. However, processes of power often take categorization a step further and the unequal distribution of resources can turn a cultural boundary into a cultural border (Erickson, 2010; Lamont and Molnar, 2002). An interesting elaboration on this issue is discussed by Cohen (1994) arguing that whereas boundaries are essentially contestable and malleable, borders seem not. The latter can be seen as matters of fact, whereas boundaries are more fluid and part of constant negotiation. As a result certain 'borders on the ground' can turn into mental structures which can be internalized as a second nature and are used to delineate different groups, often in hierarchical structures (Bourdieu, 1990).

At the same time, primordialist notions of ethnicity seem to challenge this fluidness of boundary-construction (Gil-White, 1999; Roosens, 1994). As Jenkins (2008b) argues, certain identification processes tend to remain more or less constant over various contexts bringing much more nuance to the idea of a too voluntaristic and instrumental perspective on identity construction. Therefore, ethnicity can be conceptualized as a first-order dimension of the human experience and not an identification process similar to many others (Jenkins, 2008b: 78; Roosens, 1994). It

will depend on the context and ‘the other’ which identity traits become salient, but at the same time some elements and processes of identification remain more or less persistent (e.g. see Sullivan (2006) on the pervasiveness of Whiteness). Therefore, this room to maneuver is always constrained by institutional frameworks such as the educational system, ‘religion’ or civic integration policy and power differences between individuals and groups (Hannerz, 1992; Wimmer, 2008). This also entails that identity categories are often state-imposed. An interesting Flemish/Belgian example is the label used to identify ‘non-natives’: it goes from foreigner, guest worker and migrants in the 1950’s and 70’s to allochthones, ethno-cultural minorities, new comers versus old comers, third country nationals and new Belgians or Flemings nowadays. These categories are often (but not always) related to specific political, social and/or judicial rights and limit to some extent individual’s agency and identification processes (Wimmer, 2006). In such cases institutionally imposed categories are created which can one’s life path and choices (e.g. the right to work, to health care or to vote) in such a way that they are felt to be borders rather than boundaries.

Thus, given the human tendency to differentiate and categorize in order to simplify social reality (Verkuyten, 2005), and given the unequal distribution of various forms of capital in society (Bourdieu, 1990) and the structuring of social reality by the cultural apparatus and institutional frameworks (Hannerz ,1992; Wimmer, 2008), the creation of cultural borders seems inevitable. Through processes of in-group favoritism

and out-group hostility, borders are created and reflect the negative side of categorization (Brubaker et al., 2004). Moreover, differences in power between dominant and subordinate groups also entail differences in power to pathologize and problematize (categories of) individuals in social reality (Bourdieu, 1991; Ratner, 2000). However, in an age where sensitivity towards racism and discrimination is heightened and racism is often not tolerated, the question remains how individuals deal with these issues in everyday life. Are categorization processes constructed differently and are they based on other elements than ethnicity or race?

Culturalism in an era of antiracism

As racism is nowadays condemned as improper and even punishable by law in many countries, new concepts have arisen in the past few decades that try to grasp these new form of (negative) categorization processes based on ethnicity or race. One that seems quite persistent, as an analytical concept but also in its everyday usage, is that of culturalism. In the age-old framework of nature versus nurture, replacing categorization in terms of race or blood lines (nature) with categorization in terms of religious or cultural affiliation (nurture) seems for many a reliable, non-racist and thus legitimate way of describing and categorizing social reality (Huntington, 1993; Harrison and Huntington, 2000; Huntington, 2004). A common culturalist perspective is that social

reality is no longer divided into specific human races with homogeneous intellectual or physical capabilities but rather into specific cultures with particular, essentialized and shared ideas about how to behave, what to value and how to think. One major problem with such a view is that millions of unique individuals are categorized into a specific bounded 'culture'. Moreover, this cultural affiliation seems to be inherent - almost genetic - and impossible - or very hard - to change and reconstruct (Açikel, 2006; Brumann, 1999). As a consequence, individuals are depicted as cultural dopes lacking agency to develop their own life path (Gijssels, 2006). Furthermore, there seems to be a primordial identity present in each of these distinct cultures which makes them to a large extent incommensurable (Longman, 2005). Conceptualizing culture in such a way reveals the strong analogy with older racist perspectives on social reality (Meer, 2013). However, the 'liberating' aspect of this conceptualization is that discussing cultural, or even religious, groups in these terms does not hold the danger of being labeled a racist.

This is in line with research on the concept of aversive racism which states that nowadays, many individuals - also those in Western-Europe - embrace the idea that racism is wrong and being labeled as racist is to be avoided (Dovidio and Gaertner, 2010). At the same time, categorization, simplification and stereotyping are crucial human processes to deal with and manage social reality and to construct imagined communities (Brubaker et al., 2004; Verkuyten, 2005). How then, when it is socially unacceptable to hold explicit racist perceptions and attitudes, does (negative)

categorization of 'the other' emerge? Snauwaert et al. (1999) argue that - in the context of Flanders - more often than not, culturalist representations of social reality are applied to differentiate between the in-group of 'Christians' and the out-group of 'Muslims'. Cultural differences are used to create cultural borders rather than ethnic or racial borders, based upon aversive feelings towards the other (Dovidio and Gaertner, 2010; Erickson, 2010). Moreover, what seems to be implied in these processes is a construction of a moral order to legitimize these borders (Lamont et al., forthcoming; Lamont and Molnar, 2002). The necessity of 'the other' to be morally different and sometimes even 'morally less' than the own group what can be used to explain and justify this feeling of aversion (Dovidio and Gaertner, 2010). Specific context dependent deep-rooted representations of the other influence this moral (b)order. Whereas in the context of the USA these representations run along 'racial borders' in Western-Europe they seem to run primarily along 'cultural and religious borders' (Aberson and Ettl, 2004; Kalmijn and van Tubergen, 2006; Lamont, 2002; Snauwaert et al., 1999; Wacquant, 2005). It is this tension between a positive self-image as an open and tolerant individual and the deep-rooted negative feelings and perceptions towards 'the other' that one needs to manage and harmonize. To understand the broader context wherein this study is conducted and the parental discourses can be situated, the next section discusses the general context of Flanders.

Multi-ethnic Flanders and the salience of culture and religion

Flanders - and especially its major cities - can be defined as a multi-ethnic and a multi-religious space. In some of the larger cities the traditional Flemish ethnic majority will no longer constitute more than half of the population as the majority in these cities will have an immigration background in less than a decade. These demographic shifts go hand in hand with a second shift in the past decade from a focus on ethnicity to a focus on culture and religion. This is particularly the case with respect to the development, implementation, and for some categories of individuals obligatory, civic integration courses. Flemish policy makers focus on transmitting the in their opinion typical Flemish (and, more general Western) values, principals and norms to groups of new comers who have to internalize these traits and attitudes to integrate successfully (Bourgeois, 2009; 2013). Thus, although Flanders is becoming increasingly more multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural, the dominant ethno-cultural group still holds a dominant position in relation to other minority groups.

This dominant group in Flanders can be identified as the Belgian-Flemish community. Higher educated heterosexual Dutch speaking Belgian-Flemish origin men occupy key positions in the political, economic, educational and various socio-cultural institutions. This dominant category of individuals and its shared cultural emblems, tends to be understudied and unproblematized (Kimmel, 2000; Lukes, 2005; Wimmer,

2004; Yuval-Davis, 2010). However, its perceptions of how society should be organized, its influence on policy making, its appreciation of differences and similarities between groups and communities, define the outlook and *leitmotiv* of Flanders more than those of others.

Zooming in on Belgian-Flemish ethnicity reveals that this general identity is primarily constructed around cultural emblems such as the Dutch language and the Christian-Catholic religion. This accumulates, as said, in a (civic) integration policy stating that successful participation in society is only possible if migrants learn Dutch as soon as possible (Bourgeois, 2009; 2013). This conception of social reality stands at the heart of Flemish society. At the same time Christianity occupies a dominant position in the political system (a strong Christian Democratic Party), in the educational system (Catholic schools enrol around 65% of all pupils in basic and secondary education) but also in the family as more than 70% of the Belgian-Flemish children were baptized in 2000 (Van Meerbeeck, 2001).

Notwithstanding the demographic shifts described above in many of its major cities, the native Flemish group remains the largest group by far in Flanders, comprising 85% of the total population (thus all ethnic minorities taken together comprise 15%). Within this category of minorities, Moroccans represent 15%, Turks 12% and Italians 5% (number based on country of birth: Noppe and Lodewijckx, 2012). Whereas Italians mainly share the Christian-Catholic religion with the dominant group, this differs for

many Moroccans and Turks as they self-identify (and are often categorized by others) as Muslim. Related to this, Islam in general is nowadays quite negatively perceived in Flanders. The presumed incommensurability of ‘Islamic values and practices’ with ‘the Western’ democratic system is often subject of intense and emotional debates, and various studies discussed these sentiments (Abts and Swyngedouw, 2014; Arnaut et al., 2009; Billiet and Swyngedouw, 2009). Although, on the one hand Italian and on the other hand Moroccan and Turkish migrants share to some extent a similar labour migration background (respectively mainly in the period 1945-1960 and 1960-1973), social and (geo)political processes - such as the construction of the European Union - lead to the construction of a European identity of which Moroccans and Muslims do not seem to belong (Roosens, 1998). As is often the case, these social and political processes go hand in hand with important socioeconomic differences for example in the educational field (in particular in early school leaving or grade retention rates). The latter of course impacts dramatically on individuals’ (and groups’) labour market position (Duquet et al., 2006). All this accumulates overall in a highly vulnerable position for certain minority groups in Flanders (and Belgium): whereas 12% of Belgian natives is at risk to live below the poverty line, this is the case for 54% of the Moroccan origin individuals and for 33% of the Turkish and 22% of the Southern-European (many of whom are Italian) origin individuals (Dierckx et al., 2011).

These important social and macro-level differences between the majority group and various minority groups, exert their influence on a meso- and even micro-level. It is within this broader setting that parents perceive and act, construct identities and develop strategies.

Method and sample

As the narratives and perspectives of individual parents are central in this article, an interpretative phenomenological approach is crucial (Kvale, 1996) and *'attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them'* is the primary goal (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: 3). To understand how people interpret certain phenomena and give meaning to their daily life world, a qualitative research methodology is relevant (Maso and Smaling, 1998). Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted by the researcher, guided by a general topic list containing questions related to identity construction, family life and intergenerational relations. The start-up question was always 'Can you give me an overview of your family's history starting from the family you were born in up until your *own* family now, with special attention to your family composition, residence status, and other life events you find important?'. This proved to be an interesting question (of course, sometimes more sub-questions were necessary) and the information collected often gave a good

overview of events important to these parents, which could be elaborated on further in the interview.

The research data are obtained via 27 individual in-depth interviews with fathers and mothers of Belgian-Flemish and Italian origin. Moreover, in most cases it was possible to interview both parents from the same family, although they every respondent was interviewed individually and separately. The respondents have diverse backgrounds, but they all have at least one child and identify themselves as ‘having’ one of the three abovementioned ethnicities. To recruit these respondents, different methods were applied. Public family assistance services and specific ‘ethnic’ organisations were contacted and, in combination with the method of snowball sampling, this allowed for the recruitment of a diverse research sample. In total, 27 respondents were interviewed: 12 women and 15 men. With respect to their ethnic background, 14 Belgian-Flemish (5 men and 9 women) and 13 Italian (7 men and 6 women) individuals participated in the research. Concerning family composition (older and/or younger children), educational background and employment status, variation was pursued and obtained. The Italian parents were mostly born in Belgium, or migrated to Belgium before their children were born. In each of the categories – be it gender and/or ethnicity – there were respondents who were higher or lower educated, some worked as labourer others as clerk, teacher, researcher or social worker. The unemployed women were housewives and the two unemployed men were looking for a job. Yet, in this sample, Belgian-Flemish

respondents were generally higher educated than Italian respondents. This sample configuration made it possible to study the research topics from a diversity of perspectives. All interviews were executed and transcribed by the researcher, and afterwards coded via a code scheme in Atlas-ti. In the following section, we discuss the results of this study more in-depth.

As a final point, it should be noted that the idea of ‘interreligious’ marriage was never explicitly triggered by the researcher. Only (hypothetical) interethnic relations of respondents’ children with Moroccan or Turkish origin friends were explicitly brought up by the researcher (if, by then, the topic was not already mentioned by the respondents themselves). It is striking that in each of the interviews the respondents themselves shifted the label from ethnicity to religion, and in some interviews respondents spontaneously discussed interreligious relations themselves.

We are all humans but we have incompatible religions

The quotation at the beginning of this article illustrates that various parents state not to tolerate that their children hold racist beliefs or say racist things.

My daughter, she was not even four years old, in second year kindergarten and she came home and she said: ‘I hate Turks.’ That’s a four-year-old child! I went

to her school for that. I said to her: 'You can't say that. They are people just like us.' (35-year-old Italian origin woman)

As this mother argues, you cannot say that about other human beings as they are people just like us. However, as mentioned, in the same interview this parent says she wants to exclude '*actually everything that has to do with these Muslims*' when it comes to relationships between her children and 'the religious other'. Although she discusses the 'same' group of individuals, she shifts the label from ethnicity to religion (culture) when creating a border between these two religious groups. This is repeated throughout the interview as she also states that:

I don't have problems. Even my boss is a Moroccan, so... I mean, I don't have problems with that at all. [...] In the past, I myself always used to have a Turkish friend.

It is interesting to notice that the label shifts when she discusses positive relations with the 'ethnic' other in comparison to the moments when she discusses negative relations with the 'religious' other. One can be friends across ethnic boundaries, some parents even say to encourage these relations as it broadens one's mind to have a 'multiethnic peer group'. However, interreligious relations are of a different 'nature' and parents

seem to construct a religious border which some parents want their children not to cross. These complex discursive processes are apparent in various interviews.

A 37-year old Belgian origin woman says about her children interacting with Turks *'like towards Turks, not that they [her children] act racist towards them, no, not that!'* However, this parent also shifts her focus from the ethnic marker to the religious marker when interreligious relationships are discussed: *'I hope that [interreligious intimate relations] doesn't happen. For me personally, that's not acceptable'*.

The previous quotations were expressed by female respondents, but male respondents held similar views as is illustrated by this 35-year old Italian origin man:

Researcher: So with respect to your children it doesn't matter who they marry?

Parent: No, as long as it isn't a Turk or Moroccan it is ok.

Researcher: So, certainly not that?

Parent: No, I really don't want that. They have a different religion. And they have a different life, I really don't want that!

[...]

Researcher: But you said you get along fine with Turks?

Parent: Yeah, but still, that I don't want. They have a different mentality. I get along with them, but that's it.

Even though this father claims to have good relations with Turks and gets along with them, he refers to their religion that creates a different mentality which subsequently creates a cultural border and therefore legitimizes their exclusion from one of the most intimate relationships in life (for a more in-depth discussion of this intersection of gender, religion and ethnicity see XXX). When it comes to more intimate relations - when 'the other' enters the house and is there to stay, as it were - this border is one parents do not want their children to cross. At first glance it would appear that Christianity and Islam are 'simply' represented as incompatible religions (and 'cultures'), as the following 33-year-old Italian origin man illustrates quite determinedly:

The difference between the religions. They will never accept us as Catholics, and we will never accept them as Muslims. That's just the way it is.

However, a more in-depth analysis shows that these parents situate the reason for this incompatibility at the heart of the other: Islam and Muslims.

Legitimizing the construction of borders: it's not us, it's them.

What the previous paragraph made clear is that Italian and Belgian origin parents, both sharing a Christian-Catholic affiliation, strongly condemn racist beliefs and do value interethnic friendships. In doing so, they seem to construct an image of two incompatible religions, (implicitly) reflecting a cultural relativist perspective on cultural differences. However, what the current section illustrates is that it not only concerns a cultural difference between groups but that this difference is represented as a cultural deficit inherent to the other. Parents construct strong negative representation of the religious other, the Muslim (man) within the context of Flanders. Therefore, when fully embracing the ideas of anti-racism and tolerance, and transmitting them to their children, parents seem to have to construct legitimate arguments to exclude this religious other. The most important strategy that surfaces throughout the interviews is to represent the other as an intolerant and inert religious other, 'fully' determined by his/her religion and various related cultural traits. As the following 37-year old Italian father describes, religion is the only obstacle between both groups, but it is an all-encompassing mental structure that cannot be removed or rebuilt.

The only obstacle with the other [Turk or Moroccan] is the religion that has an impact. [...] the cultural differences are mainly caused by the religion. The

impact of their religion is too big and that causes this short-sighted mentality. All the time.

One major issue that often arises in the narratives is that especially daughters will be oppressed by their Muslim husband. This is expressed clearly in the following quotation of a 42-year old Italian origin woman (see for more information on this, XXX). She also uses a label switch and stresses that the problem for her does not concern the ‘Moroccan man’ but the ‘Muslim thing’, irrespective of the fact that it relates to the same individual in her representation:

Oh, I would mind that [interreligious intimate relations]. Not for that [Moroccan] man, but for the Muslim thing. There we go again, you know, men stand above [women]. I don’t accept that. It’s not equal. It doesn’t work. I don’t think so. Or the woman has to be very submissive and then those relationships work. I would mind it very much if my daughter has to go on living and serving and obeying her husband. Because these women have to serve their husband.

Even parents who represent themselves as open-minded describe the Muslim man in very negative terms. A 50-year old Belgian origin father states his Western daughter should know that if she marries a Muslim she has to walk five meters behind him when

they are publicly walking around, and she should be aware of this. While at the same time this man states that

For me, I was able to afford it budgetary-wise to leave her [his Belgian origin wife] at home. Yes, she stays at home. I like it that, when I come home, everything is clean and tidy, that my dinner is ready and that the children are taken care of.

While yet another 47-year old Italian origin man says he is open-minded towards the future living arrangements of his daughter, he also states he draws the line when ‘Muslims’ enter the picture. For him, homosexual relationships are no problem as they are part of life¹, but Muslims are described as deceitful.

What I have said to my daughter is that I would prefer she didn’t marry a Muslim. Not that I have anything against Muslims, but I’m afraid she’ll totally change her character. [...] First they (Muslims) show you their good side, and then you can stay at home. [...] I don’t have problems with lesbians, homosexuals, not even with hookers. [...] That’s part of life. [...] better that

¹ That he mentions them in the same line of reasoning as prostitutes is interesting, but will not be discussed further.

she's happy with a woman, than unhappy with a man. I've said that to her, by the way.

What is already hinted upon in some of the narratives above is that not only are Muslims, and Muslim men in particular, inherently different people, but interreligious relations also transform one's character. This is a second step in legitimizing the construction of the border and the exclusion of the religious other.

Becoming Muslim means disrupting family unity

The representation of the oppressive, short-sighted and conservative 'Muslim' mentality is constructed as something that completely determines and fundamentally changes one's personality and character. To further clarify that the exclusion of the other is not unsubstantiated and even based on a presumably fair assumption of what fundamental changes interreligious relationships bring about, a new line of reasoning is brought into the picture by various mothers. Whereas up until parents mainly feared that their daughters would be oppressed by the Muslim man (see also XXX), now mothers also refer to their son becoming Muslim and disapproving the behavior of their mothers. This in their eyes quite high probability, is a new argument not to allow interreligious relationships as is illustrated by the following quotations.

This 36 year-old Italian origin mother refers to all the things she loves to do when having fun, something she does not relate to a (devoted) Muslim man, as a reason why her son could disapprove of her. Here again a shift is made from the ethnic to the religious label.

What bothers me is, as you say Moroccan or Turk, is if my son would become a Muslim, with a long robe and beard. Because then he would also disapprove of me as a mother. Because in his eyes I would not be living the right way. Because I eat meat, I drink alcohol sometimes and I go out and we laugh.

The quotation also implicitly refers to what is seen as typical for the in-group and what is seen as typical for the out-group. Having fun, eating meat, drinking and laughing are incompatible with an Islamic lifestyle and therefore there is a high probability that the conversion of her son would break-up family cohesion. The following quotation of a 31 year-old Italian origin woman refers to this representation of 'the Muslim' who thinks he is on the right path and does not and cannot live together with fundamentally different lifestyles.

In theory he [her son] should cast us aside. Because these people [Muslims] think they are right. They are the righteous ones. Yeah, and that I am not.

The representation of their sons becoming an intolerant Muslim man themselves in an interreligious relationship is brought forward as a new argument to legitimize the construction of borders. As he will probably turn away from his mother it will break up family cohesion. This is something parents want to prevent, of course, and thus seems a legitimate claim.

The fear that is expressed in these narratives is that parents believe that engaging in an interreligious relationship and/or becoming Muslim, disrupts family unity *because* their child will transform into a different person, into a Muslim.

I would try to control that they aren't totally blinded, and are unaware of some things they regret afterwards. On religion.... because that controls, with them [Muslims], a large part of their activities, you know. I would try to discourage certain things [such as interreligious relationships]. Because then, you know, my life work, the raising of my children, would all have been for nothing (37-year old Italian origin man)

A final justification for the exclusion of the other is presented by various parents as the fear of losing their children. The latter would turn on their own family as they would probably feel their family is living and behaving the wrong way. Again, the Muslim identity seems to encompass all other subidentities and to transform an individual essentially into a different person.

Between bridging ethnic boundaries and trespassing religious borders

Throughout the interviews discussed in this article it was apparent that Belgian and Italian origin parents tried to manage their self-perception of being an anti-racist, tolerant and open-minded parent while at the same time they disapproved of interreligious relationships their children could engage in. Insights from boundary making theory (Barth, 2000; Erickson, 2010; Wimmer, 2006; 2008), social identity theory (Turner and Reynolds, 2001; Verkuyten 2005) and ethnicity theory (Brubaker et al., 2004; Jenkins, 2008b; Roosens, 1998) contributed to understanding the discourses and construction processes of the parents that were interviewed. Within the context of Flanders (Belgium) the most salient religious other is ‘the Muslim’ (Abts and Swyngedouw, 2014; Arnaut et al., 2009; Billiet and Swyngedouw, 2009).

In an age of (self-declared) anti-racism and tolerance, parents adhere to these principles stating explicitly that their children - like themselves - cannot hold racist

beliefs or attitudes towards the other as 'this is something you cannot do'. Some parents even refer to their open-mindedness with respect to their children having a homosexual relationship to highlight and 'prove' their tolerance. However, when parents are discussing issues concerning racism, they always make clear reference to the ethnic other, in this case Turkish and Moroccan individuals. This ethnic label - in Flanders (Belgium) the label 'race' is rarely used - is explicitly attributed to 'the other'. Various parents have friends, colleagues, bosses and so forth of Turkish and Moroccan origin and stress they have no problem with them and sometimes even value this diversity. The ethnic other is identified as 'one of us', belonging to the same human race. Parents at this stage do not avoid talking about ethnic differences - they do stress the existence of these differences, not only towards Turks and Moroccans but also between Belgians and Italians (see for more information XXX). However, these differences are used to create boundaries that can - and even should - be bridged. Developing friendship relations or being colleagues at work is no problem as these different ethnic groups share enough - after all, we are all humans - to make that possible. The notion of all being part of one group of humans, albeit with different ethnic origins and boundaries, is seen as a binding element (Lamont, 2002). Parents are very clear on this issue, in no way are they racist or do they tolerate racist attitudes or discourses from their children.

Nevertheless, while that may be true - or felt as such by these parents - social identity and ethnicity research continues to show that the construction of in-groups

versus out-groups strongly depends on the development of specific strategies to reach one's aims (Wimmer, 2008; Yuval-Davis, 2010). As a case in point, the parental discourses studied here show that ethnic boundaries are turned into religious borders that differentiate two groups - Muslims and Christians - which are presented as incompatible. Whereas in the context of Flanders ethnic boundaries seem malleable and can be crossed, religious borders seem 'matters of fact', much more rigid and difficult to cross (Cohen, 1994). The question then arises how this claim - prohibiting their children to engage in interreligious relations - can be legitimized when parents do encourage friendship relations with this very same other. The solution lies in the strategy to re-label this other and create a border, not in terms of their ethnic background as one cannot argue that their ethnicity is a problem as one is not a racist, but in terms of their religious affiliation. To disapprove of the religious other is felt to be of a different nature than to disapprove of the ethnic other. This is strongly in line with the trend to culturalize differences between groups rather than rely upon more racist representations of the other.

However, as Meer (2013) argues, race and ethnicity cannot as such be detached from culture and religion in a straightforward way. This is also clear in the discourses studied here. The same individuals are labeled by their ethnic marker when discussing one specific issue and context, and by their religious label in another context. This malleability and instrumental use of 'group traits' is applied to create ethnic boundaries

while at the same time religious borders can be called upon if necessary. This shift only seems possible, justified and legitimized by using ‘uncontestable’ knowledge of the religious other. Whereas various parents make clear that based on their ethnicity, all humans are felt to be the same, they simultaneously make clear that Christians and Muslims differ fundamentally and inherently which makes both religions and groups of individuals seem incommensurable (Longman, 2005). In particular the intolerance and ignorance of Islam is represented as the reason to justify exclusion. As Dovidio and Gaertner (2010) argue in their conceptualization of ‘aversive racism’, deep-rooted negative feelings and attitudes towards ‘the other’ can counter more ‘superficial’ feelings of anti-racism and tolerance.

In Flanders the current dominant negative representations of Islam and Muslims in general, and of Muslim men in particular, nowadays appear to offer this seemingly uncontested and uncontestable knowledge for non-Muslims. Large-scale survey research as well as in-depth qualitative studies have demonstrated the pervasiveness of this dominant negative representation (Billiet and Swyngedouw, 2009; Arnaut et al., 2009). Therefore, it seems plausible that this representation offers the individual who likes - or feels the social pressure - to identify as an anti-racist and tolerant individual, the escape route to disapprove of - or even prohibit - one of the most intimate relations their children could have, without fearing social sanctions of being labeled an anti-racist. The crossing of interreligious borders is perceived as trespassing as it will likely

break up internal family cohesion - 'I will lose my child' - because of the negative traits associated with the other and it is therefore justified to develop strategies to avoid this family disruption by excluding the other.

To conclude, although culturalism seems of a different nature than classic racism, in the end it boils down to the same thing: constructing negative representations of the other and labeling these traits as inherent, essential and unchangeable characteristics of the other. As 'the other' is itself intolerant, violent and ignorant because of his cultural and/or religious background than it is justified to exclude this other (see also Lamont, 2002). Moreover, culturalism is used as a way out for those holding 'racist' beliefs to express their ideas but relate them to culture and religion, instead of ethnicity (or race). As such, these representations seem justified and a reasonable tool for constructing identities and categories of in- and out-groups, explicitly and implicitly part of family socialization processes. The boundary-border analogy could be an interesting way to approach these different representations of the 'same other' by the 'same self'. It strongly depends on the context and on the (institutional) power relations whether a specific trait or element is used as a boundary or a border. As such, it focuses the attention more on the instrumental use of boundary-border making while representing the self in a positive and comfortable way. Individuals can come to the end result they had in mind from the beginning (in this case: prohibiting interreligious relationships), but have to adjust their reasoning in such

a way that it diverts attention from their own intolerant position to the intolerance of the other.

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