Telling the Collective Story? Moroccan-Dutch Young Adults' Negotiation of a Collective Identity through Storytelling

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Abstract Researchers taking a social constructionist perspective on identity agree that identities are constructed and negotiated in interaction. However, empirical studies in this field are often based on interviewer–interviewee interaction or focus on interactions with members of a socially dominant out-group. How identities are negotiated in interaction with in-group members remains understudied. In this article we use a narrative approach to study identity negotiation among Moroccan-Dutch young adults, who constitute both an ethnic and a religious (Muslim) minority in the Netherlands. Our analysis focuses on the topics that appear in focus group participants' stories and on participants' responses to each other's stories. We find that Moroccan-Dutch young adults collectively narrate their experiences in Dutch society in terms of discrimination and injustice. Firmly grounded in media discourse and popular wisdom, a collective narrative of a disadvantaged minority identity emerges. However, we also find that this identity is not uncontested. We use the concept of *second stories* to explain how participants negotiate their collective identity by alternating stories in which the collective experience of deprivation is reaffirmed with stories in which challenging or new evaluations of the collective experience are offered. In particular, participants narrate their personal experiences to challenge recurring evaluations of discrimination and injustice. A new collective narrative emerges from this work of joint storytelling.

Keywords Ethnicity · Minorities · Collective identity · Narrative · Negotiation

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In the Netherlands, Moroccan-Dutch young adults deal with a negatively valued ethnic and religious identity.[1] Surveys show that Dutch citizens rank Moroccan immigrants lowest in the ethnic hierarchy (Hagendoorn 1995; Hagendoorn and Pepels 2003; Van Praag 2006). Second generation Moroccan-Dutch youths in particular are associated with drug abuse, school failure, delinquency, and crime (De Jong 2007; Gordijn et al. 2001; Harchaoui and Huinder 2003; Van Gemert 1998; Werdmölder 2005). Since 9/11, Moroccan immigrants' religion has been the target of public criticism, with Islam increasingly portrayed as a threat to Dutch values of tolerance and liberalism, and, indeed, as a threat to Dutch society (De Koning and Meijer 2010). These trends have had serious consequences for young people. The Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP) recently found that prejudice against Moroccan-Dutch young adults limited their success on the job market (Nievers and Andriessen 2010).

This article is part of a research project on the use of storytelling as a strategy to (re)construct positive individual and collective identities among Moroccan-Dutch young people in The Netherlands. Identification strategies among ethnic minorities have been a prominent subject of research in several disciplines for decades. However, both in sociology and social psychology, ethnic identification has been analyzed more often in terms of *inter*group relations than in terms of *intra*group ones. Research has focused on how (immigrant) minority groups relate to the (receiving) dominant majority. But treating relations with the dominant majority as the only significant "other" for minority groups ignores the importance of within-group interactions (Phinney 1990; Verkuyten 2005). Moreover, while research on intergroup relations often focuses on societal level relations, intergroup relations in more local situations may operate very differently (De Fina 2003; Verkuyten 2005). In this article, we focus on intra-group interaction and describe how local level interactions with out-group members provide material for negotiating identities.

To capture this process, we analyze the stories focus group participants tell each other. Scholars of ethnic identification have found in narrative a valuable tool for understanding the interactive construction and negotiation of identity (Anthias 2002; De Fina 2003, 2006, 2008; Georgakopoulou 2006; Kraus 2007; Spickard and Burroughs 2000). In the stories they tell, people define the social groups to which they do and do not belong, giving voice to the shared schemas that are the building blocks of identity (De Fina 2003). Narrative scholars caution that people do not have a single identity, or even a single identity in a particular context (De Fina et al. 2006; Hall 1996). Accordingly the stories in and through which they construct their identities are both multiple and evolving as well as jointly constructed. We follow this line of research in emphasizing the interactional and emergent quality of identities forged in narrative. However, we try to push it further by focusing on the processes of *elaboration, challenge and revision* that take place as group members narrate who they are.

We argue that Moroccan-Dutch young adults negotiate their identities in relation to each other as well as to the native Dutch by way of the stories they tell and comment on in conversation. We ask: 1) Which storylines are shared by Moroccan-Dutch young adults and what kinds of identity claims are made through these shared storylines? 2) How are storylines elaborated, challenged and revised in conversation with an audience consisting of in-group members? 3) How do these processes affect the collective identity claims made by Moroccan-Dutch young adults?

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[1] For ease of reading, we use the term "Moroccan-Dutch young adults" to refer to second generation Moroccan immigrants, who possess the Dutch nationality.

Moroccan-Dutch Young Adults

In the Netherlands, Moroccan-Dutch young adults face negative views of both their ethnic background and their religious background. The so-called 'Marokkanenprobleem' ("Moroccan problem") has spurred wide discussion in the Netherlands in the last decade (Harchaoui and Huinder 2003; Jurgens 2007; Werdmölder 2005). Moroccan-Dutch adolescents and young adults have been described as prone to drug abuse, criminality, maladjusted behavior, and poor school performance. More recently, Moroccan-Dutch youths have become symbols for delinquent group behavior (De Jong 2007; Van Gemert 2002). The term "street terrorism" has been commonly used to describe displays of violence, aggression, intimidation and harassment by Moroccan-Dutch young men (De Jong 2007).

While some scholars have sought to account for the higher rates of delinquency among Moroccan-Dutch youths by focusing on factors specific to Moroccan culture or to the migration context (Bovenkerk 1994; Pels 1991, 2003; Van Gemert 1998; Werdmölder 2005), other scholars have focused more on the consequences of popular perceptions of Moroccan-Dutch youths (De Koning 2008; Kamans et al. 2009; Ketner 2009). Among those consequences, Moroccan-Dutch young adults have turned from emphasizing their ethnic background to emphasizing their religious background as a positive source of identification (De Koning 2008; Ketner 2008).

In line with research on Muslim youth in other parts of Western Europe and the United States (e.g. Jacobsen 1998; Kinnvall and Nesbitt-Larking 2011; Mandaville 2007; Sirin et al. 2008; Sirin and Fine 2007), research in the Netherlands has shown that Moroccan-Dutch young adults' commitment to a global and "pure" Islam helps them to deal with the difficulties of their ethnic and national identification (Buitelaar 2008; De Koning 2008; Ketner 2008). In contrast to the (Dutch) national identification, which is experienced as exclusive, membership of the global Muslim community (*Ummah*) is inclusive: Identification as a Muslim transcends both the Moroccan and the Dutch identification (De Koning 2008; Ketner 2008). Moreover, in contrast to the ethnic background of Muslim youths in Western Europe, Islam constitutes a source of stability and guidance in a world that is complex and sometimes hostile. While the boundaries and behavioral mandates of ethnic identities are often fuzzy, Islam provides for a fixed set of rules based on the Quran, whose clarity helps to protect and enhance a commitment to Islam (De Koning 2008, 2009; Jacobsen 1997, 1998).

The Muslim identity, however, also has negative associations. In the aftermath of 9/11, Muslims living as minorities in non-Muslim countries have experienced heightened hostility. In the Netherlands, tensions between the native Dutch and Moroccan and Turkish Muslim communities pre-date 9/11 (Hagendoorn 1995; Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2007). However, since then, the debate about the possibility of a multicultural society has intensified, with Islamic values increasingly cast as oppressive and as incompatible with modern western ones (De Koning and Meijer 2010; Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2007).

The participants in the project described here thus have grown up in the context of hostility directed against both their ethnic and religious identity. They have reached the age of emerging adulthood, between their late teens and mid-twenties (Arnett 2000). Psychologists argue that people at this age are highly sensitive to the demands of social belonging and affiliation, and to the competing claims they face from different groups (Kinnvall and Nesbitt-Larking 2011; McAdams 2001). Caught in public controversy about their ethnic and religious identity, and subject to widespread stereotypes, these young adults struggle to find positive sources of identification at an age when it especially matters (Kinnvall and Nesbitt-Larking 2011; Sirin et al. 2008).

Storytelling and Identity

As we noted, researchers have turned to narrative analysis to gain insight into individual identities and collective ones (Archakis and Tzanne 2005; Cornell 2000; De Fina 2003, 2008; McAdams 1993; Ochs and Capps 1996; Plummer 2001; Rappaport 2000; Salzer 1998). Narratives or stories are accounts of events, but events that are "selected, organized, connected and evaluated as meaningful for a particular audience" (Riessman 1993, 1). The stories people tell offer insight into how they make sense of themselves and their social world. Stories, in this view, are not only things people tell, but also things people live (Polletta et al. 2011). The autobiographical story in particular is studied as an expression of identity: Telling the story of one's life helps individuals make sense of their experiences and to forge a sense of self (McAdams 2001; Polkinghorne 1988).

Researchers developed the concept of the *collective narrative* to refer to a collection of stories with similar themes told by group members (Cornell 2000; Plummer 2001; Salzer 1998).[2] A collective narrative need not be a single story relating the same events in the same order with the same dénouement. Rather, it is present as common themes in group members' stories. A collective narrative emerges both in recurrent experiences and in recurrent interpretations of those experiences and their import (Cornell 2000). The presence of collective narratives in individuals' self-accounts communicates a shared collective identity (Salzer 1998).

While early research on narrative identity tended to rely on long personal accounts elicited in interviews, clinical encounters, and autobiographical writing (Freeman 2007), scholars more recently have sought to capture the kinds of stories that people tell in their everyday lives. These "small stories" are closer to people's experiences (Bamberg 2007b). Bamberg (2007a), Georgakopoulou (2006, 2007) and Riessman (2003, 2004), among others, argue that stories elicited in natural contexts tend to be multiauthored, complex in structure, and often ambiguous in point. The message or the moral of a story often requires interpretation on the part of audiences, who help the narrator decide what the point of the story is (Polanyi 1989; Polletta and Lee 2006).

Rather than a sign of weakness, Polletta and Lee (2006) argue that stories' ambiguity may be their strength. Stories lacking a clear moral invite the audience to participate in making sense of experiences quite unlike their own. In addition, telling stories allows people to disagree without antagonizing each other, since the point of the story is implied rather than stated directly. Arminen (2004) uses the concept of *second story* to describe the stories that people tell in response to other people's stories. Second stories are "a particular type of response to an original story, in which the teller of the second not only claims but proves understanding of the first story through the designed resemblance of the second" (Arminen 2004, 321). Interestingly, though, the second story may not reproduce the topic, sequence, or even the point of the first story. In this article, we make use of these insights. We show that a Moroccan-Dutch identity is forged through the interpretation and reinterpretation of short stories told in conversation.

Analyzing Storytelling in Focus Groups

To study the construction and negotiation of Moroccan Dutch identities in interaction, we used focus groups. Focus groups are valuable means for capturing the social construction of

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[2] In the following, we refer to the accounts given by focus group participants as "stories." We refer to the account of what it is to be Moroccan-Dutch that these stories draw from and contribute to as "narrative."

meaning (Gamson 1992; Kitzinger 1994). The construction of shared meaning in focus groups is a complex process and we expected there to be differences among participants both in the experiences they related, and in how they interpreted those experiences. We focused on the processes that led either to a resolution of these differences, to the explicit recognition of disagreement, or to some other response. We used groups of peers since we expected them to be more at ease with each other. Additionally, a group of peers resembles most the group of people with whom we would naturally discuss certain topics in our daily lives (Hollander 2004; Kitzinger 1994).

Six focus groups were conducted, with a total of 39 participants. All participants were second-generation Moroccan-Dutch and resident citizens of the Netherlands. Groups consisted of six to seven participants, between the ages of 18 and 24. Participants were contacted through their schools and through the network of Moroccan-Dutch students already participating in the project. The focus group sessions took place in the schools and universities that the participants attended. Each focus group consisted of either all male or all female participants. Participants were currently enrolled in lower vocational training, higher vocational training, or academic level education.[3] Despite variation in the groups, we expected that a collective narrative capturing participants' experience of being Moroccan-Dutch would be discernible. The focus group sessions were partly semi-structured and partly free-associative. A topic list was used to ask participants about their experiences in school, at work, and in their neighborhood, and to ask about conversations they had had with friends and family. When participants mentioned topics that were not directly related to the topic list, they were encouraged to discuss those topics.

Since research has shown that the ethnicity of the interviewer has an effect on responses, especially when the interview is related to ethnicity (Van Heelsum 1993), two Moroccan-Dutch interviewers (one male and one female) were trained to moderate the focus group sessions. The first author of this article was always present to provide an introduction and take notes on the conversation. We decided that videotaping the groups would have been too intrusive (Gamson 1992). In the introduction to the focus group, we explained that the anonymity of the participants would be guaranteed. Each participant received a name card with a number on it. Later, we used pseudonyms for each number. With the permission of the participants, we audiotaped all focus group sessions. The sessions lasted between 60 minutes and 2 hours. The six sessions yielded 92 pages of transcribed conversation.

We began identifying stories that appeared in the transcripts using the criteria for narrative described by Labov (1972). According to Labov (1972) fully formed narratives combine a) an abstract in which the story is summarized; (b) an orientation, identifying the time, place, persons and their activity or the situation; (c) a series of complicating actions flagged by (implicit) "and then what happened" clauses ending with one that serves as dénouement; (d) an evaluation, indicating the point of the story, or why the story was told in the first place; (e) the coda, signaling the end of the narrative (Labov 1972). Although many stories in our corpus conformed to this template, others did not. Several scholars have criticized Labov's conceptualization of narrative for its emphasis on discrete events (e.g., Patterson 2008). They have called instead for experience-centered stories, which are based on their theme rather than their structure (Squire 2008). Experience-centered stories are often accounts of past events, but they also sometimes use the present or future tense, and they

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[3] Students in lower vocational training are trained for lower-skilled jobs, mainly in construction, healthcare and childcare, and clerical work. Students in higher vocational training are trained for higher skilled jobs in all sectors of the job market. Academically trained university students are trained for careers in science, but also for managerial positions in large companies and government agencies.

may include accounts of generalized states or imagined events (Squire 2008). Accordingly, our conception of story includes accounts that are in the present tense and/or that describe habitual or generic experiences.

We also modified Labov's approach by emphasizing the orientation and evaluation elements of the narrative, rather than also the abstract, complicating actions, and coda. The orientation tells us who the main actors in the story are, where the story takes place and what activity the actors are engaged in (Labov 1972). In the rest of the paper, we will refer to the orientation as the *topic* of the story. Although in many stories told by our participants, the orientation was followed by a series of complicating actions, we found that more meaning was conveyed by way of the story's evaluation (also see Polanyi 1989). Labov (1972) called the evaluation "perhaps the most important element" of the story, because it reveals the actual "point" of the story. It is "the means used by the narrator to indicate the point of the narrative, its raison d'être, why it was told, and what the narrator is getting at" (Labov 1972, 366). It answers the question: "So what?" (Patterson 2008).

We believed that a focus on recurrent topics and evaluations used in stories by group members would provide useful insights into collective identity construction. It would allow us to see patterns in the way group members expressed and evaluated experiences they had had as members of a particular group. By recounting the same experiences, group members express their identity in terms of "we are the people who…". The lacuna is filled by a tale of some sort, a record of events that captures central understandings about what it means to be a member of the group (Cornell 2000, 42). Our aim, however, was not to reify existing story structures, but rather to focus on the process by which the collective narrative is produced, reproduced, modified, and resisted (McCall 2005). By studying variation in topics and evaluations we could gain insight into how shared representations are negotiated and collectively interpreted.

We reviewed the transcripts looking for sections in which one or more participants recounted an experience along with an evaluation of the experience. Experiences could be one-time events, but they were sometimes routine or repeated episodes. We defined story topics as what the story was about, who was involved, and/or when and where the events took place. When participants told stories about particular events, a topic was attributed to the story based on the location of the event, the main activity described in the story, or a main character. For example, many storied events took place at school or work. These stories were then coded "school" or "work." An activity code was also given to each story. Stories about experiences at school or work usually included activities such as "applying for a job" or "joking with co-workers." When the main character of the story was also the main subject, the story was assigned a code based on the main character. A number of stories, for example, were about the "media." Another common topic was the "image of Moroccan-Dutch young adults." Stories with this topic didn't necessarily include locations or activities; rather, they dealt with the way Moroccan-Dutch young adults perceive themselves to be viewed by native Dutch people. These stories included more descriptive accounts of how Moroccan-Dutch young adults felt they were represented in the media. As these descriptions often included the Dutch media as an actor responsible for promulgating a negative image of Moroccans, these accounts were coded as stories.

In addition to common topics, we also looked for similarities in the ways experiences were evaluated. Stories set in "school" or about "wearing the headscarf" can make very different points: One might tell a story set in school to draw attention to the injustices Moroccan-Dutch youth confront or to draw attention to how ethnic differences fade in the context of the classroom. In coding evaluations, we were interested in the normative point participants sought to make with their stories. One of the most common evaluations in the

stories we analyzed was *injustice*. In these stories, participants described incidents that they characterized as typical of the unjust treatment of their ethnic group. Narrators themselves were usually not involved in the incident, nor did they suffer direct consequences of the events they described. Unjust treatment was often at the hands of the news media, or institutions like the criminal justice system or schools or native Dutch people in general. This evaluation was different from *discrimination*, where narrators referred to incidents in which they themselves (or someone they were close to) suffered direct negative consequences of unjust treatment, such as not getting hired for a job or being denied entrance to a nightclub or access to an educational program. Both evaluations however, communicated the point of the story and the way the narrator wanted to be understood by the audience: as a member of an unjustly treated, disadvantaged minority.

Insofar as participants articulated similar story topics and evaluations, we concluded that they were voicing a shared collective narrative. However, to say that a collective narrative exists is not to say that it is inflexible or unchanging. Like identities, narratives are subject to debate and change. To study whether and how the collective narrative of Moroccan-Dutch young adults was negotiated, when a particular storyline appeared repeatedly in conversations, we analyzed all the evaluations of the stories involved. If the evaluations were similar, we concluded that there was no negotiation about the interpretation of an event or experience. However, if in conversation with group members, participants offered contrasting or new evaluations of the event or experience, we considered the story to be negotiated. We were interested in the kinds of identity claims participants made by way of these new evaluations.

Moroccan-Dutch Young Adults' Negotiation of a Collective Narrative

In the focus group sessions, a total of 257 stories were coded. All stories were examined for similarities in topics and evaluations. We argued earlier that storytelling is a collaborative effort. Audiences participate in the process of telling stories and deciding on their meaning. In the following, we investigate the dynamics of elaboration, challenge, and revision that take place in this process. First, we show that participants often jointly *elaborated* a collective narrative. They did this by approving of others' evaluations or by supplying missing parts of the evaluation. Second, we turn to how participants challenged and *revised* the collective narrative. They did this by criticizing other participants' evaluations and by offering stories that departed in key respects from the first story. Although elaboration and revision are separated here for the purpose of analytical clarity, they often took place simultaneously as participants negotiated their collective narrative.

Elaborating a Collective Narrative

We identified 36 topics in the stories we coded. Nine topics appeared in more than ten stories each. The largest number of stories in our data collection was about "school" ($N=57$). All stories with this topic took place at school or related to experiences at school. The prominence of this topic reflects the everyday reality of our participants, who were all in school at the time, and who were in focus groups held in schools. A second prominent story topic was "work" ($N=47$), where participants recounted their experiences in the workplace or experiences in the workplace they had heard about, including applying for jobs. The third most common topic was "image of Moroccan-Dutch young adults" ($N=28$). These stories dealt with native Dutch people's image of the group.

Other common topics included: "identity" ($N=20$), which referred to stories where the narrator's ethnic or religious identity was the main topic of conversation; "media" ($N=15$), where the mass media figured as the main character; "wearing the headscarf" ($N=14$), where female participants recounted experiences of wearing a headscarf; "questions" ($N=14$), where native Dutch people asked questions about Moroccan-Dutch young adults' culture and religion; and "politics" ($N=12$), which focused on politics in general or particular politicians. As stories with these topics were told repeatedly in all focus group sessions, we consider them part of the collective narrative of Moroccan-Dutch young adults in the Netherlands. However, we argued earlier that a collective narrative depends not only on topical unity but also on similarity in the meaning given to events or experiences. Collective narratives should complete the statement, "we are the people who…" (Cornell 2000). Accordingly, in addition to the stories' topics, we studied group members' evaluations of the stories.

First, we studied evaluations that were most common across all stories we coded. We found that the most dominant evaluation by far, was that of *injustice* ($N=42$). Other dominant story evaluations were *discrimination* ($N=30$), *exclusion* ($N=29$), and *false essentialism* ($N=27$). Stories with an *injustice* evaluation described experiences of unfair treatment. Unfair treatment was often at the hands of the Dutch news media, Dutch institutions, but also native Dutch co-workers, teachers, fellow students or native Dutch people in general. Often we found that stories concerning the injustice done to Moroccan-Dutch young adults were elaborated by several group members, rather than by a single individual. Imraan and Yassin, two males in lower vocational training, for example, recount how criminal justice agencies and media emphasize ethnicity when Moroccans[4] are involved in crime:

> **Imraan**: Listen, last time they made such a list [inventory of crime involvement among Moroccans by the National Police Service Agency (KLPD)], then they give the percentage of criminality among Moroccans. Why Moroccans? Why not criminality per city, per neighborhood or the whole country? Why do newspapers insist on printing this, as if they intentionally give more attention to Moroccans, you know?
> **Yassin**: And in newspaper articles, when something happens, a murder, if it's a Dutch person, it's just a murderer. When it's a Moroccan, they have to mention it; it has to say "Moroccan background."

Participants often drew on the media as a source of ideas, images, and argument. The news media was mentioned most often as an actor in stories about injustice. These stories, like the one told by Imraan and Yassin, did not refer to a particular event that had occurred to one of the narrators personally, but rather to a more generic experience of injustice, assumed to be familiar to all members of the Moroccan-Dutch community.

Similarly, we found that group members often used the pronoun "we," instead of "I," indicating that the experience narrated was not a personal experience, but rather one shared by group members. In the male group in higher vocational training, Said begins a discussion about how Moroccan-Dutch youths are viewed:

> **Said**: I've never heard anything positive. There's a lot of us studying in higher vocational schools, university, here in [X town]. We are really a tight group, we play

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[4] Despite their status as Dutch citizens, our participants used the term "Moroccans" to refer to members of the Moroccan-Dutch community.

soccer together, we have fun together. I never hear anything positive about us, but when I make a mistake then I will suffer the consequences immediately.

Malik: Then they really focus on it. It's not just that, it's also in court. A Dutch crook will receive a lighter sentence than a Moroccan one.

Nassim: This has been proven by research.

Malik: A young person, for example, who was involved in a fight […]. The judge or even the police might think it's just a little row. But when a Moroccan is involved, it immediately becomes a major offense, it follows you for the next 35 years.

Said: That is really a pity. We just have to…we know how we are looked upon, I think there shouldn't be any difference.

Here, Said and Malik jointly narrate the experience of injustice, in this case at the hands of the schools, courts, and police. By using the pronoun "we," Said indicates that he is not just speaking for himself, but rather that this experience of unfair treatment is shared by his friends. In the last sentence, given the contributions to the narrative by Nassim and Malik, the "we" Said uses might refer to Moroccan-Dutch young people in general. By using the pronoun "you" in "it follows you for the next 35 years," Malik's story may be called a habitual story, implying that this is not only his experience (indeed, not even his experience) and that this is not a one-time experience.

We also looked at the evaluations that were most common in the stories with the dominant story topics we identified. We wondered if the evaluations that appeared in the generic or habitual stories (i.e., the stories of collective experience rather than individual experience) appeared also in participants' stories of their everyday experiences in school and at work. With regard to stories with the topic "school," we found two dominant evaluations: *false essentialism* ($N=12$) and *prejudice* ($N=7$). *False essentialism* was used when participants described being singled out as a representative of the group or were asked to respond for the group as a whole despite the fact that they had no special expertise or experience of the issue under discussion (for example, criminality or terrorism). In the next quote, three female participants enrolled in academic level education discuss how Moroccan-Dutch students are often singled out in the classroom when the discussion is about Islam, immigration, or Moroccan-Dutch identity:[5]

Salima: We once watched this movie "Submission" [about the oppression of Muslim women] by Hirsi Ali [former member of the Dutch parliament] and we already felt it coming… When the movie ended, questions were asked and everybody was like: How did you feel as Muslims when you saw this?

Senna: You really had to justify yourself, you know. Because they looked at the images and said, my god is it that bad? And then they turned around to look at us.

Soumaya: And then you have to tell them that it's not true.

In this quote, Salima, Senna, and Soumaya jointly recount their experience in the classroom. Salima and Senna are classmates and shared the experience that Salima begins to narrate. Although Soumaya is enrolled in a different program and was not actually present at the scene, she fills in part of the story and evaluation. Soumaya's contribution to this story is an interesting one, as it is not clear whether she has had a similar experience herself, or whether she has heard about similar experiences from friends. In this case, the story elaborated by Salima, Senna and Soumaya can be considered generic in the sense that the

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[5] To talk about "Moroccan-Dutch identity" seems to suggest that there is a single Moroccan-Dutch identity. We use the term nevertheless because our participants talked about Moroccan and Muslim identities as coherent wholes. We thank one of our reviewers for this point.

story is not only about the narrators, but rather it is the story of the average Moroccan-Dutch young adult. By jointly evaluating their experience in terms of *false essentialism*, Salima, Senna and Soumaya describe a relatively powerless position, in which they are compelled to defend their religious heritage to fellow students and teachers.

With regard to the second story topic, "work," we found the dominant evaluation to be *discrimination* ($N=19$). In the male group in higher vocational training, for example, Said and Hassan share their experiences on the job market:

> **Hassan**: Before I studied here, I studied marketing and communication. I think I applied for an internship like 50 or 60 times here in this province. It was, by the way, not due to the letter that I wasn't invited for any of them. Eventually I did my internship in [name of city]. You know, yeah, this is kind of an extreme example but, you're discriminated against every day.
>
> **Said**: The same thing happened to me once. I remember it well; I applied to work at the cinema. It was 3, 4 years ago. I had applied and heard nothing and then 2 or 3 days later, my sister worked there and they told her, "Bring him with you." And then they saw how I looked … and they saw that I looked neat and then they immediately said "you can work here." But I didn't want to anymore. I thought like, you employers, you don't even send me back a letter, you don't reply, then I don't want to work here.

Here, Hasan and Said jointly recount the experience of Moroccan-Dutch young adults on the job market. Although there was nothing wrong with Hassan's application letter, it took him some time to find an internship, which he interprets as a sign of discrimination. Said supports Hassan's evaluation by offering a similar story of his own. His introduction, "The same thing happened to me" flags the introduction of a second story (Arminen 2004). Although Hassan and Said's stories are quite different, the reference to the topic of "applying" and the *discrimination* evaluation in Said's story supports the symbolic tie between the two participants' stories. In Said's story, the people at the cinema are implied to have assumed that Said was not a good prospect based on his Moroccan last name. It was only when he showed them his neat appearance that they changed their minds. Said's point is that he, like Hassan, was discriminated against by his potential employer. Based on this interpretation, Said eventually decided to decline the job offer. However, although Said's story is designed to support Hassan's story, the point of the story Said tells is actually somewhat ambiguous. The only thing standing between Said and getting hired at the cinema was his decision not to accept the job offer. However, nobody in the group responds to this ambiguous evaluation and, in the context of the group, its message is jointly evaluated in terms of *discrimination*. Both Said and Hassan's stories support the collective experience of being discriminated against in the job market. They represent the Moroccan-Dutch identity as a disadvantaged minority identity.

With regard to the third story topic, "image of Moroccan-Dutch young adults," we found two dominant evaluations: *injustice* ($N=16$), referring to the feeling of being wronged in some way, and *prejudice* ($N=9$), referring to the perception of a stereotype held by native Dutch people. The following story is told by Rachid, a young man in academic level education:

> **Rachid**: Yeah, I think everybody has experienced that. What I really hate is that, for example, when you're waiting for the tram or the bus and there's an old lady and she immediately grabs her bag. I absolutely hate that. That is a prejudice that everybody here has experienced.

Here, Rachid shares his personal experience of prejudice based on a common view of Moroccan-Dutch youths as thieves. In his story, he refers to the shared character of this experience: "I think everybody here has experienced that." It is unclear whether Rachid's

story refers to one particular experience or to a more generic experience. Like Malik's story in an earlier example, it may even be that Rachid's story is a habitual story: Through the use of the personal pronoun "you" in "when you are waiting for the tram or the bus," Rachid implies that this is not just his experience and that it is not an isolated experience.

In order for a collection of stories to become a collective narrative, reflecting a collective experience, group members must agree on the evaluation of these stories. The analysis so far suggests that there was agreement about the evaluation of experiences, with evaluations of *injustice*, *discrimination*, and *false essentialism* marking the stories of Moroccan-Dutch young adults. In addition, we have shown through an analysis of how our participants responded to each other's stories that group members assisted each other in constructing this narrative, emphasizing the shared character of experiences that were deemed typical of the group. Many of these stories were the product of what we called generic or habitual storytelling, referring to the narration of experiences of Moroccan-Dutch young adults or Moroccan-Dutch in general, or the narration of experiences that were deemed common among group members (also see Archakis and Tzanne 2005). We also found that group members seconded each other's personal experiences in order to emphasize the collective character of their experience of ethnic disadvantage.

However, concluding that Moroccan-Dutch young adults create a single, static collective identity through the stories they tell would ignore the contention over stories that occurred in our focus groups. In fact, the generic or habitual character of the experiences recounted, combined with the practice of co-constructing particular narratives, suggest to us that the narrative was collective not because every individual shared the same experience but because the narrative had been told so frequently.

We turn now to the ways in which our participants struggled with their relation to a disadvantaged minority identity and the collective narrative underpinning it. Although there was general agreement among participants about the position of Moroccan-Dutch young people in Dutch society, participants also used their own everyday experiences to challenge and revise the collective narrative. Whereas stories about the "image of Moroccan-Dutch young adults" were rarely contested, participants' personal stories about experiences in school and in the workplace were often contested.

Challenging and Revising the Collective Narrative

The collective narrative was challenged when group members disagreed on how a particular experience should be evaluated. It was revised when group members offered stories that departed in key respects from the collective storyline. These processes involved a re-evaluation of the collective identity, appropriating certain elements of it while rejecting others.

As we demonstrated in the last section, second stories are important instruments for expressing agreement. However, second stories can also be used to re-evaluate the first narrator's experience. Arminen explains that second stories can be used to re-contextualize the original story, highlighting different aspects of the story or interpreting it differently, "thereby providing a new understanding of the first story and a new angle to the teller of that story" (Arminen 2004, 332). Second stories figured this way in conversations about participants' experiences on the job market. Experiences on the job market were discussed often in all groups and the evaluations of these experiences were highly contested. For example, when a group of young women in lower vocational training are discussing the advantages and disadvantages of having a Moroccan background, the topic of job discrimination comes up:

> **Interviewer**: Are there any disadvantages to being Moroccan?
> **Karima**: That you don't get hired.

Nisrin: You hear that more often.

[…]

Karima: You hear it more often, but it's just true.

[…]

Interviewer: Have you experienced that yourself?

Nisrin: No, not me, I haven't finished school yet so I don't know how it feels, so…

Nadia: I think particularly older people. That's what I think.

Malika: People who have finished school.

Nisrin: Yeah when you've graduated. Because my brother, he graduated last summer and he is still looking for a job. They still haven't hired him anywhere.

Karima: It's just the opposite, I think that, when you have a Higher Vocational School diploma you will get hired, right? Because when I think about it…

Nisrin: It depends.

Karima: My brother-in-law, my brother-in-law has a diploma. He just applied every-where and did a lot of job interviews […]

Nisrin: Yeah, but my brother also has a diploma. But I guess it just depends.

At the outset of the discussion, Karima and Nisrin both draw attention to the disadvantaged position of Moroccan-Dutch young adults on the job market. Whereas Nisrin's "you hear that more often," suggests that the experience of disadvantage on the labor market is based on hearsay rather than experience, Karima affirms the veracity of the collective narrative by insisting, "it's just true." When the interviewer inquires whether the participants themselves have been exposed to discrim-ination on the job market, Nisrin responds that considering she is still in school, she has not. She thus puts the credibility of the collective narrative at stake. Nadia and Malika help restore it by re-affirming that discrimination is indeed an experience common to Moroccan-Dutch people, in particular "older people" or "people who have finished school." This means that, even though they themselves have not experienced discrimination, the young women in this group assist each other in upholding the narrative of Moroccan-Dutch people not being hired easily.

Nisrin decides to second the more generic narrative with a story of her own: She relates how her brother, who graduated with a diploma in higher vocational training, hasn't been able to find a job in several months. Karima responds to this story with the story of her brother-in-law who also has a diploma in higher vocational training. Although Karima's story is very similar to Nisrin's, it departs from the evaluation Nisrin gives to the story: Instead of lingering on how difficult it was for her brother-in-law to find a job, she emphasizes the effort he put into it and, implicitly, how his persistence led to success. Karima's story is an attempt to revise the story put forward earlier by offering a story that departs from the collective narrative and presents a new angle: When you try hard, you will succeed. Interestingly, although Karima and Nisrin are both involved in elaborating the collective narrative of discrimination in the job market, in the second part of the exchange Karima challenges this narrative, refuting it with a personal experience, and adding an evaluation of *justice* to the collective narrative. This contribution to the collective narrative doesn't convince Nisrin, but by conceding that "it depends," she agrees that there is room for evaluations other than *discrimination*.

A similar conversation occurred among male participants in higher vocational training. In a later stage of the conversation between Hassan and Said that we referred to earlier, the participants talk about "positive discrimination" in the job market. Said, who was eventually hired as a teacher at a school that had problems with Moroccan-Dutch pupils, begins:

Said: Yes, I have equal opportunities, but I'm not that happy about it. It sometimes feels like doing the dirty work.

Fikry: What dirty work?

Said: For example, I wouldn't have been hired if there weren't any problems with Moroccan-Dutch young people, it feels like…

Hassan: You are being used aren't you? You're hired because there are problems with Moroccan-Dutch youth.

Fikry: That is just one way of seeing it. There don't have to be problems with Moroccans. It can also just be young people in school who simply do their best, but want someone from their own group, their own culture, whom they could look up to. So it doesn't always have to be negative. In building A, Mr. El Bouiadi [Moroccan] teaches courses and there are a lot of Moroccan boys and girls who think he is great.

Samir: But you know what, Fikry? It also has a negative aspect, because in the end you want to be hired for your competence and skills and not for your background and indirectly you are being associated with it. You are a Moroccan, okay, positive discrimination, maybe there is a Dutch person with better skills, but you are Moroccan, okay …
[…]

Fikry: Yes, you can see it negatively, but I see it positively.

While Said initially evaluates his experience of being hired for a teaching job in terms of *equal opportunities*, he follows this evaluation with one of *discrimination*, explaining that he had been hired to do the "dirty work," solving the school's problems with Moroccan-Dutch pupils. With the term "dirty work" Said makes a conscious or unconscious reference to the work that first generation Moroccan immigrants were hired to do: hard, unskilled work in factories and harbors. Hassan, whose initial account of discrimination was supported by Said, seconds Said's evaluation by affirming that, "you are being used, aren't you?" Then Fikry enters the discussion. He too was hired at a local school with many first- and second-generation immigrant children. Whereas Fikry's story builds thematically on the story by Said, his evaluation of the events described is rather different. Fikry, in this fragment, re-assembles Said's story elements to re-evaluate the experience of positive discrimination. Without directly disputing Hassan and Said's arguments, Fikry uses a story to argue that Moroccan-Dutch pupils need positive role models to look up to. While Samir, at that point, tries to support Hassan and Said's interpretation of the experience of positive discrimination, Fikry sticks to his evaluation: "You can see it negatively, but I see it positively." The point made by Said, Hassan, and Samir about positive discrimination is in line with earlier stories about discrimination on the job market. By contrast, Fikry challenges the collective narrative by re-evaluating the experience described by other group members. By means of the re-assembled storyline, Fikry challenges the generalizability of Hassan and Samir's interpretation of the collective narrative. Instead of focusing on the deprived position of Moroccan-Dutch young adults, Fikry interprets the same events in a positive way.

Later in the interview, when group members pick up the thread of the collective narrative of discrimination on the job market, another participant in the same group, Malik, brings up his own experience in the personnel department of a temporary employment agency:

Malik: You actually should consider that you are not the only one applying. I worked in the personnel department at a temp agency and I know exactly how it goes. The best way to get in somewhere is through a network, through someone… it's just the best way to get in. If you are just one in a stack of resumes […] of people with the same qualifications. On the other hand they also look at your appearance […]

Interviewer: But do you mean someone's appearance or whether he looks like a Moroccan or a Muslim?

Malik: That too. We just looked at things… I suggested some people and according to my manager they were not good, because yeah, it was a Christian organization. And

they wouldn't fit in. …Who says they [the Christian organization] think that way, but the other party [the temp agency] assumes they do. So what did we do? We sent them some neat looking Dutch people who weren't even Christians, but looked a bit like ones…

Although Malik's story seconds the collective narrative thematically, talking about the chances of finding work, it departs in key respects from the preceding stories. Malik uses his personal experience in the temp agency to give insight into how employment agencies work. His evaluation is that there is some justice in the system. He knows from experience that jobs are hard to find and his friends should realize that they are not the only ones applying. The sheer number of applications is the obstacle to getting hired, not the ethnicity of applicants, in Malik's story. Moreover, Malik argues that Moroccan-Dutch young adults seeking work have a responsibility to maintain a network, which will improve their chances of "getting in." In other words, the collective narrative of "Moroccan-Dutch young adults are discriminated against on the job market" doesn't figure in his personal story. Rather, Malik opens up the possibility that other participants might see their experiences in a different way.

Interestingly, Malik's story also recasts the role usually attributed to employers in participants' stories. Whereas employers are mostly described as rejecting Moroccan-Dutch job applicants based on their ethnic background, in Malik's story the employer was only doing what he was paid to do, namely, proposing the best candidates based on the profile of the organization. When Malik says, "We also looked at your appearance," the interviewer asks whether Moroccan or Muslim characteristics were important in this selection process. Malik acknowledges that they were but then goes on to identify a different logic at work. Malik explains that he and his manager, anticipating that certain candidates would fit the profile of their client's organization better, "sent some neat looking Dutch people," indicating that he and his employer worked together in selecting native Dutch participants. In this way, Malik questioned the disadvantaged minority identity put forward by his friends. Where that identity suggested a subordinate position vis á vis the majority, Malik positioned himself at the same level as his native Dutch manager.

Later in this exchange, Said, who earlier supported the collective narrative of discrimination, gives the conversation an interesting turn by saying:

Said: But there are also good companies. What I always do is send them a picture [of myself]. One way or another, they are afraid of the unknown or whatever. Always send a picture. Then they'll think: He sent us this picture for a reason.

Whereas Said earlier was a fervent defender of the collective narrative, now, in tune with Malik, he is sympathetic to employers and asserts that Moroccan-Dutch young adults can overcome employers' initial hesitation to hire a Moroccan. Once employers see a neat looking job candidate rather than an application written by a Moroccan, they will overcome their initial doubts about hiring Moroccan-Dutch people. By telling this story, Said seems to contradict the collective identity claim he seconded earlier, arguing that on a more personal level the disadvantaged minority identity can be overcome. Participants used an emphasis on personal agency rather than a reliance on the collective experience to challenge and revise the collective narrative. Although participants knew their position in Dutch society was not always favorable, they believed in their capacity to overcome the difficulties they faced. Instead of harmonizing their stories with earlier storylines, they used their personal stories of individual agency to challenge the collective narrative of a disadvantaged minority.

Participants' conversations about the position of Moroccan-Dutch young adults on the job market showed group members negotiating the generalizability of their collective

narrative. Although generic or habitual narratives were easily produced and reproduced, the collective narrative was challenged and revised mainly in participants' stories about their own experiences. Although the quotes above show that it was easy and, in the setting of a group, probably tempting to harmonize their experiences with the collective narrative, participants struggled to determine to what extent they should rely on the collective narrative to make sense of their own experience.

We have used the concept of second stories to analyze stories that seemed to be aimed at challenging the collective narrative. By re-assembling certain story elements, or offering stories that departed in key respects from the stories told before, participants reevaluated prior storylines. While participants elaborated the generic or habitual collective narrative to assert a disadvantaged minority identity, these new stories were used to question a disadvantaged minority identity.

Discussion and Conclusion

Although researchers taking a social constructivist perspective on identity agree that identities are constructed and negotiated in interaction, few studies have examined just how that construction and negotiation between group members actually occurs. In this study, we have explored how a collective identity was negotiated by a group of second-generation Moroccan-Dutch youths in the Netherlands. With Moroccan-Dutch youths facing increased stigmatization based on both their ethnic and religious background, it is essential that we understand the consequences of stigmatization for the way in which these youths interpret their experiences and their position in relation to native Dutch people. At the same time, it is important to recognize that despite stigmatization, Moroccan-Dutch youths find ways to challenge and resist a disadvantaged position.

We have shown that the Moroccan-Dutch identity is defined through a collective narrative dominated by experiences of discrimination and injustice. This narrative, which is firmly grounded in media discourse and popular wisdom, represented the position of Moroccan-Dutch young adults in Dutch society as disadvantaged. In focus group discussions, participants assisted each other in elaborating a particular experience or evaluation, or alluded to the generic or habitual character of particular experiences. Although there was agreement on how the Moroccan-Dutch identity should be described, this agreement was not strict. Participants struggled with the fact that on the local level of everyday interaction, there was never just one story.

We used the concept of second stories to shed light on two aspects of the negotiation of the Moroccan-Dutch identity. Second stories sometimes were used to support the stories told by other participants. But second stories were also used to re-assemble elements from the first story to produce a more positive evaluation of the events or experience recounted. In this way, participants took issue with the generalizability of the collective narrative. Through the reevaluation of old stories or the telling of new stories, participants invited their audience to imagine new ways of understanding the Moroccan-Dutch identity. Experiences of fair treatment rather than unfair or discriminatory treatment were thematized in these stories, along with logics of action by Dutch natives that were not based on prejudice.

By focusing on the process as much as the content of storytelling in interaction we were able to demonstrate that collective identities are both stable *and* fluid. Our participants' storytelling supported a collective identity but their stories were at the same time diverse and in some ways inconsistent. That said, stories affirming the disadvantaged minority identity predominated in all our groups. This shows the strength of the collective narrative. Trying to

change the collective narrative was a tricky exercise: Participants' negative experiences seemed to provide richer story material and to have made a more lasting impression than their positive experiences. Moreover, the negotiation of storylines did not always lead to the acceptance of a new storyline. Heated debates were sometimes provoked by the proposal of new storylines, but not resolved. Sometimes, participants seemed uncertain as to the right way to understand a particular experience. Often, discrepancies between perceived injustices to the group on a societal level contrasted with participants' own experiences, leaving individuals to express conflicting identity statements.

The use of focus groups proved effective in charting intra-group negotiations of identity. These, we believe, offer analytical insights into the simultaneously fixed and changeable character of collective identities. By pointing to the gap between personal experiences and collective stories, they also point to some of the challenges involved in integrating Moroccan-Dutch youths into Dutch society. But our focus groups also demonstrated complexities to the process of identity negotiation that deserve further study. The discrepancies between identity statements point to the value of thinking about storytelling as a situated performance. Rather than just telling and sharing stories, Moroccan-Dutch young adults were performing their identities in the context of the focus group. By performing stories of the disadvantaged minority identity, group members may have been communicating how they wanted to be seen by the interviewers. Similarly, participants may have harmonized their experiences to those narrated by their friends and classmates to emphasize their group membership. We do not question the veracity of the stories our participants told, but both the stories and the identities expressed in those stories may have been in part a reaction to the presence of an academic audience on the one hand, and close relations with in-group members on the other. Since participants wanted to convey to us the experience of being a disadvantaged minority, they may have been reluctant to tell stories that related to other aspects of their collective identity. Indeed, we observed that some participants either expressed uncertainty about the appropriateness of telling certain stories, or told stories in especially vague ways. A more detailed study into the performance of identities in focus groups would tell us more about when and which stories are told or not told.

As our groups were homogenous in composition in terms of gender and educational level, we were able to compare the topics and evaluations discussed in the different groups. Young men, for example, were more likely to narrate experiences of prejudice based on their ethnic background than young women. Although the young women in our focus groups narrated their daily experiences as affected by their ethnic background, their visible commitment to Islam (through the practice of veiling), undeniably shapes their everyday experiences. We plan to compare the ways in which Moroccan-Dutch young adults separated by gender and educational level elaborate and revise the Moroccan-Dutch identity in a subsequent study. It seems clear, however, that the position of our participants at the intersection of different identities influences how they negotiated their collective narrative and identity.

There is still a great deal to learn about how Moroccan-Dutch young adults negotiate their identity in interactional contexts. A more mixed composition of the focus groups in terms of gender, educational levels and ethnic backgrounds, for example, could shed more light on the meaning group members give to their identity in different interactional contexts. But we would also want to know something about how young adults narrate their identities in naturally occurring contexts. Perhaps most importantly, although we have shown that Moroccan-Dutch identities are negotiated, we have not traced the consequences of this negotiation for how Moroccan-Dutch young adults interact with each other and with native Dutch in their everyday lives. Doing so, we believe, will be essential to more successfully integrating Moroccan-Dutch young adults into Dutch society.

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