Struggles of competition

Psychotechniques and ethnic boundaries in the workplace

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Abstract

In this article we approach the proliferating diversity management industry from an anthropological perspective, as called for by Hannerz. We present a two-layered analysis of psychotechniques as key operationalizations of the neoliberal idea of ethnic diversity as a business case. We start with a discourse analysis of the Dutch Foundation for Psychotechniques, followed by an ethnographic study of how these psychotechniques *trickle down* and function as instigators and/or catalysts of ethnic boundaries between officers within the Dutch police, in terms of ethnic *salience, closure* and *inequality.* We conclude that business perspectives on ethnic diversity, despite some distracting talk about equality and inclusion, fuel differentiation and inequality for the sake of competition.

Introduction

Neoliberalism has been centre-staged within the anthropological discipline and has become a common object of anthropological theory (e.g. Collier, 2012; Comaroff and Comaroff, 2001, 2009; Gershon, 2011; Harvey, 2005; Hilgers, 2010, 2012; Hoffman, DeHart and Collier, 2006; Kingfisher and Maskovsky, 2008; Maskovsky, 2006; Morgan and Maskovsky, 2003; Shore and Wright, 1999; Shore, Wright and Però, 2011; Wacquant, 2012). The topic has definitely moved to the forefront of analysis now leading anthropological journals such as *Current Anthropology* (volume 52, issue 4), *Critique of Anthropology* (volume 28, issue 2), and *Social Anthropology* (volume 20, issue 1) have dedicated debate sections, special issues and keywords sections to it.

The analytical labour is impressive and covers numerous settings where neoliberalism has touched down, so to speak. Largely absent from this literature, however, are anthropological investigations that relate neoliberalism and ethnic boundaries (a hallmark concept in anthropology) in the workplace, which is exactly the focus of this text. This omission is curious considering the default approach to ethnic diversity in organizations from

a neoliberal perspective, the famous business case of diversity, which is current in mainstream management literature and practice. One would expect a critical response from anthropologists, which is why with Hannerz (2010) we consider it a problem that the proliferating diversity industry remains understudied in our field. Critical empirical and theoretical reflections have mainly appeared in the field of organization and management studies (e.g. Carter, 2000; Lorbiecki and Jack, 2000; Litvin, 2000; Noon, 2007; Siebers, 2009; Zanoni et al., 2010). These studies are essential as they expose the detrimental impact of business approaches on ethnic minorities in the workplace (e.g. in terms of the power processes that are ingrained in diversity management and fuel categorization and essentialism), but they generally lack what is normally considered to be anthropology's analytical edge, i.e. an understanding of both the concrete structuration of the world of social interaction and experience, as well as the mechanisms of ruling that are at the foundation of this structuration. In order to come at such analytics we ask three questions: How is the neoliberal idea of ethnic diversity as a business case operationalized in both the diversity management industry and workplaces? How are these operationalizations (in terms of techniques, instruments, methods, practices etc.) experienced by relevant stakeholders, in our case ethnic minority employees? And how, if at all, are these operationalizations influenced by certain mechanisms of ruling that hamper or fuel ethnic boundaries between colleagues at work?

We are particularly interested in how business approaches to diversity in organizations push struggles of competition to the level of identity. Whilst mainstreamed ideas of diversity as a competitive advantage are often euphemistically put in positive and productive terms (which is quintessential to neoliberalism, as we argue later on), they also mean that competition and rivalry in the workplace are extended to the inner life of employees, as diversity issues are per definition identity related. In the critical management literature this is often labeled as *identity regulation* (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002), but the notion of *deregulation* is perhaps more applicable here. Work settings are increasingly deregulated, leaving team dynamics to the competitive struggles of employees that now involve their cultural (norms, values, traditions, meanings, ideas etc.) and psychological life (emotions, attitudes, cognitions etc.). Our chief interest is in how these struggles of competition may result in ethnic boundaries among employees. Not in the sense of social (i.e. group) boundaries and real ethnic group-belongingness, but in the sense of (1) constructions of subjective distinctions between ethnic in-groups and out-groups in which individuals – either by or against their own choice – are situated (ethnic *salience*) and (2) the consequences

such groupist thinking (cf. Brubaker, 2002) has for alleged representatives of these groups in terms of social interactions (ethnic *closure*) as well as the distribution of resources, such as jobs, promotions and wages (ethnic *inequality*) (cf. Wimmer, 2008a, 2009).

Ethnic boundaries and psychotechniques

The ethnic boundary paradigm has recently received new theoretical investment through a series of articles by Wimmer (2008a, 2008b, 2009). These publications mark the enduring relevance of the 1967 symposium, encouraged by the Wenner-Gren Foundation, and the subsequent collection of essays by Barth and his fellow Scandinavian anthropologists. The work, which 'ended up among the top 100 on the social science index for a number of years', was widely read and considered a milestone in anthropology (Barth, 2007: 10). Its appealing message was recently summarized by Barth himself: 'Contrary to the common-sense reifications of people's own discourses, and the rhetoric of ethnic activists as well as anthropology textbooks, ethnic identity is determined not by massive facts of shared culture and shared history, but instead in each case by a more limited set of criteria. It can also be deeply affected if it is subject to the manipulations of political entrepreneurs' (Barth, 2007: 10). Barth and his associated were able to show that a drastic levelling of cultural differences did not necessarily or mechanically correspond with a looser organization of ethnic boundaries. They encouraged more modest investigations and urged ethnographers to work with models of social organization that grappled with a set of *specified operations* (Barth, 2007): attention was directed to the *local* circumstances that condition the organizational potential of ethnic identities (Eidheim, 1969); awareness of the ways in which the organization of ethnic identities depended on the assignment of *particular* social meanings to a *limited* set of acts was called for (Blom, 1969); and anthropologists were urged to take more seriously the ways in which ethnic units depend on an understanding of *specific* factors that can make it untenable or unattractive to sustain a certain identity (Barth, 1969). In other words, exponents of the ethnic boundary view wholeheartedly embraced a meticulous analysis of the emergence and maintenance of ethnic boundaries on the basis of specifics. In the words of Brubaker (2002: 67, italics original) this means thinking of ethnicity 'not in terms of substantial groups or entities but in terms of *practical categories, cultural idioms, cognitive schemas, discursive frames, organizational routines, institutional forms, political projects* and *contingent events*'.

Inspired by this call for meticulous analyses of specific operations and local circumstances that may (de)construct ethnic boundaries, we focus in this text on a concrete set of techniques that make neoliberal discourses practicable and active, that is, capable of deployment in the context of the diversity industry and business approaches to diversity in the workplace. Our field study has directed us to what we have come to call *psychotechniques*. Before we discuss, in line with our main research questions on the second page of this text, how psychotechniques come about as operationalizations of the neoliberal idea of ethnic diversity as a business case (part four) and how they are experienced by ethnic minority employees (part five), preceded by methodological considerations (part three), we first briefly discuss relevant governmentality studies that are important to position psychotechniques in the rest of this text as particular mechanisms of ruling.

Traditionally bounded by the psychologist's or psychiatrist's office, psychotechniques have now found reception in the HR manager's office, the countless self-help guides, the relations manager's practice, the tutor's classroom, the diversity manager's workshop and all the rest of it. The psy-function has transgressed its traditional boundaries as it has entered new domains of life. With Miller and Rose (1994) we believe it is fair to say that a psy-turn has taken place. In their genealogical work on the psy-disciplines Miller and Rose have identified an important transformation in the psy-disciplines (e.g. psychotherapy, psychoanalysis, industrial psychology, social psychology), comparing the psy-disciplines of the Interbellum and the aftermath of World War II with contemporary psy-disciplines (e.g. Miller and Rose, 1988, 1994, 1995; Rose, 1989). Wartime psychological expertise was very much revolved around things like shell-shock therapy, mental conflict, maladjustment, mental hygiene, rehabilitation, and madness. Now, however, we see a *positive psychology* emerging that is replacing this disease and treatment model with a much more positive skills and potency model, making virtually all of us a customer of the therapist (Rose, 1989). New techniques of problematizing, diagnosis and intervention have been developed for the sake of things like quality of life, the humanization of work, and lifestyle maximization, which all share a certain positivity in that they prescribe specific ways to fulfill and perfect ourselves. An economic rationale is not unimportant here: we have to consider our careers in terms of maximization of profit; our personal relationships in terms of emotional pay-offs; and life as an experiential benefit (Binkley, 2007).

The governance of psychological life as a neoliberal enterprise is an expanding frontier that is commented upon in Foucault studies, governmentality studies in particular. Excellent commentary can for instance be found in the work of Cruikshank (1996) on self-

governance and self-esteem. In her study she scrutinizes a US based self-esteem movement – the California Task Force to Promote Self-Esteem and Personal and Social Responsibility – which 'promises to deliver a technology of subjectivity that will solve social problems from crime and poverty to gender inequality by waging a social revolution, not against capitalism, racism and inequality, but against the order of the self and the way we govern our selves' (p.231). This Task Force sees self-esteem, a psychological concept *par excellence*, as a *social vaccine* (p.232) that empowers people to live responsible lives. It can be enhanced through *liberation therapies* (p.233) that stimulate a reorientation to social problem-solving revolving around the self. More recent work on governmentality and psychological life (interiority) is to be found in Binkley's studies on lifestyle and happiness (2007) and life coaching (2011) as key topics for governmental programmes to manage *homo psychicus.* For Binkley, the (life) coach is a frontiersman in the new psy-industry. In managerial domains, coaching and mentoring techniques have been in vogue for some years now as ways to establish particular subject positions in the governance of work processes (Costea, Crump and Amiridis, 2008). Costea et al. underscore that the contacts between the coach and the coached, the mentor and the mentee, are to an ever greater extent of a quasi-therapeutic kind, incorporating the 'entire gamut of subjectivity' (p.671). As mentioned earlier, these issues have been covered in the critical management literature (cf. Alvesson, Bridgman and Willmott, 2009 and Grey and Willmott, 2005 for overviews) by the notions of identity regulation (Alvesson and Willmott 2002) and socio-ideological control (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2004). These forms of labour control intervene on the level of the hearts and minds of employees: the shaping and moulding of their attitudes, meaning-making, personality and identity, not just how they behave (Willmott, 1993).

In sum, psychotechniques like self-esteem trainings or life coaching show to be good bearers of neoliberal power. Emigrated from the psychologist's office, they have come to be consonant with an economic rationale (moulding the psyche in line with managerial discourses), are drenched in positive language (perfect yourself!), and make it virtually impossible to give structural explanations of social wrongs such as ethnic inequality (forget about capitalism, racism, inequality; devolve responsibility to the self).

Methodological approach: (n)ethnography and discourse analysis

How are psychotechniques used as operationalizations of the neoliberal idea of ethnic diversity as a business case? This question can never completely be answered, which is why

we narrowed it down to the diversity industry in one country, the Netherlands, and to one player within that industry, *De Nederlandse Stichting voor Psychotechniek (*NSvP; the Dutch Foundation for Psychotechniques*).* The NSvP was originally founded in 1926 as a small and local psychological assessment centre, but in its contemporary form it is better characterized as an influential knowledge institute that works at the junction of organizational psychology, social psychology and human resource management (van Strien and Dane, 2001). On the website it presents itself as an independent capital fund that facilitates research projects, organizes seminars, conferences and workshops, publishes its own journal and books, and awards grants (www.innovatiefinwerk.nl). Over the decades, the NSvP has lost its local character and has gained in national and international prestige through partnerships with numerous public and private organizations in the Netherlands and several international consultancy firms.

To get a good grasp of the NSvP approach to workplace diversity, we closely studied all texts – both written and spoken, offline and online – we could get our hands on. We participated in several conferences and meetings on the topic; we analyzed popular and scientific books and articles as well as other (e.g. conference) publications; and we got ourselves involved in what today is called a *netnography*, i.e. ethnographic research online (Kozinets, 2010). Like all fully fledged online communities, the NSvP has a website overloaded with tweets, tags, newsletters, expert opinions, online articles, feeds, newsflashes, tools, online columns, and videocasting. To speak with Kozinets: 'our social worlds are going digital' and 'to stay current our research methods must follow' (2010: 1). Not conducting ethnography over the internet would mean overlooking much valuable information. Moreover, online communities generally have a broader range of influence than offline communities, since the discussions they have are usually more accessible and the texts they produce travel faster. For an information- and knowledge-based, consultancy-like organization such as the NSvP, this is a quality that matters a lot and should not be underestimated by ethnographers.

These two issues, that is *range of influence* and *travelling texts*, immediately bring us to the three cornerstones of our (critical) discourse analytical framework: power, intertextuality and context. First of all, the principal raison d'être of knowledge organizations like the NSvP is the influence they have on others with their knowledge regimes and truth statements. As such they play a central part in the institutional (re)production of power. Power, however, is not our *sec* object of analysis; we learn more from a proper understanding of the power *effects.* In our analyses we better focus on 'the outcome of power, of what power *does to* people, groups, and societies, and […] *how* this impact comes about

(Blommaert, 2005: 1-2, italics original). This is where the notions of intertextuality and context come in. Intertextuality refers to the 'textual features that reappear across contexts and practices to do subtly related kinds of work' (Grant, Iedema and Oswick, 2009: 218; see also Blommaert, 2005 and Fairclough, 1992). Such contexts and practices may be internal (within the world of NSvP, in our case, where there is censorship and control) and external (outside the world of NSvP, where things are largely out of their hands). This is why we coin the terms *endogenous intertextuality* and *exogenous intertextuality,* a differentiation, although a gross oversimplification, we nonetheless deem important in order to understand power as being created endogenously (in-between texts as produced by the NSvP) and effectuated exogenously (outside the domain of the NSvP, where discourses are internalized in social and discursive practices). This approach 'mediates the connection between language and social context, and facilitates more satisfactory bridging of the gap between texts and context' (Fairclough in Grant et al., 2009: 218). 'Our unit of analysis is not an abstract "language" but *the actual and densely contextualized forms in which language occurs in society*', which is guided by the idea that language operates and works out differently in different contexts, (Blommaert, 2005: emphasis and italics original). For example, and here we draw on Fairclough, the genre of counselling may be born in a certain context (e.g. the NSvP context, or the diversity industry at large) with a counter-hegemonic intention to resist impersonal institutions, but gets effectuated hegemonically, 'as a personalizing stratagem within such institutions', where it is indexed differently (2010: 28).

The Dutch police

To study the power effects of NSvP discourses we have to look beyond this particular organization and see what happens if they touch down in other places. One of these places is the Dutch police organization, where we have been doing ethnographic research for several years now. It is important to clarify from the outset that our police ethnography pointed us in the direction of the NSvP; not the other way around. In a thumbnail sketch, our ethnography can be described as a study of ethnic boundaries in their organizational and socio-political context, meaning that we look for the context factors that fuel or hamper ethnic boundaries between police officers. One of the context factors that emerged during fieldwork was a set of psychotechniques used throughout the organization. When we discovered that this happened under the aegis of the NSvP (details are given later on), this gave us the opportunity to

answer our second research question: how are psychotechniques experienced by ethnic minority employees, in this case police officers?

So far the (ongoing) ethnography comprises 55 interviews, 17 diaries and nine months of participant observation. It is divided in four phases: (1) 19 interviews across the country in 2008; (2) 14 interviews and 17 diaries from all over the country in 2009; (3) eight interviews and five months of participant observation in one team in a police force in the south of the Netherlands in 2011; and (4) 14 interviews and four months of participant observation in one team in Amsterdam in 2012. The fourth phase is ongoing and supposed to yield an additional 60 interviews and an extension of participant observation with a year.

The ethnographic character of our study is cumulative, one could say, in terms of focus and methodology. In the first two years we had a broad focus, both in terms of interview topics as well as research settings. From then on we started to focus on local contexts in more depth. The same holds true for the methods we employ. In 2008 we identified and reconstructed real-life ethnic boundary events in the interview. In 2009 we identified these events by means of diaries and reconstructed them in subsequent interview, referred to by Czarniawska (2007) as the *diary, diary-interview method.* From 2011 onwards we identified these events during fieldwork – in which we *shadowed* (Czarniawska 2007) one person each week (which in practice meant one or two days) – and reconstructed them in subsequent interviews.

Throughout our study we included participants with ethnic minority and majority backgrounds, coming from basically all echelons in the organization (from police students to district commanders). We used multiple triangulatory tactics, in terms of methods (interviews, diaries, shadowing), locations (which are multifold, but at the same time in-depth researched), but also – perhaps most importantly – in terms of participants. We did our utmost best to reconstruct ethnic boundary events from multiple perspectives. If circumstances allowed us, we interviewed several informants who were involved in the same event.

The Dutch Foundation for Psychotechniques (NSvP)

Looking at NSvP texts on workplace diversity makes one aware of the fact that the organization is principally interested in ethnic diversity from a business perspective. On the homepage of the NSvP website one can click on *Diversiteit,* which will display numerous sub-links that open texts on diversity at work. A substantial majority of the texts treat diversity as a business case, highlighted by key words such as *resource optimization,*

innovation, quality, success, employability, entrepreneurship, profits of diversity, intrapreneurship, creativity, return on investment, surplus value, originality, productivity, talent, customer satisfaction, competition, effectivity, image improvement, inventiveness, flexibility, potentials, competence and *excellence* (we have translated most words from Dutch, although some were already in English). There is, in other words a very strong and manifest endogenous intertextuality, meaning that mutually approving links and connections are visibly there between various NSvP texts. This does not only hold true for vocabulary but for grammar as well. The grammatical mood in the documents is declarative; it lacks hedging expressions (such as *kind of, sort of, a bit, something*) and, more generally, modality (*maybe, probably, possibly, I think*) (see Fairclough, 1992): 'diversity *is* part of a business case' (NSvP, 2009a: our emphasis) and 'diversity *offers* opportunities to increase the innovative capacity of the organization' (NSvP, 2010a: our emphasis). This lexico-grammatical stance implicates that all that remains to be done is measuring *to what extent* diversity is beneficial and competitively advantageous.

In one of the documents on the website (NSvP 2009b) the minutes can be found of an expert meeting on diversity and quality, which shows that the NSvP takes these matters of measurement seriously. This confirms the advanced stage of incorporation of diversity as a variable in economic modeling. Participants in the expert meeting propose to explore ways of including diversity in the INK model, a Dutch quality management (audit) model. In her words of welcome, Sonja Sjollema (NSvP director) states that there is an increasing need to develop instruments that formulate diversity as a business case and that the expert meeting offers opportunities for the NSvP to take scientists and practitioners on an expedition to explore if incorporation of diversity in the Dutch quality model can be the next step to manage diversity in a more result-oriented way. Arguing for diversity as a necessary part of the business case of 'excellent organizations', Ila Khasem (NSvP board member) puts it this way:

'The idea emerged to look for ways to provide insights into the connection between Diversity and Quality and to translate external business goals into internal areas for attention. A favourable opportunity seems to be the INK model, which should be extended with specific attention for Diversity and Inclusion. The goal is to investigate this opportunity with the experts present and to check the support to test this model in collaboration with organizations in the field and to make experiences transferable, so that other organizations can learn from it' (our translation).

A few months after the expert meeting took place (delegates of the Dutch police were also present at the meeting), diversity-incorporating INK models were gradually being implemented in Dutch organizations (NSvP, 2012). What's more, the Dutch police organization had already experimented with INK-based monitoring systems to deal with diversity in the organization (Inspectie Openbare Orde en Veiligheid, 2009).

The presupposition in these meetings as well as the applications they produce, is that whenever workplace diversity contributes to business, this will in itself legitimate a more diverse work floor and increase equality and social justice. The working hypothesis is not that social justice will eventually contribute to good business; it is the other way around. This hypothesis is most germane to neoliberalism. *De forma* social justice is dealt with as an outcome of good business, but *de facto* concerns about social justice simply fade away under pressure of a unilateral concern with business results. Questions concerning social justice and equality are outmaneuvered; they are no longer to be asked and can certainly not be answered. What's more, there is a careful avoidance of subversive questions about whether such *diversity rich* management models may not actually fuel interethnic competition, rather than cooperation and sharing of diverse ideas, or what to do in case diversity does not score well on the scales of management models (homogenizing the workplace?). In other words, will they not actually contribute to ethnic boundaries in the workplace? As usual, 'ideologies are primarily located in the "unsaid" ' (Fairclough, 2010: 27, emphasis original).

From inspection to introspection

The only answers that in fact are given to these questions lead to the articulation of what can be called *inspection* and *introspection* and it is at this point that psychotechniques enter the scene. Whilst INK and other quality management models can be seen as inspection regimes that monitor workplace diversity from the outside-in, psychotechniques are proposed that control diversity from the inside-out, as part of introspection regimes (please see similar work of Covaleski et al., 1998 on what they call the *calculated* and the *avowed*). These regimes are distinguishable but akin nonetheless. In the NSvP context their co-dependence and interrelation are irrefutable:

'Many organizations struggle with the daily practices of multicultural teams. The positive aspects of diversity are undisputed: more creativity, flexibility, broader vision, better customer responsiveness, more learning and inspiration. But unfortunately this surplus value is not straightforward. People simply have preferences for

things known, for those who look like themselves, they are troubled by culture and language differences and are blinded by stereotypical images and expectations' (NSvP, 2010b: our translation).

In the best case scenario, such an individual pathology approach – echoing the so-called cognitive-turn in diversity research and management – reinforces the idea that ethnic discrimination and other social wrongs simply occur because of individuals' shortcomings to overcome cognitive distortions and biases, regardless of the social, institutional or organizational context in which they are manifested (Bielby, 2008). This means a decontextualization and psychologization of ethnic boundaries at the same time. In the worst case scenario these social wrongs are not even the issue; the sole concern is how 'stereotypical images and expectations' may endanger business results and need to be remedied for the sake of business only.

Several dimensions of this introspection were discursively articulated in various NSvP texts, of which we would like to single out one in particular; a conference publication called *Diversiteit: Hoofd, Hart en Buik* (Diversity: Head, Heart and Belly). The NSvP had organized this conference in the spring of 2010 in Amsterdam and prior to the conference it had invited five organizations to develop novel ideas and methods for diversity management. The conference, divided in five different seminars, was organized as a platform to introduce these methods. The day was opened by Sjiera de Vries, NSvP expert and at that time Lector *Multicultural Craftsmanship and Diversity* at the Dutch police academy. When de Vries finalized her plenary speech, in which she introduced the five methods that were about to be presented in the workshops, a critical participant raised the question: 'are we all supposed to go into therapy now?' (field notes). The setting indeed reminded of what Costea et al. (2008) had called a *therapeutic habitus*. In the manuscript (de Vries, 2010: 8) that was given to all participants, one finds out what was considered the bedrock of these five methods of diversity management, i.e. dialogue:

'[Dialogue is a] special form of conversation that is focused on inner search. Not the solution of a problem is central, but a quest to find the essence of a problem is. Dialogue is a self-exploration that you go through together' (our translation).

Herein lies the essence of psychotechnical approaches to ethnic diversity at work: inner search, and self-exploration (a journey taken together with others). In other words, the NSvP repeats with gusto what had already been applied by the California Task Force (discussed by

Cruikshank, 1996 in part two of this text): *liberation therapies* that offer a sort of *social vaccine* to keep the self-governing individual healthy (and productive). Not the solution of a problem is central (we don't wage social revolutions against exclusion, inequality etc.), but the essence of a problem, that is, the way we govern ourselves. In doing so, dialogue – a socially interactive phenomenon *persé*, which involves more than one person – gets reduced to an individual trait. This became particularly clear when a discussion started to develop at the conference venue on whether or not dialogue does actually fit each and every person. Is it up anyone's ally (?), it was asked. At that point, a *reductio ad absurdum* had taken place which collapsed dialogue into a personality feature. When we asked (as *participant* observers) if dialogue could also be seen as a situational phenomenon (Does it suit every situation? Can it perhaps silence people in some situations, whereas it may open them up in others?), we were confronted with concerted opposition.

That is to say, within the world of NSvP (the organization itself plus their network partners, i.e. the delegates present at the conference) there was a stable agreement and visible intertextuality. A way of speaking about diversity management had developed and was now clearly consolidated. However, the power effects of the discursive strategies for diversity management (dialogue in the form of counselling, coaching, mediation etc. is necessarily communication-based, which is not so say that the actual effects are discursive only as we show later on) cannot be studied in this context, due to its speculative character. As we know, speculation has often relatively little to do with the real-life context and it is in real-life situations that power effects come to the surface. What happens when NSvP discourses on dialogue and self-exploration are *enacted* in social practices outside the NSvP context? Will they actually be the panacea they are professed to be, or can they be (mis)used as mechanisms of ruling, despite their supposed powerlessness and egalitarianism (or exactly because they help to avert eyes from power asymmetries)? These matters concern us in the next part of this text.

But we are not there yet, as more preparatory work is needed. Another psychotechnique that we would like to discuss is the *multicultural personality questionnaire*. This questionnaire was introduced at one of the workshops – named *Caleidoscoop* – organized by Karen van der Zee, who is a NSvP expert, professor in organizational psychology at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands, and key advisor to the Dutch police organization in matters of ethnic diversity (see chapter 2 by van der Zee and Hamming in the conference manuscript edited by de Vries, 2010). The questionnaire includes scales that measure factors like *cultural empathy, openmindedness, social initiative, emotional*

stability, extraversion, adventurousness, curiosity, and *flexibility* (see van der Zee and Oudenhoven, 2000, 2001, as well as van der Zee, Zaal and Piekstra, 2003 for scientific publication on the multicultural personality). On page 23 of the conference manuscript we can read:

'Openness is a trait that can be used to distinguish groups. However, on an individual level differences between people exist as well in terms of their appreciation of new things and diversity. This is for instance expressed in how curious people are about other cultures […]. This is where intercultural traits become important. Competences that are linked to openness are Openmindedness and Cultural Empathy (Van der Zee and Oudenhoven, 2000, 2001). In the programme individual test scores are used to reflect upon what it means for individual performance and team performance to be more or less open' (our translation).

A few analytical notes are required here. First, this quote shows once more that a means-end calculus (the – presumed – causality between individual competences and performance) is the prime, managerial, motive for NSvP associates to study diversity in the workplace, which will oftentimes stir up competition between different individuals with different ethnic backgrounds (see part V) . NSvP members are, to speak with Baritz, the *servants of power.* Second, whilst power issues were kept out of sight in previous text fragments, they are no longer concealed. These competences are prescriptive; they are part and parcel of the micropolitics of prescriptive identities (cf. Blommaert, Mutsaers and Siebers, 2012). (Non-) compliance is strictly monitored and calibrated on a normative scale (Likert 1 for bad qualities and Likert 5 for good ones). So much for the *no strings attached* credo. Third, with the introduction of the multicultural personality it becomes increasingly difficult, perhaps altogether impossible, to effectively re-forge social issues (such as ethnic boundary constructions) into collective or exterior action. Everything must come from the individual and it must come from inside, from the intrapsychic domain.

Closely related to this governing of the interior is the notion of *authenticity* that is often invoked in NSvP texts. Discourses of authenticity are scripted into numerous NSvP texts on a variety of work-related issues, such as promotion, performance, leadership, and also diversity. Some of these are creatively combined in the dissertation of Mirea Raaijmakers (2008), NSvP expert:

'Accommodating authenticity allows for individual differences and "being different" and creates possibilities to experience these differences and let them co-exist, rather than disappear. […] More specifically, in diverse working contexts, research shows that when group members give recognition to the unique qualities of other

group members, this recognition moderates the relation between diversity and performance. […] Creating a working climate that stimulates authentic behaviour is contingent upon authentic leadership. Authentic leadership means that managers are a reflection of themselves and are in contact with all dimensions of their self' (our translation, emphasis original).

What happens when these discursive strategies are *entextualized* (Blommaert, 2005) in different contexts where they receive operational power is discussed in the next part.

Ethnic boundaries within the Dutch police

NSvP and police discourses on diversity management are close relatives who belong to a family in which the business case of ethnic diversity is treasured. The *Landelijke Expertise Centrum Diversiteit* (LECD; the National Expertise Centre Diversity of the Dutch police) has neatly appropriated the diversity-as-business mantra (e.g. LECD, 2004, 2006). A study conducted by the Public Order and Safety Inspectorate (Ministry of Security and Justice) has corroborated that this approach has made headway in all of the 26 police organizations (Inspectie Openbare Orde en Veiligheid, 2009). This happened with even greater zeal when Sjiera de Vries (NSvP expert) was installed as Lector at the police academy, particularly so after she held her inaugural speech (titled E=MCV², standing for 'effectiveness = multicultural craftsmanship²', *multicultureel vakmanschap* in Dutch) (Politieacademie, 2009). As an organizational psychologist she opened the doors for other psychologists (the fact that most of them are NSvP associates is not by happenstance of course). Karen van der Zee introduced the multicultural personality questionnaire within the organization (see Politietop Divers*,* n.d.) and several other NSvP experts assisted the organization as HR advisors and/or project managers diversity (NSvP, n.d.).

We do not intend to use Part V as a precise reflection of how diversity discourses get shipped around in cyclical processes of de-contextualization and re-contextualization, i.e. how they travel and are exchanged between the two organizations in our study. We simply mean to demonstrate through a critical event analysis what happens when these discourses *trickle down* so to speak. What happens when they get loose from their speculative, policy-making, context and start to live their own life in the context of organizational reality, where the effects of policies, politics and power become real? Two case studies will suffice, for now, to answer questions two and three of the introduction: how are the operationalizations of neoliberal discourses (i.e. psychotechniques) experienced by ethnic minority employees and

how are they influenced by certain mechanisms of ruling that hamper/fuel ethnic boundaries between colleagues at work?

Dialogue and mediation

The first event was shared with us by Ayşe (pseudonym), a community officer with a Turkish background who works for the Rotterdam police. She told us in an interview in the spring of 2008 about how she got on a collision course with two of her colleagues:

'The Pope had said something about Muslims, that the Prophet Mohammed had converted everyone into a Muslim by the sword ... That was a hot topic in the media. The next day at work there was a newspaper on the table in the canteen with an encircled heading quoting some Afghan saying: "Pope go to hell". As usual, we started the day at half past seven with the briefing, with about 30 police officers. I and another Turkish colleague were scheduled that day. We have more Turkish colleagues, more ethnic minority colleagues, but that day it was just the two of us. Suddenly, five minutes before the briefing commenced, a colleague started to speak in anger: "You Muslims have to knock it off; you think you can allow yourselves everything. We Christians, we will attack the Turkish consulate and we will teach you what violence is". And another colleague added: "It is about time to take the white cone hats out of the closet". So these are things you have to deal with at work. [..] Well, this happened while we sat at the table and then the team leader simply said "stop it, we are going to brief" and went on with the briefing as if nothing had happened. [..] Well, even though I am very articulate, I did not know what to say. I clammed up completely. Then I stayed home for three long months' (our translation).

Ayşe had filed an official discrimination complaint, but the organization had done nothing with it. She and her (Turkish) colleague went on sick leave for three months:

'I couldn't go to work. Than you fall back upon your old life, you see? I want to integrate in society, I want to do things, but than you withdraw, you go back to your own culture. Well, you have the need to talk about it, you want help for it. But you want it in your own language. You only wish to talk with people who understand you. For me it was very hard to explain to a Dutch social worker what I experienced inside. Many Turkish people live for their honour, you see. Honour is very important; it is the first thing that counts. It's priority number one. Maybe this is unthinkable for a Dutch person, but at that moment your sense of honour and pride is extremely affected. They rather could have kicked me to death. […] So then you find yourself sick at home… your [Turkish] colleague is sick at home. Together we weren't able to go to work while the other colleague was unaffected and could simply go on with his life and his work. But it is supposed to be the other way around. How can the victim be stuck at home for three months, while the perpetrator can continue with his work?' (our translation).

Three months went by when Ayşe and her (Turkish) colleague were invited to come to the police station for conflict mediation (a dialogue session) with the team leader and the two other colleagues. With a tremble in her voice she said:

'Now, I'm willing to go into mediation about how we use our key cards, for instance, but this is something completely different. […] These people have made up their mind. They are no kids of 16, 17 years old' (our translation).

She declined the invitation for the therapeutic session because she experienced it as sheer betrayal. The team leader had not intervened in the heat of the moment, anti-discrimination laws were not stipulated (a remarkable omission in a law enforcement agency), and now she was about to be thrown to the wolves again. Declining the invitation was unacceptable and Ayşe was forced to leave the team. It was said that she lacked the mental resilience deemed necessary to work in the team and to handle situations like these. Ayşe was alleged to have a deficit in openness, flexibility and assertiveness, competences which were considered necessary to *stand your ground* and to be a professional police officer.

We would like to share a few of our reflections. First, it cannot be denied that in this case ethnic boundaries have developed in full, both materially and discursively. Ayşe was victim to what is called *cultural anxiety* (Grillo, 2003), which subjected her to a violent discursive framing that portrayed her as the dangerous ethnic other, an Islamic threat. Whilst she did contest the negative associations with this enforced boundary, she could not resist the boundary *an sich* and felt forced to comply with it. She fell back upon the same sort of *culture speak* (Hannerz, 1999) – this time about *honour* and *pride* as essential to Turkish culture and unimaginable to Dutch people. This kept her away from Dutch social workers and as such widened not only the discursive but also the physical distance between herself and others (Dutch social and co-workers). This was a defense mechanism but a consolidation of ethnic boundaries nonetheless. Furthermore, ethnic closure (i.e. the reorientation of social interactions) eventually led to ethnic inequality (i.e. job loss, not in the strict sense but by means of relocation) as it forced Ayşe to leave the team. Whilst the sequence of ethnic salience, closure and inequality was stable and strong, this does not mean that ethnic boundaries were an ontological constant for Ayşe. In the (retrospective) interview she acknowledged that they are transient, triggered by events that come and go and do not leave a permanent imprint on her identity. In general, she succeeds in focusing on her professional life and in prioritizing her professional identity. Referring back to Brubaker (2002), this case

implies that ethnicity must indeed be seen as a contingent event that is influenced by certain discursive frames, organizational routines, institutional forms or political projects.

Second, what this case painfully shows is that, to borrow from Bauman (1998: 5), 'the price of silence is paid in the hard currency of human suffering'. It is on this notion of silence that we would like to spend a few words. The basic supposition in neoliberalism is that everybody is free to speak and that people *take their own responsibility* to participate. With unflagging zeal the NSvP tries to convince us that communication methods like dialogue sessions offer the ideal laissez-faire platforms where people can take the opportunity, or *feel free*, to engage in the *verbal competition*. This train of thought explains why Ayşe's team leader acted ignorant at the moment of collision (intervention would be unfair, since we are all to be seen as equivalent in the verbal competition). It also explains why he opted for mediation and dialogue in the aftermath, which would create a free space for all. This is of course rebutted by the hardship that Ayşe faced, which points to the fact that there are always *conditions of sayability* (as they are called by linguistic anthropologists, e.g. Blommaert, 2001, 2005) and these conditions are unequally accessible and distributed. Particularly clarifying in this regard is the idea of *pretextual gaps*, i.e. 'socially anchored and often invisible differences between what is expected in communication and what people can bring and deploy in communication' (Maryns and Blommaert, 2002: 11). Ayşe did communicate, but this was not in line with the expectations. Her anti-discrimination complaints were not taken seriously; perhaps they were dismissed as obsolete, too hierarchical, a sign of weak personality? The fact remains that Ayşe felt completely incapacitated by feelings of insecurity and these feelings turned worse when her complaint fell on deaf ears. Even though she characterized herself as outspoken and articulate, she turned incommunicado after these events. She was silenced, her voice turned mute. We suggest that we interpret dialogue sessions, deliberate non-intervention, and allergies for the law exactly as the organizational routines and institutional forms (Brubaker) that fuel events of ethnic boundary construction in work organizations.

Finally, if we would draw the NSvP ideas of dialogue as a personality trait (rather than a situational device) and the multicultural personality questionnaire (featuring assertiveness, emotional stability and extraversion as crucial factors) into this context and apply it to the case of Ayşe, she would hit rock bottom in both cases. Hypothetically, if Ayşe would have been assessed by a psychometrist during these events, she would be underrated as having a low multicultural personality. Inversion has reached its ultimate stage here: the

victim of blatant ethnic discrimination scores low on the multicultural personality questionnaire. This is blaming the victim in *optima forma.*

Authenticity

We came across another example of inversion during our ethnographic fieldwork in one of the police organizations in the south of the Netherlands. The first author was *shadowing* a district commander (DC) in this area for a week and joined the DC in all of his activities. One of the events that week was the *P-schouw,* P standing for *Personeel* (Personnel), which can best be translated as a personnel review. All matters concerning the work floor are periodically discussed in this *P-schouw* by the DC, his HR advisor and, occasionally, relevant others who are involved in a certain situation (e.g. a team leader). That week in the autumn of 2011 the DC and his HR advisor sat together to discuss a promotion interview they had had the other day with an operational commander A (foreman) who had applied for a position as operational commander B (deputy team leader). During the *P-schouw* it was decided that the candidate, Dinesh (pseudonym), born in Surinam, did not match the profile because he was not considered authentic. Before we continue we deem it important to mention that authenticity discourses have been embraced within the police with much enthusiasm. The *exogenous intertextuality* with NSvP discourses is abundantly clear. Mark the similarities between this text fragment – coming from the *Werkgeversvisie Politie* (best translated as the Employer's Perspective Police), published by the National Program HRM Police – and the dissertation by Raaijmakers (2008) discussed in the previous part of this text:

'The police organization pursues diversity and this requires a variety and authenticity of leadership in the police organization. […] Leaders coach and impassion[1] employees in order to let them excel in things they are good at; this gives employees a chance to act in accordance with their own views. This implies that leaders must go deeper than controlling behaviour. Leaders must be capable of touching upon the authenticity of employees' (Werkgeversvisie Politie, 2008: 77-78, our translation).

'Leaders *must* go deeper than controlling behaviour', they '*must* be capable of touching upon the authenticity of employees' and 'impassion employees'. In other words, the extension of labour control to the hearts and the minds (Willmott, 1993) is turned into an imperative. No

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[1] In the original Dutch quote the word *bezielen* is used, but this word has no equivalent in English. *Ziel* means 'soul', so a literal translation would be 'ensouling'.

wonder that the DC and the HR officer deployed authenticity as a criterion to *police* the career advancement of their subordinates. This is not to say however that there is a clear process of structuration going on here; agentive aspects may play a roll just as well. It is exactly the ambivalence of psychotechniques like these that give them such powerful effects (Dinesh did not protest in the interview we conducted with him and he took the validity of a criterion like authenticity for granted) and make them multi-interpretable.

A first interpretation is that the DC and HR advisor had no idea how to wield discourses of authenticity and felt indeed obliged by higher management to appropriate them in social practices like job interviews. When the first author asked them in the aftermath of the *P-schouw* what authenticity means, how they would define it, and how it fits the job description, they could not give an answer. A blush of shame crept up the face of the HR advisor, who admitted that a great deal of latitude and contingency is involved:

'I must confess that how we deal with it within our organization varies a lot' (our translation).

Yet, in a separate interview we had with her a few days later she had regained confidence and felt visibly more at ease:

'Leaders must be themselves, that is, authentic. […] In a job interview you are most importantly looking for the true self of a person. And you know what… an answer is not right or wrong – I mean substantively right or wrong. No, it's about how you come to it. This means that you look for who someone really is' (our translation).

These statements could be a sign of agentic power, which would lead to a second interpretation. But there is a third possibility. In a separate interview we had with the DC we raised the same question as in the individual interview with the HR advisor: what is authenticity? This time the DC told us that for him, being authentic means to be assertive, to dare to stand up against your superiors. It appeared that the applicant, if hired, would come to work as the deputy of a team leader with a Turkish background who had caused quite a stir in the organization. During fieldwork we talked (informally) with this team leader and it appeared that her employment record was full of ethnic conflicts, which expelled her from the police district she previously worked for. According to the DC, she has a 'strong personality' and 'needs to be brought back into balance', these were his literal words. A third interpretation thus points to authenticity as an empty signifier that can be used at will as a power instrument. Honestly, this interpretation makes most sense in our view, because the

authenticity concept was twisted upside-down. Contrary to the HR advisor's claim that a focus on authenticity would empower people by allowing them to stay *close to themselves*, Dinesh experienced it as an alienating force:

Dinesh: 'I am not willing to change my whole personality. […] And I said that to the committee. If you're looking for someone who bangs his fist on the table, that's fine. But that's not who I am.'

Interviewer: 'You don't want to change that?'

Dinesh: 'No, because I want to be myself.' (our translations)

In the interview Dinesh substantiated his experiential framework with cultural content, claiming that in his culture it was all about respect and calmness, not about blatancy and assertiveness.

'I think it has a lot to do with norms and values and with your background and culture' (our translation).

Dinesh clearly experienced the job interview and its aftermath in terms of ethnic salience, but despite the fact that he eventually did not get the job, it remains hard to conclude that this is a case of *intended* ethnic closure and inequality (that is, full-blown ethnic boundaries). But this is exactly our point. We can speculate (here is that word again) about the intensions of the DC and the HR advisor to keep Dinesh from a position where he and the Turkish team leader would make two ethnic minorities in leading positions in a team that is predominantly white, i.e. majority Dutch. But wondering about whether their motives would be based upon stereotypes, prejudices or other intrapsychic features – as the NSvP would prefer – would not get us very far. To put it in the eloquent language of Hall (2002: 58): 'The question is not whether men-in-general make perceptual distinctions between groups with different racial or ethnic characteristics, but rather, what are the specific conditions which make this form of distinction socially pertinent, historically active? What gives this abstract human potentiality its effectivity, as a concrete material force?' In that sense, psychotechniques as offered by the NSvP can have a double complicity in the construction of ethnic boundaries. First, they divert our attention from these socially constitutive and constituted factors and conditions, which were already declared to be crucial in the ethnic boundary research by Barth and his colleagues. And, second, psychotechniques like the application of authenticity as a criterion

in the HR cycle (recruitment, selection, promotion) are exactly the factors that underlie and support mechanisms of ruling ethnic boundaries. They are the *proximate causes* (Reskin, 2003), i.e. the organizational practices that may work out differently for *ethnic others* because they open up subjective spaces for decision makers in organizations, in which stereotyping can be propelled and cognitive biases can be activated and crystallized into a hard reality of ethnic boundaries (cf. Moss and Tilly, 1996; Reskin, 2003; Siebers, 2009).

Discussion and conclusions

We commenced this article with three research questions, which have drawn the attention to psychotechniques as (one way of) operationalizing the neoliberal idea of ethnic diversity as a business case, how these psychotechniques are experienced by ethnic minority employees, and how they gain operational power through certain mechanisms of ruling that may propel and/or exaggerate ethnic boundaries between colleagues at work. Here we use these questions again as a format to organize the final part of this text, this time by bundling the first two.

Context is/as critique

One of the main purposes in this text has been to show the discrepancy between the sweeping accounts of those who are in the avant-garde of the diversity industry about psychotechniques as prototypical instruments of the business case of diversity on the one hand, and the lived experiences of ethnic minorities with these techniques on the other hand. Within the enclosures of the NSvP we see an extraordinarily positive account of psychotechniques as instruments to ameliorate the conditions of diversity for the sake of business accomplishments. Instruments like the multicultural personality questionnaire are meant to encourage people to keep themselves and each other on edge (by stimulating such things as extraversion, assertiveness, open-mindedness, authenticity etc.), which is assumedly good for performance and results. Neoliberal instruments like psychotechniques are normative – and thus power-based – but in a prescriptive and productive, rather than prohibitive or repressive, way. It is worth the effort to repeat at some length what Foucault (1972: 119) had to say about these aspects of power, some forty years ago:

'It seems to me now that the notion of repression is quite inadequate for capturing what is precisely the productive aspect of power. In defining the effects of power as repression, one adopts a purely juridical

conception of such power, one identifies power with a law which says no, power is taken above all as carrying the force of prohibition. Now I believe that this is a wholly negative, narrow, skeletal conception of power, one which has been curiously widespread. […] What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse.'

Once we break out of the enclosures of the NSvP and go into the everyday struggles of people on the work floor, we see that it is exactly this positivity which makes the power effects of psychotechniques so strong. In the case of Dinesh, these effects go in principal unnoticed. Although he resists the particular twist that is given to authenticity in the job interview, he settles with the fact that it is being used as a criterion. He takes its legitimacy at face value. In the case of Ayşe we see that any form of resistance instantly sweeps her across the other side of the positive/negative divide. She becomes a nuisance and is treated like deadwood.

In his article 'Context is/as Critique', Blommaert (2001) emphasizes three *forgotten contexts*, one of which is *text trajectories*. With Briggs he argues that the 'shifting of texts between contexts –re-entextualization practices – involves crucial questions of power' (p.24). Later on (p.26) he states that it is a crucial task for ethnographers to make people aware that 'discourse is contextualized in each phase of its existence, and that every act of discourse production, reproduction and consumption involves shifts in context'. Embracing such an ethnography is exactly what we have been trying to do in this project. But we cannot retire at this point as there is more to it. This methodological issue is to be supplemented by an empirical issue. That is to say, we have also attempted to show that psychotechniques can best be seen as decontextualizing strategies. This becomes evident when we look at the torrent of stereotype and awareness trainings that have been developed in the diversity industry and which narrowly focus on the individual by marginalizing the role (institutional, social, political) context factors may play in (de)activating intrapsychic processes. It becomes evident too if we look at the careless adoption of private sector management styles (laissez-faire, non-interference, dialogue, counseling etc.) in the public sector, regardless of context. Anti-discrimination laws were not enforced in a law enforcement agency. By the same token, aggression by a police officer (who is meant to embody safety and security) did not *arrest* attention in any particular way. The context of Ayşe's troubles was discarded, as if it all took place in the local bakery at the corner. What's more, the *humanization* of work relations through the introduction of a concept such as authenticity in practice boils down to a severe

violation of the liberal principle to segment life into separate and relatively independent and protected spheres (Kallinikos, 2004). This liberal *art of separation* (Walzer, 1984) is consigned to the dustbin of history. Empty signifiers like *inclusive organizations*, often used by the NSvP, then all of a sudden gain significance, albeit not in the way originally intended. It is the obligatory inclusion of an employee's body and mind and the commodification of both that makes psychotechniques instrumental to neoliberalism. By transcending the local context – in which things are messy – diversity experts can steer at arm's length; they *govern from a distance*, without recourse to direct intervention (Barry, Osborne and Rose, 1996; Rose, 1996). This flexible implementation of neoliberalism may be key to its wide dissemination (Hilgers, 2010).

Competition

Finally, by looking at the mechanisms of ruling ingrained in psychotechniques we must realize that, despite some distracting talk about equality and inclusion, its objective is not equalization but differentiation for the sake of competition. Particularly, the objective is not to lessen anti-social effects of competition (e.g. by stipulating anti-discrimination laws in the case of Ayşe); it is to invalidate those elements considered anti-competitive (e.g. compliance, obedience or solidarity, which were ascribed to Dinesh). Psychotechniques bring workplace rivalry to the level of cutthroat competition. Out-competing others in terms of upward career mobility now depends on a person's authenticity; having the mental resilience to swallow aggression allows one to *score better*; and *being dialogical* gives a head start in the verbal competition with colleagues.

The transformation in liberal discourses from exchange and equivalence to differentiation, competition and inequality with the advent of neoliberalism, was already lucidly observed by Foucault in his renowned 1978-79 lectures at the Collège de France (Foucault, 2008). It is important to comprehend that in the footsteps of Foucault, neoliberal governmentality scholars have explicitly stated that competition is to be seen as a formal game between *equal inequalities*, which needs to be instituted and constantly nourished (Donzelot, 2008; Lazzarato, 2009; Lemke, 2001). In other words, we need to see it as an artificial relation between people (contrary to the naturalness of exchange; see Burchell, 1996), which needs to be actively protected and organized, monitored and navigated. This is best demonstrated by a citation from Friedrich Hayeks *The Road to Serfdom* (2007 [1944]: 85-86):

'It is important not to confuse opposition against […] planning with a dogmatic laissez faire attitude. The liberal argument is in favor of making the best possible use of the forces of competition as a means of coordinating human efforts, not an argument for leaving things just as they are.'

Neoliberalism thus insists on organizing inequality; it is instituted into its core, because a competition by design is bred by differentiation and inequality. We know this from macro anthropological analyses of neoliberalism (e.g. Harvey, 2005), but in this text we have attempted to show that the very same idea resonates in *small places* where neoliberalism touches down. Psychotechniques must be seen as instruments that make such ideas operable and practicable and drag employees' inner life into the struggles of competition. When this happens, it becomes futile to ask why ethnicity starts to play a role in the competition. The real question is, why not?

Acknowledgements

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