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## **Part II**

# **International and Intergroup Comparisons of Ethnic Minority Students' Experiences of Otherness in Schools**

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## 7

# Intricacies of Ethnicity: A Comparative Study of Minority Identity Formation during Adolescence

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## Introduction

This chapter discusses the formation of the ethnic identity of teenagers belonging to various 'visible' minorities across Europe. By analysing their narrative constructions, formulated in face-to-face interviews revolving around relevant experiences within and outside the community, we aim to explore shared characteristics and common features of the identification process. This process is conceptualised here in terms of identity models and identity strategies.

*Identity models* refer to background conditions, ranging from the characteristics of families and communities to the policy context and the larger political, economic and cultural environment which function as a 'web of meanings' (Geertz 1977) in processes of socialisation and individuation. Hence, by reflecting on the given circumstances, these models include sets of viable life strategies that are allowed or even supported by the internal rules and expectations of the in-group and of the majority society. It was assumed that identity models as mediated by the immediate environment, especially by the parents, can be explored in terms of ethnicity, and vice versa: ethnic identity is related to other social identities that are derived from all sorts of circumstances (gender, religion, social status, migration, political ideology, etc). Models imply relatively static constructions providing reference points to individuals which together constitute the blueprints of identity strategies.

*Identity strategies* represent the manifest aspect of identity formation and are the ways in which individuals actually relate to their ethnic belonging and perceive their current and future position in society (Phinney 1992). Because our chapter is concerned with adolescents, it seemed all the more appropriate to study identity in the making as a set of responses to outward

circumstances. We also propose considering the future prospects, visions and aspirations of teenagers which, in turn, reflect their understanding of their present condition. Given their age, the unfinished nature of identities is accentuated. Moreover, the ethnicity of our respondents also exacerbates the emotional charge of their self-images. In trying to grasp identities that are in constant transformation, while underpinned by solidified structures within larger (local and national, social and political) contexts, it was acknowledged that the respondents' self-identifications reflect, in particularly sensitive ways, widespread practices of ethnic (religious, national and racial) labelling that are prevalent in the given country (Verkuyten 2005).

The discussion below focuses on the perceived positive and negative aspects of ethnic belonging, its ascribed or self-ascribed nature, and its connection with integration. Our analysis is primarily concerned with the extent to which minority ethnic students think that their culture, customs, behavioural rules and very existence is accepted and respected, or, on the contrary, the degree to which they feel excluded because of the given implications and perceived traits of their 'ethnicity'. By reflecting on the educational, familial and occupational aspirations of minority ethnic students, we examined whether these reinforce ethnic separation – that is, enclosure in or reliance on one's own ethnic community – or rather enhance integration or assimilation into the larger society.

### **Dimensions of ethnicity: A typology**

Amidst the complexity of components, two sets of cross-cutting factors proved to be decisive in the development of identity strategies. The first denotes whether or not separation from the majority is a matter of voluntary choice by the individual or the minority community, or, on the contrary, whether it is a consequence of social pressures and oppression by the majority society. The second kind of distinction refers to the personal drive to express or, contrarily, to suppress ethnic difference. Obviously, these latter predispositions, again, are framed by outside conditions that not only impose constraints on the development of identity but, indeed, invest it with meaning. The combination of positions along the two factors allowed for the classification of identity strategies into four categories, using a two-by-two matrix. The four cells of Table 7.1 represent typical patterns of identity formation – namely, 'ghetto-consciousness', 'responses to slum existence', 'affirmation of ethnic (or religious) pride', and 'striving for assimilation/cosmopolitanism'.

The voluntary as opposed to the involuntary assumption<sup>1</sup> of ethnicity refers to the key instances determining ethnic belonging: individual agency as opposed to outward social and political forces, respectively. Along this dimension, ethnic ghetto and slum dwellers are distinguished from the residents of (mainly lower-middle-class) ethnic neighbourhoods and (usually

Table 7.1 Patterns of identity formation

	Maintenance of difference	Trivialisation of difference
Involuntary assumption of ethnicity	Ghetto consciousness	Responses to slum existence
Voluntary assumption of ethnicity	Affirmation of ethnic (or religious) pride	Striving for assimilation/cosmopolitanism

well-off) families living dispersed among the majority society.<sup>2</sup> This variation is conditioned mainly by historical and cultural factors, including political tendencies, rather than merely by class or social status. Being born into a ghetto or slum provides few chances of self-determination, even if it does not prevent individual reflections on group belonging. By contrast, taking pride in one's ethnic origin or religious belonging, melting into the majority society, or the adoption of a supra-ethnic ideological stance marking cosmopolitanism all imply some degree of individual will, the emergence and viability of which is, again, determined by the dominant political ideology and the historical and cultural context. Hence preconditions in terms of social and political pressures and opportunities which shape ethnic strategies must always be taken into account. Another way of looking at these preconditions would be to differentiate between compelled as opposed to self-conscious ways of assuming ethnic identity and entailing differing degrees of agency.

The other axis – that is, the maintenance as opposed to the trivialisation of ethnic difference – accentuates the fact that ethnicity, whether ascribed or self-ascribed, allows for some variation in identity strategies, especially in terms of expressing or suppressing ethnic identity. Nevertheless, being different is seldom a matter of free will but rather represents, at its best, the outcome of a conditioned choice and, at its worst, an inevitable fate. This situation involves serious struggles for the members of socially excluded minority groups who try to earn social respect and enforce their interests in one way or another. As the management of identities is always a work of both power and will, the conceptual opposition presented here refers to the two extreme poles of a continuum. The categories of our diagram are intended to indicate that ethnic identities are mainly reactive, working upon the given circumstances, yet leaving more or less room for action and self-reflection. Conditioned by the social status and situation of the given minority group within a particular historical and cultural context, and fuelled by individual or collective aspirations that are adjusted to the available patterns of identification, ethnic difference may be maintained and supported or trivialised, refused and even abandoned through the employment of identity strategies.

**Ghetto consciousness**

Ethnic ghettos are isolated and socially deprived urban neighbourhoods, separated from the majority society. Such segregated residential areas are characteristically populated by extended families in which parents are mostly uneducated and engaged in menial jobs. Due to the limited educational and employment opportunities and the marginalised status of the inhabitants, these places show a high concentration of social problems, such as poverty and unemployment. Life in the ethnic ghetto is characterised by permanence, even immobility, and also has a great deal of instability and insecurity. Amidst these conditions there are hardly any chances to break out. Thus, ghettos have a particular propensity for reproducing the low and excluded social status of the inhabitants, including educational disadvantages.

Among our interviewees the clearest examples of identity strategies as conditioned by ethnic ghettos are provided in the countries of post-socialist transformation and concern the Roma minority. Certain post-colonial minorities, such as Algerians in France or Afro-Caribbeans in the UK, also fit this paradigm, at least when they are relegated to stigmatised urban areas. The consciousness and attitudes of these teenagers is marked by a sense of being born into a closed and isolated community that is despised by the majority society and not valued much by the insiders either. Thus they experience ethnicity as a confinement rather than a source of empowerment, which is imposed on them and does not allow for much variation in terms of future expectations.

Given the general destitution of the area, the local schools attended by those of our interviewees who fall into this category are usually of poor quality, which induces poor school performance and provides strongly limited opportunities for further education. If at all, students continue their studies in nearby vocational schools which typically enforce strong gender distinctions. Thus girls are mostly trained to work in the less-qualified service sector as hairdressers, shop assistants or kitchen employees, while boys usually acquire qualifications in traditional industrial or building trades as mechanics or painters. Such an education ensures that these young people will end up at best in low-paid blue-collar jobs. As expressed by a Czech Roma adolescent, 'If you are Roma and you are a bit brown, you can hardly find a job.' When ethnoracial discrimination has less of a stronghold on individual expectations, the future seems to be utterly unpredictable: 'If I finish school and find a job, then it will be good enough. It might be better, or might be worse... One can't really plan the future,' said a Hungarian Roma teenager.

Given the perceived lack of future opportunities, a kind of resigned passivity and lack of ambition characterise these adolescents. Defeatism originates in the strong stereotypes held against the group which become interiorised as autostereotypes that function as self-fulfilling prophecies.

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Since they are bound to fail, they had better not even try doing anything. 'I think non-Roma are different because they want to achieve some goal. Roma do not... they are often lazy, lacking goals,' explained a Czech Roma.

Even if the children from the ghetto, like most youngsters of their age group, freely entertain hopes for a full adult life at an early age, they see how futile such day-dreaming is as soon as they become conscious of their circumstances. Experiences of hostility on the part of the majority society and (fear of) discrimination make them relinquish any hopes for a better future. Their desperation increases when they understand that their fate is tied to that of their community and, subsequently, that they are unable not only to change their own lives but also to influence the future of the community. The acknowledgment of this sad state of affairs is expressed by a 15-year-old Romanian Roma girl:

We live in the landfill. Recycled material, copper, aluminium, beer canes... I think having children in the house only involves problems and trouble. If one day dearth comes, how will you give them what they need? But you do tomorrow the same as you do today, as the wheel spins... When I was little, I wanted to become a doctor. I wanted to change my house, human perspectives, and discrimination against Gypsies. I thought if I had a high position, I could help the poor. If I had where to stay, where to work, I would do better... Obviously, you have three options: to steal, to beg, or to prostitute yourself.

Instead of communal ties, ghetto consciousness is dominated by a lack of belonging. As a result of the deterioration of community life, the valuation of traditions or ethnic consciousness does not thrive here. Hence, conventional ethnic markers such as language, customs or religion have only very limited significance, if any at all. Ghetto communities maintain very scarce inter-ethnic relations and almost no positive connections with the majority. This state of affairs is clearly signalled by residential and educational segregation. The main source of self-differentiation is represented by occasional conflicts with the majority society. Socioethnic division from the surrounding society is reinforced by symbolic barriers too. The other means of feeling unique for those who differ slightly from the in-group is by distancing themselves from fellow ghetto dwellers, manifesting in this way a kind of compensatory self-esteem. This is illustrated by the words of a Hungarian 'Romungro' boy:

We are normal, but the Vlach Gypsies are different from us. They relate to everything differently, they talk differently, they are self-conceited... they cannot have fun without fighting and making a big row. They act as if they were kings. We are not like that, we know how to have fun and

party, we can talk to any people, and we don't care whether the person is Hungarian or not Hungarian.

Another source of compensatory self-esteem is derived from successfully coping with hardship and humiliation. This comprises the seeds of what in more favourable circumstances could become a sort of ethnic pride. Hence, even though they are the product of negative conditions, the locality and its community may become associated with a positive sense of belonging together and some level of group cohesion can even be identified.

The coercions holding the collective together result in weak self-determination that fails to produce positive self-esteem. Still, in the face of an outside threat, the ghetto community, in particular the extended family, may function as a protective shield. The lack of future prospects enhances the importance of family values and expectations so that eventually many young people decide to stay in the familiar environment and continue with the way of life seen in the family. The supportive network of the family and the role models provided by the immediate environment help in coping with difficulties and getting along in life. The lack of any perspectives and entrepreneurial spirit, coupled with the acknowledgement of having to rely on one's 'own kind', inadvertently reinforce community feelings: 'we hold together more', 'Gypsies and Gypsies are more attached . . . they do not look down on one another,' said a Hungarian Roma.

#### **Affirmation of ethnic (or religious) pride**

By contrast, when separation from the majority society occurs on a voluntary basis, perceived differences tend to be filled with positive content. The self-enclosure of the community in such situations is associated with an ethnic or religious consciousness owing to which the group has been able to achieve some degree of social respect or at least tolerance from the majority society. The economic profile of the typically metropolitan neighbourhoods in which one finds individuals belonging to this category is marked by self-reliance, especially in terms of employment. Given the strength of the community, national, ethnic or religious origins are often seen as more significant than citizenship. Solidarity and group cohesion are manifested in a variety of forms, including family enterprises, peer networks, religious congregations and schools managed by the community.

Typical candidates for this category are Muslims in Western European cities, including those in Germany, Denmark or France (in our sample). Besides religion, upward mobility and achieved social status may also reinforce ethnic consciousness and pride. Thus the Gabor Gypsies in Romania as well as a few other Roma families typically living in ethnically mixed neighbourhoods and belonging to the higher ranks of the working-class also belong to this group.

As in the ghetto, extended families are also present here but not because of the lack of family planning; rather as a result of accommodation to



ethnocultural or religious norms which value high fertility. The family not only represents the basic element of community life but also provides a socially desirable model and a resource for the young generation. Being an important economic unit, it may also function as the basis of small enterprises run by the nuclear family or provide a supportive network formed by the extended family. Therefore it is especially due to its practical importance that the family acquires significance in the development of identity: 'I often help my father in the butcher business. All our family helps him. And he gives work to all of us,' reported a Turkish-German boy.

Education has great significance as the source of individual success and upward mobility. Children usually attend schools that are dominated by the social majority yet that are sensitive to ethnicity and cultural difference or, when available, enrol in schools run by the minority. Integration into the school system ruled by the majority is generally welcome as a way to social advancement and it is not seen as involving detachment from the original community. The parents – characteristically first- or second-generation immigrants or recently urbanised Roma who have managed to attain higher social standing and better material circumstances – often serve as examples for their children in terms of career choices, further education and lifestyle. The parents' high expectations and, indirectly, the requirements set by the community become interiorised by the children. The overall impact of economic demands and community expectations supports gender distinctions: small enterprises are managed by men while the female members of the family are usually employed as assistants. As a consequence, attitudes towards schooling differ in the case of boys and girls. As girls gain less support and opportunities for self-development, they are especially inclined to adopt a broader perspective of the future that involves some degree of disengagement from the original community.

Incidentally, self-conscious Roma students born into relatively favourable circumstances manifest signs of positive ethnic belonging: 'I am proud to be a Roma . . . we like traditions while Romanians do not have so many traditions', a Roma girl from Romania said. However, it is mainly well established immigrants who are likely to develop a strong sense of community. While based on ethnicity and religion, such local identities often express detachment from the country of origin and demonstrate relatively close links with the community and place of residence in the host country. Illustrative examples are provided by Turkish students from Kreuzberg in Berlin: 'In Turkey I am a foreigner. They don't regard me as an ordinary Turkish boy like themselves but as someone from Germany. Therefore they regard me as rich and special.' Or: 'My parents will definitely return to Turkey when I am grown up and have my own family. But I will stay here . . . Here in Kreuzberg is my home.' Or: 'I never felt discriminated and I never was called a "Scheiß-Türke" or something like this. Here in Kreuzberg I was always part of the majority and not of a minority.' Longing for the place of birth may also determine future ambitions to return home one day: 'When you think of how it's like in

Morocco – summer all year long –, I sometimes think to myself: I want to go back.' 'We are proud to be Berber, we are proud to be Moroccan,' exclaimed a Moroccan student living in Denmark who, after finishing business high school and working a couple of years as a policewoman, plans to go back to Morocco and open a business of her own, such as a store or a restaurant.

Group cohesion, the adoption of traditions, the determining power of religion and the related cultural practices – all of these factors affect plans regarding future employment, forms of marriage (for example, the acceptance of arranged marriage), the planned type of family, the number of children – in short, the conception of a 'good way of life'. A Turkish boy living in Germany stated: 'It is important to know the Koran very well to educate our children in the right way. It is important to marry within the same religion.' Although the ethnonational background may also be important in informing future aspirations, the cohesive power of religion seems to be especially strong: 'When I get married, it is very important that she has Kurdish background and my parents want that as well. Then we will share everything, religion, culture... I don't want to break that chain,' said a Kurdish boy from Sweden. Or: 'Never ever would I marry someone who isn't Muslim. Never in the world,' affirmed a Moroccan student living in France.

In religiously based communities, shared faith often overrides other types of tie in terms of providing orientation in life and a sense of belonging. A Moroccan boy living in a Parisian neighbourhood explained:

...for us, the Muslim community, religion plays a very important role... If he simply respects religion, it means that between the ages of 10 and 12 he will know the way to the Mosque. So if he knows that way, there won't be any problem. Just with his lessons at the Mosque, leaving the national education aside, we'll see that that child will be well educated compared to a child who doesn't even know about religion... My friends are Muslim like me, an Algerian, a Tunisian, a Mauritanian, it's mixed. That's why I say the country doesn't count.

The proud assumption of ethnic or religious identity often involves active connections with the country of origin. The resulting positive ethnic identity is reinforced when the multicultural environment in the host country allows for complex attachments. A Palestinian girl from Lebanon, now living in Denmark where she is proudly wearing the headscarf, said the following about her multiple ties: 'I live in Denmark and I'm happy for it... but I'm also still happy for where I'm coming from, like, I like the religion, I believe in Islam and the culture we have at home.' Ethnic traditions are also seen as protective: 'A girl from the Comoros has a lot of prohibitions. When you're young, you ask yourself why all these rules but when you really think about it, it's good for us, it preserves us, it keeps us from doing a lot of stupid things. Our customs are great,' said a Comorian girl living in France. The

broader community can provide the same sense of security as the family: 'Sometimes when I meet other Moroccans I feel protected in some way even though I don't really know the person,' explained a Moroccan student living in Denmark.

The growing distrust and hostility affecting Muslims in the West, along with the countermodels provided by the surrounding society, often heighten a sense of difference and group cohesion, and strengthen group solidarity. At the same time, both animosity and modernising influences create divisions within the community. Hence, while acknowledging the essentially voluntary nature of the adoption of group identity and the positive contents that it involves, the coercive momentum should not be dismissed in this category. Positive group identity, at least in part, is produced as a reaction to external pressures, such as anti-immigration policies or hostile anti-minority attitudes. However, in contrast with vulnerable ghetto populations, these generally well-settled minorities are able to utilise communal resources to protect themselves.

It also should be noted that membership of a community not only depends on individual will but, to some extent, it is also prompted by certain collective disciplining mechanisms of the community. Expectations of the family and the larger community exercise pressure on individuals to the extent that group membership comes to be seen as the guarantee for making a decent life in the future. In this sense, beyond representing an attribute of personal identities, 'ethnic pride' may be interpreted as a collective response to a particular situation or group status which may be regarded either as a transitory state in terms of social integration or as a relatively permanent solution reflecting the ideal of a multicultural mosaic society.

### **Responses to slum existence**

Slums, like ghettos, are mostly deteriorated urban neighbourhoods located on the outskirts of cities or in deprived inner-city districts. They are separated from the majority society but separation occurs on social rather than on ethnic grounds. Slums resemble ghettos due to the lack of resources, such as public services, as well as education and employment opportunities. These are also stigmatised places stricken by refusals of the majority along with their assumptions about and aversion to poverty, people's low social status, the prevailing destitute residential conditions and the marginal lifestyle. Because they lack the essential means for individual and collective development, slums become self-reproducing localities due to a downward spiral of social decline.

Examples of identity strategies characterised by slum existence can be found, primarily, in the French, British and, to a lesser extent, Danish and Swedish urban communities of high immigrant concentration. The attitudes of interviewees coming from some mixed Roma and non-Roma neighbourhoods in deteriorated and economically depressed

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Central European cities, where residents live in deep poverty and social exclusion, also fit this pattern.

Because of the diversity of the residents' cultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds and the haphazardness of individual lives, a wide variety of family forms fall into this category: mixed families, single-parent households, parents living in polygamous relationships, adoptive parents, relatives taking care of abandoned children and so on. Besides the lack of quality education, it is the unstable background of children that virtually predestines them to poor school performance and very limited opportunities for further education. Yet, because they desperately want to break out of their situation, many students see an important potential in education in terms of social mobility and respect. 'I don't want to work in a supermarket... Why do it if I can get education instead? I want to be something,' said a Kurdish adolescent from Germany. Such ambitions often involve a desire to break away from one's own family and people:

I want to move to another country because I don't think my opportunities are that many here. For instance, my brother is an educated machine engineer but gets no job and has to work in the subway. The same with my father. When I look at my family, I see how it works here, said an Eritrean boy living in Sweden.

Given the lack of common cultural references, weak group cohesion and complex family types, individual identities are shaped to a large extent by experiences of discrimination and marginalisation. Severe socioeconomic disadvantage is coupled with aversion and ethnic prejudices on the part of the majority society: 'Sometimes, I think that the others are afraid of Roma people.' And: 'Czech people sometimes slander them [Roma people]. It is because all of them [Czechs] think they [Roma people] are all the same and do the same things, that they steal, that they are criminals,' said in a variety of ways by our Roma respondents coming from the different Central European countries. Due to their multiple exclusion and the lack of any positive collective ties, children are often at a loss as to how to identify themselves. The words of a Somali boy in Denmark reflect the ambiguities and confused feelings associated with ethnic identity:

When the Danes look at me, they see a perker [which translates as 'nigger']. When the perkers look at me... they would call me a Dane... It has a big impact on how I'm looked upon and what expectation I have to live up to. Most people look at me like I'm something else than what I am.

There is a strong awareness of stigmatisation, exclusion and discrimination among young people in this category which induces a sense of shame or even self-hatred. The resulting identities are unstable, effectively situational

and reactive in character, and they are negative in their effects. At the same time, visible traits such as skin colour tend to fix ascribed ethnic identities, implying the impossibility of integration:

I feel like an Eritrean because I look like one. It is very obvious with my dark skin and dark eyes. If I meet someone in the street they don't look at me like a Swede, they think I am an African or an Eritrean. Therefore, I feel like an Eritrean.

Destitution and experiences of rejection by the majority society result in a conflict-ridden life in the slum, marked by distrust and envy, rather than a sense of belonging together. Religion and culture do not play an important role in (self)-identification, though language occasionally becomes a marker of intragroup distinctions. However, inter-ethnic differences are especially conveyed by reference to stereotypes expressing ignorance, social distance and sometimes hostility, and reflecting on them often functions as a source of compensatory self-esteem. This mechanism is aggravated by the schools, where the proportion of minorities is high, while efforts to thematise cultural or ethnic difference are absent or ineffective. A girl with mixed ethnic background in one of the British sites described distinct 'types' in her community:

'He sells drugs, he uses knives and guns, he is not a very nice person, be scared of that person, you will get your phone robbed, he is a woman beater, he is a man slag, he cheats on his girlfriends'. That is the typical Black guy... [A Black girl] is a bitch, she's right hard, she'll bang you, don't mess with her'... [An Asian boy] is a suicide bomber, he's from the Taliban.

Yet, to some extent, inter-ethnic relationships exist within the local communities and make it possible for young people to suspend ethnicity or engage in mocking with it. This is how a Malian boy described the nuances of inter-ethnic connections in a French 'banlieue':

There are girls that we call 'Black guys' chicks', because they only go out with Blacks... they say it's because Blacks are more tender and all that and that Arabs are violent and all... It's true sometimes you hear 'dirty nigger', 'dirty Arab', but that's just making fun, it's just teasing, 'cause we get along. It's just humour. It's the way people laugh together in Saint Denis.

Students in this category hold visions of a future that is full of uncertainties and anxieties, and they tend to resort to a kind of escapism. They develop great expectations of living in a distant place in the same country, express

a nostalgic yearning for the country of origin, or entertain utopian desires to move to a third country. 'Of course, I will have a better job and live in a different area. In a big house where the Swedes live. I would never let my children grow up in this area. I know how the atmosphere can be here,' anticipated a Kurdish boy from Sweden. An Ethiopian girl living in Sweden said: 'I have seen so much in Sweden, I want to get to know another part of the world. But I don't know yet, maybe Ethiopia.' This kind of escapism often expresses a wish to 'act white' – that is, to melt into mainstream society. It may even entail a sense of cosmopolitanism even though the wish to transcend one's narrow social context, in this case, is not so much fuelled by principles and ideologies but rather driven by disillusionment and the awareness of limited opportunities. A Tunisian girl living in France admitted:

Personally I'm not too inspired by my origin. Some call me the corrupted girl... I may have Maghreb origin, but I'm more often with Blacks or people of colour than with Arabs... I noticed that if you get into religion too young you don't live... I would never wear the veil, I'm against that. I'm for putting it in religion but not ahead of it because it would prevent me from doing lots of things.

#### **Striving for assimilation/cosmopolitanism**

Neither traditionalism nor poverty determine the lives of minority adolescents whose families have managed to avoid, or break out from, ghettos or slums and to establish a decent working-class or lower-middle-class lifestyle on their own, without having to rely on the extended family network or on the support of the original community. While maintaining a strong ethnic identity is obviously an option in such circumstances, children often wish to break away from the original community and melt into a larger, not necessarily ethnicity-based, one that is represented by the majority population of the given country or by a supranational entity.

This complex category is typically represented by new immigrants from Asia and Africa, on the one hand, and upwardly mobile Roma families in post-socialist countries, on the other. Their drives are certainly intensified by, respectively, the prevailing anti-immigrant rules and attitudes, and the general hostility against Roma.

The parents of the children belonging here are usually significantly better educated than minority adults in the other categories, yet their educational attainments do not suffice to reach middle-class status in the host country. Thus they push their children to achieve even more in life by means of quality education and the adoption of majority values and lifestyles. Children aspire to become professionals – such as a pilot, an IT specialist,

a lawyer or a doctor – and to live in a modern nuclear family. ‘I would just like to have a normal life, where you have a job and a home and feel well... I think the ideal family, as it is completely ordinary, maybe two children, like completely normal,’ said an Afghan student from Denmark. Given their secular views and Westernised perspectives, these families are usually more progressive-minded and liberal in terms of gender roles and other social norms than those succumbing to traditional values (marked by ‘ethnic pride’) or those who suffer from poverty and marginalisation (in slums or ethnic colonies). Nonetheless, as it is usually the father who is the driving force in migration and social mobility, it is boys rather than girls who embody the family’s hopes for further upward mobility.

By living in typically middle-class neighbourhoods, members of this category mingle with the majority population. Children normally attend local schools dominated by majority students and characterised by either colour-blind or multicultural educational policy. These institutions tend to reflect on and also reinforce the aspirations of ‘visible’ minority youths to overcome ethnic barriers, neglect religious ties and loosen community attachments. However, notwithstanding its integrative efforts, the school fails to protect minority students in this category from experiences of prejudice and discrimination from their peers or the outside society.

Such contextual features, combined with young people’s personal characteristics, account for their tendency to ‘act white’. The driving force behind such attitudes is a sense of incompleteness and instability concerning their social status that originates in the often frustrated ‘mobility project’ of the previous generations. Occasionally it is pragmatic decisions that are responsible for relinquishing the significance of ethnicity. This is the case, for instance, when the demand for occupations associated with the ethnic community is scarce and thus young people are practically forced to step outside their traditional economic niche. Although the voluntarism of assimilation is questionable when other alternatives are rendered unfeasible, individual decisions still matter and reveal particular ways of reflecting on ethnic belonging.

These young people’s future plans regarding education, employment, the choice of a partner and a family reveal a heightened sense of individual autonomy and the adoption of majority values and/or modern ideals. Besides being informed by modernist ways of thinking, the wish to loosen the ties to their ethnic community is generally motivated by a desire for conformity. Refusal of ethnic traditions is typically nourished by a kind of anxiety, reflecting pragmatic considerations regarding social inclusion, which tends to be more articulated than in the case of slum dwellers: ‘I don’t want to live in South Harbour in the future. I want to find an area with many Swedes. It is important that my children learn the Swedish language well, and people speaking good Swedish are really lacking in

South Harbour,' explained an Ethiopian girl whose family had immigrated to Sweden. Rejection of ethnicity as an overly significant marker may be grounded in principles, too. A boy at one of the French sites, who would like to become a psychoanalyst and wishes to travel and live in different countries, expressed his thoughts as follows:

Pride isn't really my thing... Frankly, it's not something I take to heart. I feel neither French, nor Moroccan, nor American. For me, representing a country without having a good reason to do so is stupid. A president, if he represents a country OK, he's a president, it's normal. But a guy who visits his country once a year and says he represents it – it's stupid. They just do that to make trouble and to look down on others, to give themselves some pseudo-superiority.

Downplaying ethnicity helps to break down obstacles and to establish solidarity based on other sorts of values which are more responsive to actual personal experiences and needs. For instance, a teenager planning to continue his studies in a business school said:

[Ethnic background] doesn't matter because we are still like brothers. One is from Iran, the other is from Palestine, and the sixth is from Afghanistan. It doesn't matter because we are not in those places now... You can always have prejudice against someone but then if he's nice to you, if he's your friend, you skip the prejudice,

Students in this category typically have a large number of inter-ethnic relationships as well as anti-prejudice attitudes and display a tendency to understand and reflect upon social problems. Our Swedish respondent coming from Ethiopia remarked about prejudices against white people there: 'I think it has to do with colonisation... even though it happened a long time ago. Prejudices stay. I will live differently than my parents. I can focus more on my individuality, on what I strive for.'

As opposed to guest workers in earlier decades, today it is mainly highly qualified people (usually men) who fuel migration and make efforts to become self-reliant as soon as possible. This requires some level of accommodation to the norms and styles encountered in the host country. Given that we are dealing here largely with the children of highly qualified guest workers and middle-class Roma parents who have acquired a new style, it is no wonder that they are more self-confident than 'visible' minority teenagers belonging to the other categories with regard to their ambition to integrate into society and become recognised as equals. Whether full social inclusion through assimilation or cosmopolitanism will be achieved by the next generations or remain illusionary projects is another question. The answer



depends to a great extent on the direction of larger-scale sociopolitical trends within nation-states and on the international scene.

### Conclusion

Notwithstanding significant differences between the four types of identity pattern, ethnic identity is never free from pressures and constraints. This seems to be acknowledged by our interviewees as well who, being aware of their limitations, envision more or less plausible future lives. Although they frequently cherish dreams about earning social respect by excelling within their minority group or by becoming part of mainstream society, it is primarily the viable identity strategies that tend to surface in their narratives. It seems already quite clear to these young members of racialised minorities that, no matter how hard they try, they will probably fail to assimilate, especially if they bear visible identity marks (the 'stigma') and/or come from a multiple-disadvantaged social background. Ethnic minority adolescents appear to be very reflective not only concerning their limitations but also regarding their attachments. National, ethnic, religious and cultural ties have differing significances according to several factors, such as the history and nature of the community in question; the time, reason and form of migration; the economic resources and social accommodation of the community; and the cultural and political atmosphere in the host society. External determinations appear to be more powerful when one is born into a slum or ethnic colony than for those living in non-segregated, ethnically and socially mixed residential areas. This is reflected by the categories of our typology that refer to forms of 'being' as opposed to forms of 'acting'. In the more disadvantaged cases, the assumption and expression of ethnicity is more constrained by historical circumstances defining the group in question that is also characterised by low social status and/or ethnic segregation. In contrast, individual perspectives and ambitions are more decisive when the structural determinations of ethnicity are weaker – that is, when ethnic identity is not so much determined from the outside or imposed by the community itself. This is the case with self-reliant migrant communities that occupy favourable economic niches and are held together mainly by economic interactions, though cohesion is often also reinforced by religious and ethnic belonging. Urbanised, upwardly mobile Roma show similar patterns of identity formation. Interestingly, variation on the scale of ascribed versus self-ascribed identities has less to do with the content of ethnic identity: some may want to do away with a relatively stable and successful identity, while others give up, early on, the idea of overcoming the narrow confines of a 'negative', though vaguely defined, identity. At the individual level, 'ethnic mobility' depends especially on the availability of feasible alternatives as far as the employment of identity strategies defining a positive relation to ethnicity is concerned. The freedom to live

and act out one's ethnicity is thus inversely related to the vulnerability of individuals.

The permanence and character of a community, on the one hand, and of individual membership, on the other, are contingent upon features of the sociopolitical environment and on outsiders' perceptions. These factors may favour or discourage internal cohesion and the inception of individual or collective 'struggles for recognition' (Honneth 1995). As far as ethnic colonies vs. slums are concerned, the expression or suppression of ethnicity is largely determined by the policies and the internal rules governing such places. What these two situations have in common is that they both allow individuals minimal opportunities to break out. Hence residents of such places act out schemes implied in the very nature of their self-enclosed community that are grounded in ethnicity in the case of ghettos and in social status in the case of slums. Endeavours aimed at the exhibition of a positive (and more complex) relation to ethnicity may emerge only when there is a sense in developing ethnic pride. That is to say, if living conditions are utterly miserable and the social environment is totally hostile, claims for respect will hardly be articulated, let alone recognised. When, in turn, the community is strong enough to ward off the stigmatising effects of ethnicity, a sense of ethnic pride may surface as it happens typically in urban ethnic neighbourhoods. Curiously, the viability of assimilation is also heavily contingent on the social acceptance of one's ethnic identity that is about to be abandoned. Moreover, assimilation is a real option only as long as the expected outcome is acknowledged by the society that sets it as a requirement. In contrast, when the very possibility of becoming part of the society is denied to 'visible' minorities on quasi-ontological grounds, such attempts are necessarily doomed to failure. Paradoxically, 'acting white' may bring about rewards even in a repressive society that bans the expression of ethnic differences, while it does not work in a quasiliberal state if its feasibility is pre-emptively questioned on racialised or racist grounds. Cosmopolitanism, allowing for a virtually unconstrained development and exhibition of individual identities, in turn, may breed only in a truly liberal social environment as the bracketing of ethnic or national origins makes sense only when these can be displayed equally.

## Notes

1. Religion and, to a lesser extent, language, common origins or intentional migration represent important elements in the construction of what Ogbu calls 'voluntary minorities', in contrast with 'involuntary minorities' formed by coercive forces, such as discrimination or segregation, or that are produced by the vicissitudes of history (Ogbu 1991). At an individual level or even in an intergenerational comparison (for example, among migrants) it is not always easy to make the distinction, as is suggested, among others, by theories on acculturation (Gordon 1964, Berry 1991, Gundykunst and Kim 2003).

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2. We reserved the term 'ghettos' to denote impoverished and neglected, urban or rural residential areas, populated mostly or only by members of an ethnic group (including 'Roma colonies' or 'Roma rows' in Central and Eastern Europe), while ethnic enclaves in inner cities are referred to here as 'ethnic neighbourhoods' (Zhou 2005). 'Ghettos' and 'slums' – the two basic types of 'excluded localities' – are distinguished by the significance of ethnicity, prevalent in the former and dissolved in the latter.