(Sub)national and supranational identity among majority and minority youth in superdiverse urban schools

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Abstract

This article studies the extent to which ethnic minority and ethnic majority students in highly diverse urban schools identify with Flemish and European identity. In doing so this paper aims to discuss to what extent these sub-national and supranational identities can function as shared identities within the multiple identity belongings of teenagers and what the impact is of teacher support and perceived discrimination in schools on these phenomena. The analysis is based upon a survey among Belgian native and Moroccan origin students in the 5th and 6th year of secondary education in Antwerp, one of Europe's most diverse cities. The results show that Moroccan students identify more strongly with a European identity than with a Flemish identity, while Flemish native students identify more strongly with Flemish than with European identity. This results in a large 'identity gap' with respect to Flemish identity but a much smaller gap with respect to European identity. In addition, our results show a positive effect of teacher support on Flemish and European identity for Belgian students, while it only has a positive effect on European identity for Moroccan students. The broader implications of the findings are discussed.

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National identities in Europe often seem less attractive to individuals with an immigration background, while they remain one of the most important identities to national citizens without an immigration background (Alba and Foner 2015). Recent research showed that in particular Muslim adolescents do not identify strongly with (sub)national identities in regions and countries such as Flanders (and Belgium) and Germany (Fleischmann and Phalet 2018). When (sub)national identity remains one of the most important identities for ethnic native Europeans, a gap might be emerging where ethnic minorities and ethnic natives do not share the same collective identity and might not develop shared feelings of belonging together in superdiverse contexts.

Moreover, in Flanders – a context wherein (subnational) Flemish identity is quite salient in political and public debates on education (Clycq 2016) – already from the age of eleven children with a (predominantly Muslim) Turkish migration background identify significantly less with the Belgian (national) identity than children without an immigration background (Agirdag et al. 2016). Thus, research shows that in superdiverse urban areas across Europe youth can (and does) identify with a variety of collective identities and often constructs multidimensional identities (Verkuyten and Martinovic 2012). Nevertheless, in particular the (in)compatibility of ethnic native/national identity and ethnic minority identity seems to be a recurrent issue as ethnic minorities generally express a strong attachment to their ethnic minority identity (Fleischmann and Phalet 2016, 2018). This raises the question whether other collective identity/ies – next to ethnic (minority) and national identities – emerge in superdiverse contexts that might be able to be 'equally' attractive, available and appropriated by youth with and without a migration background. To this end, the current paper acknowledges individual's ability and need to construct multidimensions identities and thus also their agency in articulating which identities they feel to be (in)compatible.

First, this article engages with a new approach in research on collective identity in relation to ethno-cultural diversity, which focuses on the role of European identity (next to (sub)national identity). Most research on European identity has studied the perspectives and experiences of so-called native Europeans, even though they are now a minority in several urban areas across Europe (Kaina et al. 2015). Moreover, a few recent studies show that individuals with a non-European immigration background might identify more strongly with European identity than with the (sub)national identity of the country they are living in (Agirdag et al. 2016; Teney et al. 2016). In this article, we elaborate on these findings and study what might influence these processes. Some argue that feelings of exclusion can push youngsters with an immigration background away from (sub)national identities and towards collective identities such as 'being European' (Erisen 2017). In addition, others focus on the conceptualization of these identities and argue that (sub)national identities in Europe are inherently 'ethno-cultural' and thus unattractive to 'ethnic others' (Alba and Foner 2015).

A second major focus of this paper lies in grasping some of the important factors steering identity outcomes. To this end the paper collects data in a context wherein 'identity' is highly salient: the domain of the (sub)national education system. Since their establishment as key institutions in nation-building processes formal education was given as one of its major tasks to socialize children into becoming 'good' (national) citizens and members of collectivities such as a (sub)national society (Green 2013). Therefore, it is argued that studying collective identity formation in education is important, as certain identities are made available in this domain, while others are potentially suppressed (Clycq 2016; Valenzuela 1999). Two major factors can be studied that can deeply influence identification processes of pupils in schools: (1) feelings of discrimination and exclusion of pupils, and (2) the impact of the relations pupils have with their most significant other in education, their teacher.

In this paper, we elaborate on the issues raised above by studying European and Flemish identity on a sample of 509 Belgian (N=211) native and Moroccan origin (N=298) students in the 5th and 6th year in 17 secondary education schools. We focus on the context of Flanders, more in particular on Antwerp, one of Europe's most (ethnically) diverse cities. We explore the following research questions: (1)(a) To what extent do Belgian native and Moroccan origin students identify with a Flemish and a European identity? (b) Do Belgian native and Moroccan origin students significantly differ in their Flemish and European identity (2) What is the effect of perceived discrimination at school on the one hand, and the support of teachers on the other hand, on Flemish and European identity for (a) Moroccan origin students and (b) Belgian native students? To answer these questions we conduct a three-step analysis starting with (a) a descriptive analysis of Flemish and European identity for Belgian and Moroccan students, (b) an independent samples t-test and paired samples t-test with a discussion of the effect sizes and (c) a multilevel linear regression analysis to test the effect of perceived discrimination and teacher support for the subset of Moroccan students and the subset of Belgian students. We use multilevel analysis to control for the clustering of the students in schools. Before presenting and discussing our methodology and results, we discuss the state of the art on collective identity and ethnic diversity in the context of education.

National identity and European identity in superdiverse contexts

A new trend in identity research is the study of collective identity formation in highly diverse contexts. These identity discussions have been building up in recent years, as a rapid ethno-cultural diversification of European societies is turning native ethnic majorities into ethnic minorities themselves (Crul 2016). Metropolitan areas are quickly transforming into contexts wherein every ethnic group is at the same time a minority group (Kasinitz et al. 2002). In these

so-called majority-minority cities (sub)national social imaginations will most likely change and 'new' collective identities are expected to emerge (Gould and Messina 2014). This transformation within collective imaginaries may be more drastic in Europe (as compared, for example, to the USA), because (sub)national identities are more often experienced by minorities as rather exclusive, while these identities remain the most important identities for native majorities (Alba and Foner 2015). Moreover, due to the continuing importance and even resurgence of ethno-nationalist inspired politics and social movements, ethno-cultural diversity is seldom experienced as a core element in the imaginations of European national identities. When (sub)national identities are imagined and practiced in exclusionary ways (e.g. by prohibiting the expression of minority and religions in society's institutions) this leads to a situation where minority groups and migrants do not feel included in (sub)national identities (Alba and Foner 2015). This is indeed what recent research seems to suggest: minorities in general do not identify strongly with the (sub)national identities of the European countries they are living in, mainly in reaction to discrimination or stigmatization (Fleischmann and Phalet 2011, 2018). In reaction to this ethnic minority individuals might search for more – in their perception – inclusive collective identities, potentially at the local and/or on the supranational level, or they might rely upon their minority identity as a protection strategy to discrimination (Baysu et al. 2011).

Indeed, some scholars argue that city and/or local identities are uniquely equipped to be sufficiently inclusive for individuals from different immigration backgrounds (Oosterlynck et al. 2018). Based upon concrete interactions in tangible contexts individuals might more easily construct bridging relations and collective identities. However, research also shows that in cities with a traditionally strong (extreme) right wing political presence city identity for ethnic minorities can be lower and/or lead to more 'identity conflict', as was apparent for Moroccan and Turkish origin youth in Antwerp (Fleischmann and Phalet 2016; Verkuyten

2016). Moreover, others argue that for bridging relations to develop the intensity of the relations is an important factor. For example, in the context of leisure time close friendship (strong interethnic ties) seem to be much more important for developing durable bridging relations than weak ties (Kivijärvi 2015).

A different, and potentially less straightforward route ethnic minorities could take to overcome (perceived) barriers to feel included in the (sub)national (and city) identity, is to identify with a supranational identity, e.g. a European identity. Indeed, some research suggests that ethnic minorities identify more with a European identity than with the (sub)national identity of the country they are living in (Agirdag et al. 2016; Saroglou and Galand 2004). Even though their European identification is modest – similar to native majority members – their national identification is very low. This is an interesting element, as much of the literature points to the fact that European identity remains appropriated mainly by higher socio-economic status and internationally mobile groups (Fligstein 2008; Diez Medrano 2011). At the same time scholars such as Bhambra (2016) argue that European identity cannot be perceived independent from Europe's colonial and violent past, in particular vis a vis countries wherefrom many of Europe's ethnic minorities and recent refugees originated from. This negative connotation of 'Europe' could hinder ethnic minorities to identify with this identity.

Yet, recently research shows that ethnic minorities and migrants become active participants in European identity formation (Teney et al. 2016). When the boundaries of national identities are experienced as relatively impermeable, it is to be expected that new strategies will be developed to ameliorate one's group status (Reicher et al. 2010; Lamont et al. 2016). This is especially the case when one's low status and the high status of, e.g. the national identity group, is felt as unjust due to experiences of discrimination (Fleischmann and Phalet 2016). Thus, identifying with a European identity that one relates with values such as dignity, equality and freedom (Boehnke and Fuss 2008; Roose 2013), might enable

marginalized individuals and groups to increase their societal status or sense of being an authentic member of a society.

Based upon the above discussion of the current state of the art and related to our first research question presented at the end of the introduction, we formulate the following hypotheses for our study:

H1a. Belgian native students will identify to a higher extent with Flemish and European identity than Moroccan origin students.

H1b. Belgian native students will identify more as Flemish than European, while Moroccan origin students will identify more as European than Flemish.

Studying collective identity formation in education

Educational systems and schools in particular are interesting settings to study processes of collective identity formation. In nation-building processes (sub)national education systems are often core institutions and one of the main reasons they are set up is to shape the identity formation of youth, through the school curricula, the language used and the everyday classroom interactions (Green 2013; Reay 2010). More in particular it is one of their major tasks to socialize children into becoming (sub)national citizens and thus include them in a shared sense of belonging together and collective identity (Youdell 2011). However, at the same time when discussing the 'performance quality' of education systems students are often categorized based upon specific ethno-cultural identity features (Schleicher 2018). Sometimes migration status is used to separate and compare the performance of 'native students' versus 'migrant' students. At other times ethnicity or religion and, very often, language are used to differentiate between first and second language learners (Alba and Holdaway 2013). While categorizing students (e.g. also according to gender or socio-economic status) is a common policy and research

strategy, it also illustrates how important identity features can become in predicting or sometimes even explaining educational inequalities. Moreover, categorization is seldom a neutral process and the creation of the label of 'at risk' students can lead to stigmatization and consequently have an impact on identification and acculturation processes of students (Makarova and Birman 2016). This also broadens the focus not only to formal categorization processes but also to the interactions within schools and in classroom in particular. Within schools and classrooms teachers are the most significant others that – in the eyes of students – represent the inclusive or exclusive character of a school towards the identities of students. Research showed that negative student-teacher relations can negatively impact students' identification with the school (Nouwen and Clycq 2016).

Therefore, in this paper, we focus on two crucial related issues: the role of perceived discrimination (and related issues) in school and the influence of feeling supported by teachers.

The impact of (perceived) discrimination in school

As young people spend huge amounts of time in schools their experiences are bound to go broader than just the acquisition and internalization of knowledge and skills (Feliciano 2009). Their social and psychological well-being is also influenced by their experiences and relations in schools (Juvonen 2006). Compared to native students research shows that ethnic minorities more often feel stigmatized and sometimes even discriminated by teachers (Nouwen and Clycq 2016; Van Praag et al. 2016). Students' cultural resources, e.g. their 'home language', religion or other identity features, are frequently pinpointed as the main causes for educational failure (Valenzuela 1999; Yosso 2005). Research even shows that these processes can be aggregated into a specific school culture in such a way that teachers have generally lower teachability perceptions of ethnic minority (and lower SES) students (Agirdag et al. 2012; Van Houtte

2004). One explanation of these perceptions that investment of time and effort in 'vulnerable' students not necessarily 'pays off' in higher achievement is ethnic prejudice. However, this relation is not straightforward. Ethnic prejudice and discrimination by teachers depends on various personal as well as contextual variables, e.g. school composition (Vervaet 2016), but 'culturalist' approaches often play a key role (Alba and Holdaway 2013). Those students feeling stigmatized by teachers based on their ethnic, religious, cultural and/or linguistic identity, can disidentify more from their school. This negatively affects their identification with the broader social imagination of the school (Nouwen and Clycq 2016). This also seems to impact on their broader collective identification. Verkuyten (2016) found evidence that perceived discrimination could lead adults with an immigration background to disidentify with national identity in The Netherlands and identify more strongly with their ethnic minority identity. Similar results were found by Fleischmann and Phalet (2016) and Baysu et al. (2011) in Flanders. Moreover, recent research in Germany studying the longitudinal measurement of the relation between perceived discrimination and identification showed that when ethnic minorities perceived more discrimination mainly their national (German) identification lowered over time (Fleischmann et al. 2019). While there is some impact of actual and perceived discrimination on (sub)national and ethnic minority identity, up until now studies analysing its impact on (supranational) European identity have been missing. We therefore argue that the perception of discrimination by teachers (which are almost all of Flemish native European background) might also have a negative impact on minorities' European identity.

As the aforementioned studies found that there is a strong correlation between reports on actual and perceived discrimination and that the latter – perception of discrimination on the group level – wields more reports than reports on actual discrimination, the current paper applies this measurement of discrimination (Baysu and Phalet 2011). Moreover, a focus on perceived discrimination by teachers also allows for a more fine-grained and open

measurement of discrimination because it is also a relevant question for ethnic native majority students and might influence the extent to which they identify. Thus, based upon these findings we formulate the following hypotheses with respect to our study:

H2 a. Perceived discrimination will have a negative effect on Flemish as well as European identity for Moroccan origin students, but perceived discrimination will have no effect on the identity of Belgian native students.

The role of feeling supported by teachers

One can also study the impact of school processes from the opposite perspective: feeling supported and respected by teachers might also have an impact on identity formation. As Erisen (2017) argues, based upon macro-level data, well-functioning antidiscrimination policies correlate with migrants feeling recognized as part of and included in the national imagination, rather than the European imagination and identity. The question arises if similar processes can be found on the meso- and micro-level of school interactions. It is common knowledge that the teacher–pupil relationship is assumed to be one of the most influential in the school context. For instance, it has a major impact on students' school engagement, their performance, but also more generally on their social integration in and identification with the school (Klem and Connell 2004; Goodenow 1993; Van Maele and Van Houtte 2011). The impact of teachers is also apparent on the students' psychological and social well-being (Juvonen 2006; Cemalcilar 2009; Berti et al. 2009). This may be related to the fact that teachers, who are experienced by students as positively supporting them, empower, in particular, low-status pupils to contest stereotypes (Lamont et al. 2016). Support for this claim is found in the qualitative research of Faas (2016) with Turkish origin students in German schools, which demonstrates that European

identity thrives in multicultural and inclusive school contexts. Based upon these findings we formulate the following hypotheses with respect to our study:

H2 b. Feeling supported by teachers (higher teacher support) will have a positive effect on the Flemish and the European identity of Moroccan origin as well as Belgian native students.

METHOD

Description of the field: the Flemish educational system

Flemish secondary education can be characterized as a clear example of a system with early tracking (from the age of 12-13 years old) wherein the three main tracks – general, technical and vocational education – are embedded in a strong hierarchical framework. A common finding in such systems is that vocational training is often viewed as a reservoir of students (often working class and/or ethnic minority) incapable or not intelligent enough for the higher status tracks (Stevens and Vermeersch 2010). It is also no surprise that strong performance inequalities, mainly related to the socio-economic status and migration background of students, exist and persist over time in Flemish education (Danhier et al. 2014). This finding sits uneasily with the imagination of a meritocratic educational system wherein only students' efforts and intelligence is said to be determinative for their results (Clycq et al. 2014). A final important element to consider for the current paper is that the vast majority of teachers in Flemish education – around 95% – has a native Flemish-Belgian background (Consuegra et al. 2016). This can create clear and explicit ethnic boundaries between the staff in front of the class and the pupils in the class, in particular in cities such as Antwerp where almost 70% of the youngsters have an immigration background (Lens et al. 2015). These characteristics make the context of Flemish education highly relevant to study identity, in particular when taking into account migration background or 'ethnic identity'.

Sample

The study was conducted over 8 weeks, in February and March 2017. We used data from 509 pupils in the 5th and 6th year of secondary education from 17 high schools in Antwerp, Belgium. 86 schools in the city of Antwerp were asked to participate; this yielded a positive response of 20 per cent. The participating schools varied according to neighborhood, ethnic composition (heterogeneous and homogeneous), educational track (academic track, vocational track and technical track[1]) and educational network (five belonged to the State network, eleven to the Catholic network and two to the City network).

While 1039 pupils were surveyed, we only used the data of Belgian native students (N=211) and Moroccan origin students (N=298). Pupils were categorized as 'native Belgians' when they were born in Belgium as well as both their parents and grandmothers, a common way of measuring 'ethnicity' in Flanders. They were categorized as 'Moroccan' according to the following three conditions: If they were born in Morocco, if one or both of their parents were born in Morocco or if both grandmothers were born in Morocco. Several studies show that differences between generations are, strikingly this may be, are rather small in Flanders and that ethnic minority identity remains to some extent salient for 'third generation' children (Clycq et al, 2014; Kostet et al, 2019). In our sample of Moroccan origin students, the vast majority of respondents – that is 84.8% – is categorized as second generation (13.5% belonged to the 1st generation and 1.7% to the 3rd generation of immigration).

Students filled out the questionnaire in class, with one or two researchers present. The questionnaire was administered in Dutch and took approximately 40 minutes.

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[1] ASO, BSO and TSO

Research design

First, we examined the extent to which Moroccan origin and Belgian native students identify with European and Flemish identity. We discussed the descriptive results and compared the mean levels of Flemish and European identity between both groups. Therefore, we conducted an independent sample *t*-test and discussed the effect sizes (Cohen's *d*). In addition, we examined the mean levels of Flemish and European identity within both groups. We conducted a paired sample *t*-test and discussed the effect sizes (Cohen's *d*) (using SPSS statistics 24). This design is in line with the research of Agirdag, Phalet and Van Houtte (2016).

Second, we continued the analysis by studying the effects of teacher support and perceived discrimination on European and Flemish identity for the subsets of Moroccan origin students and Belgian native students. For this, we conducted a multilevel regression analysis as the data consists of a clustered sample of students nested within schools (using MLwiN, two level procedure). An unconditional model was estimated to determine the amount of variance that occurs on the school level for European and Flemish identity for Moroccan students and for Belgian students. The analysis showed that for the Moroccan subset there is (only) 3.3% of the variance situated on the school level for European identity and 1.4% for Flemish identity. For the Belgian subset, there is (only) 7.2% of variance situated on the school level for European identity, and 7.2% for the Flemish identity as well. Accordingly, research indicates that most of the variation occurs within schools and between pupils (teddlie & Reynolds 2002). However, we do belief it is important to rapport a multilevel analysis to account for the nested structure of the data. Subsequently, we added the main (teacher support and perceived discrimination) -and control (gender, educational level of the parents and educational track) effects and estimated a random intercept model to explore the individual-level variables. The metric predictors are grand mean centered and unstandardized effects are reported in the tables.

Tests to see if the data met the assumption of collinearity indicated that multicollinearity was not a concern for all the models.

Variables

Dependents

To measure *European and Flemish identity* subjects had to indicate to what extent they identified as European and Flemish on a five-point scale ranging from 1 = not at all to 5 = very strongly[2] (following Baysu et al. (2011) and Saroglou and Mathijsen (2007)). Participants did not rank these identities, but gave a score on each identity. This measure was chosen considering it examines in a straightforward manner the way in which respondents appropriate these identities (Maxwell and Bleich 2014).

Independents

With respect to the variable of discrimination, we faced a few obstacles. On the questions that probed into the personal experiences of discrimination by teachers, too few students answered these questions to make a meaningful analysis (we come back to this issue in the discussion). Therefore, we shifted our attention to a related, yet more general issue on which we collected sufficient data. Responding on a five-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree), based on the school diversity inventory (Gottfredson et al. 2001), Belgian and Moroccan origin pupils were both able to answer the following questions referring to *the perceived discrimination of ethno-religious groups in school*: 'Most teachers favor students of their own ethnic or religious group', 'Students are discriminated by some teachers, because of their ethnicity or religion', 'Most teachers consider members of other ethnic groups, unfairly,

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[2] We would like to know how you describe yourself. Do you feel Belgian, a citizen of Antwerp, Christian, Moroccan, etc.? Indicate, with a mark, how strong you identify with the following groups.

as troublemakers' and 'Not everyone is treated equally at school'. The scale acquired an adequate Cronbach alpha of 0.78.

Teacher support was measured with three items: 'I feel that I can trust my teachers to talk about my private issues', 'If I talk to my teachers, I think they will try to understand how I feel' and 'If I'm having trouble with my schoolwork, I can go to my teachers for help'. The subjects responded on a five-point scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree (based on Kaye et al. 2017). This scale delivered an adequate Cronbach alpha of 0.73.

Controls

Gender was used as a dichotomous variable: 0 = 'female' and 1 = 'male'. For Belgians there are 140 females and 70 males. For Moroccans there are 180 females and 116 males. Due to an overrepresentation of females for the Belgian sample, we acknowledge less representative results, for this group, regarding to gender. The *educational level* of the parents consisted of five categories: 'Lower education', 'middle education', 'higher education' and 'other'. The reference category was 'lower education'. *The educational track* of the pupils was divided in three groups: 'Academic' (ASO), 'vocational' (BSO) and 'technical' (TSO) education. 'ASO' was selected as the reference category.

RESULTS

The extent of European and Flemish identity for Belgian and Moroccan students

The mean levels on European and Flemish identity for both groups (table 1) suggest that Belgian students have a higher level of European (M = 3.77; SD = 0.89) and Flemish identity (M = 4.06; SD = 0.95) than Moroccan students (M = 3.44; SD = 1.09) (M = 2.9; SD=1.16). Further, the independent sample *t*-test indicates that the difference between Belgian and Moroccan students is statistically significant for Flemish identity (diff = 1.156; t = 11.784;

p < 0.001). The Cohen's d (= 1.08) indicates that this is a large difference. The difference for European identity is significant as well (diff = 0.335; t = 3.609; p < 0.001). In contrast, the Cohen's d is 0.33 and, thus, shows a rather small effect size.

The paired sample *t*-test indicates that Belgian students significantly score higher on the Flemish identity, than the European identity (diff = 0.291; t = -3.828; p < 0.001). The effect size is rather small (Cohen's d = 0.31). Contrastingly, Moroccan students significantly identify more as European, than Flemish (diff = 0,552; t= 7,722, p<0,001), with a medium effect size (Cohen's d = 0.49). Thus, it can be argued that for both groups the European identity has more potential as a collective identity, than the Flemish identity.

Looking at the correlations between European and Flemish identity, there is a significant correlation for both groups. Both are medium in effect size, while the correlation is slightly stronger for the Moroccan students (r = 0.429) than for the Belgian students (r = 0.302). This indicates that the Flemish identity becomes stronger when the European identity is stronger and visa-versa.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the dependent and independent variables for Moroccan (N=298) and Belgian (N=211) students: frequencies (%), means and standard deviations.

	Moroccan (N=298)		Belgian (N=211)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Independents				
European identity	3,44 (N=283)	1,091	3,77 (N=207)	0,899
Flemish identity	2,9 (N=285)	1,162	4,06 (N=209)	0,949

Main				
Perceived discrimination	2,94 (N=289)	0,86	2,34 (N=210)	0,733
Teacher support	3,21 (N=292)	0,839	3,59 (N=210)	0,68
Controls				
% Gender	(N=296)	0,489	(N=210)	0,473
Female	60,8%		66,7%	
Male	39,2%		33,3%	
% Educational track	(N=297)	0,791	(N=211)	0,645
ASO	36,4%		41,2%	
TSO	36,7%		48,8%	
BSO	26,9%		10%	
% Educational level mother	(N=297)	1.092	(N=210)	0.847
Low	53,9%		11,9%	
Middle	22,2%		27,6%	
High	9,4%		48,6%	
Other	14.5%		11,9%	
% Educational level father	(N=290)	1,228	(N=208)	0.870
Low	37,6%		10,6%	
Middle	22,4%		28,8%	

	High	12,8%		44,7%	
	Other	27.2%		15,9%	

The effects of perceived discrimination and teacher support on Flemish and European identity for Moroccan and Belgian students

Table 2 shows the effects of perceived discrimination at school and teacher support on European and Flemish identity for the subsets of Moroccan and Belgian students. Moroccan students tend to have a higher level of European identity when they experience more support from their teacher (b = 0.193; p < 0.05). This significant effect is not found for the Flemish identity. Regarding the effect of perceived discrimination at school, there is no significant effect for Moroccan students on their Flemish and European identity. The control effects indicate that Moroccan boys significantly identify less as European than Moroccan girls (b = -0.435; p < 0.01). There is no difference for Flemish identity. In addition, having a mother with a middle educational level suggests a higher level of Flemish identity for Moroccan students, than having a mother with a low educational level (b = 0.416; p < 0.05). For European identity, there is no significant difference concerning the educational level of the parents. For both identities, there is no difference for being in a TSO or BSO educational track in comparison to Moroccan students in an ASO track.

The results for the Belgian students suggest that there is a significant effect of teacher support on their Flemish identity (b = 0.304; p < 0.01) ánd European identity (b = 0.297; p < 0.01). Regarding the effect of perceived discrimination at school, there is no significant effect for Belgian students on their Flemish and European identity. The control effects suggest that Belgian boys tend to have a significant higher level of European identity than Belgian girls (b

= 0.405; p < 0.01). There is no significant difference for gender concerning their Flemish identity. For both identities, there are no differences for Belgian students concerning their educational track and the educational level of their parents.

With respect to the hypotheses we formulated our study shows mixed results. To start with hypotheses H1a and H1b can be accepted. However, hypotheses H2a and H2b need more discussion as the results for Moroccan origin students are more complex. Contrary to what we expected in H2a, perceived discrimination does not have a negative effect on Flemish nor on European identity for Moroccan origin students. Moreover, H2b can only be partly accepted for Moroccan origin students: feeling supported by teachers (higher teacher support) has a positive effect on their European identity but not on their Flemish identity. We discuss this further below.

Table 2. Multilevel regression on European and Flemish identity for Moroccan students (N = 298) and Belgian students (N = 211): Unstandardized effects (b), standard errors (SEs), p values and model parameters.

		Moroccan students				Belgian students			
		European identity		Flemish identity		European identity		Flemish identity	
		b	(SE)	b	(SE)	b	(SE)	b	(SE)
Main	Perceived discrimination	0.021	0.079	-0.022	0.086	0.124	0.089	0.173	0.095
	Teacher support	0.193*	0.082	0.168	0.09	0.297**	0.093	0.304**	0.100
Controls	Gender (female)	-0.435**	0.139	0.055	0.151	0.405**	0.132	0.080	0.140
	Educational track (ASO)								
	TSO	0,103	0,155	0.023	0.166	-0.074	0.151	0.019	0.159
	BSO	0,357	0,186	0.287	0.198	-0.053	0.254	0.344	0.270
	Educational level mother (low)								
	Middle	-0.135	0.170	0.416*	0.186	-0.248	0.202	-0.052	0.217
	High	0.154	0.238	0.152	0.260	-0.110	0.207	0.148	0.221
	Other	-0.059	0.216	0.047	0.236	-0.065	0.259	0.233	0.279
	Educational level father (low)								
	Middle	0.227	0.173	0.117	0.190	-0.180	0.215	-0.246	0.228
	High	0.138	0.218	-0.071	0.238	-0.024	0.229	-0.379	0.240
	Other	0.064	0.181	0.014	0.196	-0.107	0.263	-0.233	0.279
Model parameters	Unconditional model								
	Constant		3.440		2.911		3.796		4.086
	Within school variance σ²		1.144		1.324		0.753		0.831
	Error term		0.099		0.144		0.076		0.084
	Log likelihood		848.469		892.589		538.532		564.158
	N		283		285		207		209
	Main model								
	Constant		3.411		2.671		3.870		4.203
	Within school variance σ²		1.057		1.268		0.669		0.776
	Error term		0.094		0.11		0.069		0.079
	% variance explained (level 1)		7.6%		4.2%		11.1%		6.6%
	Log likelihood		768.042		815.007		500.997		535.041
	N		265		265		202		204

*** p < 0.001; ** p < 0.01; * p < 0.05.*

DISCUSSION

In this paper, we addressed new emerging issues in the sociology of education and identity. Our key research question was: to what extent do ethnic majority and ethnic minority students identify with a Flemish and a European identity, and what is the impact of teacher support and perceived discrimination thereon.

First, we aimed to study the extent of Flemish and European identity for Moroccan origin and Belgian native students. The results show that Belgian native students identify more with European and Flemish identities in comparison to Moroccan origin students. However, the effect size for Flemish identity is quite large, while the effect size for European identity is rather low. In addition, and equally interesting, Moroccan origin students significantly identify more as European, than as Flemish. Because of this rather small effect size of the difference on European identity between both groups and the significant higher level of European identity for Moroccan students, the results suggest that Belgian native and Moroccan origin resemble each other more closely in terms of their European identity, than their Flemish identity (in line with Agirdag et al. 2016). At the same time the results show that the Flemish and European identity are positively correlated and are therefore not mutually exclusive. This is in line with most research arguing that, firstly, membership in a group is often highly correlated with membership in other groups (Maxwell and Bleich 2014). Secondly, studies also showed that (sub)national and supranational identities are not necessarily in contradiction or conflict with each other (Agirdag et al. 2016; Diez Medrano 2003; Reeskens and Wright 2014). This demonstrates the multi-layered character of identity underlining that collective identities are often not exclusive towards each other.

The finding that native and ethnic minority youth identifies more or less equally strong with European identity – while the 'identity gap' is much bigger with respect to (sub)national identity –was also found in a few other studies (Agirdag et al. 2016; Teney et al. 2016), we

aimed to further develop our understanding by studying these phenomena in schools. As young people spend a lot of their time in schools, the latter have always been presented as crucial socialization agents in the development of collective identities (Green 2013). Taking this into account we examined the effect of perceived discrimination and teacher support on European identity and Flemish identity for native Belgian and Moroccan origin students. Contrary to what we expected we did not find support that perceptions of discrimination in school significantly influence the extent to which respondents identify as European or Flemish. The question is why feelings of discrimination have no significant effect for Moroccan origin students despite various studies showing the Flemish educational system being quite stigmatizing, specifically towards Moroccan origin students (Nouwen and Clycq 2016; Van Praag et al. 2016). Several hypotheses could be inferred that can be studied in future research. Is it because racism and discrimination is so pervasive that what happens in the school context does not make a significant difference? Do Moroccan origin students in Flanders face a rather invisible institutionalized form of discrimination? Is it because discrimination is indeed not related to processes of identity formation in this specific educational context or, indeed, did these youngsters not perceive discrimination? Or is it because individualist explanations of the lower educational achievements of Moroccan students have been internalized and discrimination is to some extent tabooed as an explanation for differences in educational achievement (Hunt 2007; Lamont et al. 2016)?

Interestingly, our results suggest that for both groups the experience of feeling supported by their teachers positively influences their European identity. This is also the case for the Flemish identity for Belgian students, while this is not the case for the Moroccan students. Indeed, a dominant finding throughout most education research is that a supportive student-teacher relationship is of primordial importance (Klem and Connell 2004; Van Maele and Van Houtte 2011). It has a positive impact on students' school belonging, their school engagement

and their results (Nouwen and Clycq 2016). What our research shows is that it can also have a significant impact on students' collective identity. However, it is striking that supportive student teacher relations positively affect Flemish identity for Belgian students, but have no effect for Moroccan students. This may point to the 'irrelevance' of Flemish identity for Moroccan students and future research needs to probe deeper into the different factors that can account for this. Overall, this is a striking finding given that (most of) these students have spent all their lives in Flanders and have been enrolled in a Flemish educational system that explicitly stresses 'Flemish identity', and they have been interacting with a teacher force that is 95% Belgian (Flemish) native. Flemish identity is not only salient on the macro-level, e.g. in the public discourses and policies of the Flemish minister of education and other policy makers (see above), but also on the meso-level of the school policy and the micro-level of everyday interaction in the classroom (Clycq et al. 2014). The way Flemish identity is represented in dominant discourse and the way it is perceived is potentially a key factor for many ethnic minority students to not feel attracted to this identity, something future research might probe into.

Our study also looked at the influence of socio-demographic variables on identity. Contrary to the existing literature (Roose 2013; Agirdag et al. 2016), we did not find a significant effect for parental education on the European and Flemish identity (except that Moroccans with a middle-educated mother tend to have a stronger Flemish identity than Moroccans with a lower educated mother). This could be explained by a relatively low number of respondents in specific categories, in particular the few Belgian origin students from a lower SES family and the few Moroccan origin students from a higher SES family. Similarly, there was no significant effect for the educational track of the pupils. Consistent with previous studies, this study demonstrated that gender had a significant effect on the European identity and not on the Flemish identity for both groups (Agirdag et al. 2016). Research found that men

identify more strongly with the European identity than women (Kohli 2000). However, our study nuanced this finding. Belgian boys do indeed identify more strongly with the European identity than Belgian girls. Interestingly, for the Moroccan pupils, there is a reverse outcome. Moroccan boys tend to identify more weakly with the European identity than Moroccan girls do. As an analysis of the impact of gender was not our primary aim, future research is imperative to improve our understanding of this intersection between gender and ethnicity within a school context.

Social and policy implications

Our findings encourage us to approach the issue of collective identity in highly diverse contexts from a different perspective. The creation of collective identities is not only part of specific 'civic integration courses' set up by many European countries, but it is also part of everyday school life.

A first implication to consider is that a low (sub)national identification (for example with the Flemish identity) does not indicate a disidentification from broader society leading to an oppositional identity (Verkuyten and Yildiz 2007). Rather it might primarily refer to the 'irrelevance' of Flemish identity for ethnic minority students. Thus, whereas the Flemish subnational identity might be perceived as incompatible with an ethnic minority identity, European supranational identity might not be perceived in the same way. Therefore, we can argue that the European identity might have a higher potential of becoming a collective identity for both groups.

This raises questions on the role of schools and teachers in collective identity formation. It is to be expected that (sub)national identity figures more prominently in school curricula, especially given the ethnically homogeneous staff and management population in most

(Flemish) schools. Yet, at the same time European identity emerges as a more attractive identity for ethnic minority students. Faas (2016) argues that a European identity might flourish in more inclusive school environments, potentially due to more supportive teacher relations. In any case our findings urge schools and individual teachers to be aware of the impact they have, not only on the knowledge and skills accumulation of students, but also on their collective identity formation.

Finally, and relating to broader society, questions can be asked whether focussing on Flemish identity (or even Belgian identity) is a fruitful policy strategy to make 'new-comers' and ethnic minorities part of the broader national social imagination. Alternatively, should one rather look at newly bottom-up emerging collective identities, such as European identity, and acknowledge the agency of individuals – minorities in particular – in steering collective identity formation processes? These are crucial questions as minority populations are growing fast and outnumber 'native Belgian' populations in European cities such as Antwerp, Paris and Rotterdam.

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