Ethnic minorities in local politics: comparing Amsterdam and Paris

Michon, L.B.

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.
Chapter I
Theoretical Framework

The main elements of the theoretical framework of this study have been highlighted in the introduction; they are based on both insights from the existing literature and the notion that some aspects of the presence of ethnic minority representatives at the local level have not yet been thought through. Two key ideas guide the theoretical framework of the present study: firstly, the purpose is to distinguish and contrast two perspectives (structure and practices); and secondly, the focus is more particularly on the analysis of practices that are comprised of three main elements (access to politics, the development of a political career, and discourses on representation).

I. Two perspectives: “structure” and “practices”

Two perspectives are utilised for the analysis of the role of ethnicity in local politics in Amsterdam and Paris, and I will describe these as: structure and practices. Before I explain this terminology and what this dual focus entails, I will initially illustrate the difference between the two perspectives by referring to two seminal works of the social sciences, Dahl’s Who Governs? (1961) and W.F. Whyte’s Street Corner Society (1993 [1943]), both of which concern the political integration of immigrants.

In his now classic book, Dahl has analysed the emergence of “ethnic politics” in terms of numbers: the increase of immigration has led to the political integration of migrants. He describes how the electorate of New Haven has changed as a result of immigration. While mass immigration began in the 1850s, by 1910 two thirds of the population of the city was composed of either immigrants, or the children of immigrants (Dahl, 1961, p.32).
This overall group thus formed the majority of the population and electorate, even if each individual ethnic group was in a minority. The political role of each ethnic group depended upon the degree of homogeneity of both the community in socio-economic and political terms and the factors linked to immigrant status ("education, speech, dress, demeanor, skills, income, neighbourhood, ignorance of American institutions and folkways, and lack of self-confidence", idem, p.33). Based on these criteria, Dahl distinguishes three phases “on the way to political assimilation" (idem, p.34). The "success" of ethnicity as a factor in the local politics of New Haven is linked to the first stage, which is characterised by both the social, economic and cultural homogeneity of the ethnic group, and the rise of ethnic sub-leaders who receive nominations for “minor offices” (idem, p.34). In the following stages, the heterogeneity of the ethnic group increases, with ethnic leaders coming to the fore and being able to count on “their electorate”, while each ethnic group has its own candidates (idem, p.35). In time, however, ethnicity becomes less of a determining factor in the political behaviour of immigrants and their descendants: Dahl argues (idem, p.34) that “ethnic politics (...) is clearly a transitional phenomenon”. In the third stage of political integration, ethnicity has lost its meaning in politics for most members of an ethnic group, “often [being] embarrassing or meaningless” (idem, p.35). In all three stages, the extent to which ethnic politics play a role depends upon the degree of homogeneity of the ethnic group and its size. One criterion that Dahl does, however, disregard is the issue of political rights; for this factor to be relevant within the political context, immigrants and their descendants need to have the right to both vote and stand in an election. Moreover, they also need to exercise this right.

The political integration of immigrants, as described by Dahl, appears to be a relatively smooth and rapid process. The first alderman of Irish origin was elected in 1857 and, quite soon after that, aldermen of German, German-Jewish and Russian descent appeared on the Board of Aldermen. The process of political integration was a little more difficult for the Italians, but in 1945 a mayor of Italian origin was elected in New Haven (idem, pp.36-43). Dahl describes the political careers of several politicians in Who governs?, but it is important to note that he does so with the aim of exemplifying general processes. Dahl is not particularly concerned with individual motivations and experiences in politics, but instead considers how politicians fit into the political structure of the city of New Haven.

It is important to highlight, for the purposes of the present study, that Dahl analyses the political participation of immigrants in terms of aggregate phenomena – at the group and organisational level. He describes the institutional structure and practices: the party structure of New Haven and the different party strategies; the rituals within parties,

1. Wolfinger, who was one of Dahl’s research assistants, studied ethnic politics in New Haven extensively for his study of “The politics of progress” (1974). He disagrees with Dahl’s analysis of the success of ethnic politics, based upon the facts that he distinguishes acculturation from assimilation (idem, p.32) and believes that high levels of ethnic voting depend not only on “the intensity of ethnic identification”, but also on “the level of ethnic relevance in the election” (idem, p.49). This, in turn, depends on the presence of ethnic candidates, which is typical of later stages of immigrant presence in a society. Therefore, the mobilisation theory defended by Wolfinger posits that “ethnic voting will be the greatest when the ethnic group has produced a middle class, in the second and third generations, not in the first” (idem). This is confirmed in a very different context by Sayad in his analysis of the three ages of Algerian immigration to France (Sayad, 1999).

2. Wolfinger does highlight the fact that “The immigrants in New England were equal to the old settlers in only one respect: they could vote” (Wolfinger, 1974, p.35).
such as the process of nomination; the different political positions (leaders versus sub-leaders); the aggregate characteristics of groups (ethnic groups, but also politicians); and individual attitudes (at the aggregate level) towards political participation. Dahl’s analysis covers more than a century of the history of New Haven, and although its renown is due to the pluralist conception of politics presented in the work, I believe that this thorough and detailed study of the political history and structure of a particular context is an example of attractive political science research.

In order to highlight two possible perspectives through which ethnic politics can be examined, I wish to contrast Dahl’s study of New Haven with Whyte’s work, Street Corner Society (1993 [1943]). In his ethnographic study, Whyte describes group interactions and the interplay between individuals and groups in the context of a slum with a population predominantly comprised of those of Italian extraction. Politics come into play in Whyte’s study as he portrays the “big shots” of the local society of Cornerville: the politicians and the racketeers, as opposed to the “little guys”, namely the corner boys and college boys who are the primary focus of his work. Whyte depicts how the politicians relate to the racketeers and vice-versa, e.g. how politicians took advantage of the Italian-American structure of racketeering to secure their electoral success (idem, p.205). Politics also comes into play when Whyte describes the political choices made by individual, young inhabitants of the area, contrasting the clique leader Doc with the college boy Chick. Doc, who is in close contact with his community and very loyal to his group, ran for office as a Democrat (idem, p.39). He was, more or less, forced to do so because of his leading position among the corner boys. Without the financial means to support himself or run a campaign (idem, p.36), Doc finally withdrew, which was not understood by his supporters. Analysing Doc’s unsuccessful political career, Whyte posits that a corner boy can only become successful in politics if he steps outside of his own group (idem, p.40).

Chick, the second emblematic character in Whyte’s book, did manage to “widen his sphere of social influence” (idem), and in doing so made connections with the Republican party. For Chick, much more than for Doc, engaging in politics was a career move and, thus, an individual strategy (idem, p.105). His notion of individual advancement prevailed over what was crucial to Doc, namely group loyalty (Doc; idem, p.106-107). According to Whyte, differing views about social mobility are at the core of these varying partisan affiliations. Related to this, the different attitudes regarding the purpose of a political career lead to very different conceptions and practices of what the role of ethnicity is, or should be, in politics. Democratic political activities mean keeping one’s background and history to the fore (idem, p.206), while maintaining a distance from one’s origins is apparently inherent to a Republican political career:

To get ahead, the Cornerville man must move either in the world of business and Republican politics or in the world of Democratic politics and racketeers. (...) If he advances in the first world, he is recognized by society at large as a successful man, but he is recognized in Cornerville only as an alien to the district. If he advances in the second world, he achieves recognition in Cornerville but becomes a social outcast to respectable people elsewhere (idem, p.273).

Whyte also argues that politicians like Chick play a role in reinforcing the prejudices that exist against their own ethnic group among the upper-classes; they move up the social
and political ladder by connecting with upper-class people and distancing themselves from the community they come from (idem, p.105; p.205).

The richness of Whyte’s “thick description” enables the author to present a nuanced and comprehensive analysis of the “social structure of an Italian slum” (the subtitle of the book). Strongly embedding the analysis in the case of Cornerville is, however, at the cost of generality. Where Dahl provides both a birds-eye view (with a profusion of details) and a model that can be transplanted into other communities, it is less clear how Whyte’s insights should be reproduced in other settings; are we to expect a similar social structure in other American-Italian slums? What about slums with other ethnic groups? Is it the same in slums in other countries? Moreover, Whyte pays less attention to changes over time than is the case in Dahl’s work.

These two early accounts of the access of immigrants to politics are interesting to compare because of their different focus. While Dahl looks at institutions and how they work, Whyte concentrates on individual and group activities. This corresponds with the traditional distinction between structure (Dahl’s perspective) and agency (Whyte’s approach). The question at stake in this debate concerns the extent to which individual (or group) actions are shaped by individuals (or groups) autonomously, or by the context in which they operate (McAnulla, 2002, p.271). However, the purpose of the present study is not to take a stand in this particular debate; I will not argue that structures determine the actions of individuals or, on the contrary, that individuals are autonomous and exhibit free and rational behaviour. My assumption, in line with previous comparative studies in the field (Bousetta, 2001; Garbaye, 2005; Ireland, 1994), is that it is necessary to look at the structure (which is usually called the institutional setting) in which the political mobilisation of ethnic minorities occurs, since this setting provides an opportunity structure which frames individual (and group) actions. This institutional setting has been defined in a study by Kriesi and his colleagues of new social movements as a “country-specific mix of facilitation/repression of the movements’ mobilization, their chances of success, and the degree of reform/threat they have to reckon with” (Kriesi et al., 1995, p.xv). Some actions are made possible and others not; for example, the enfranchisement of foreigners at the local level in the Netherlands enables non-nationals to be elected in Amsterdam, while this group does not have this opportunity in Paris. For what Kriesi and his colleagues call the “political opportunity structure”, I will use the term “structure.” In doing so, I choose a “loose” definition that also enables me to refer to institutions, contexts and systems. These terms are embedded in different theoretical traditions (Levi-Strauss and Parsons’ structuralism, March and Olsen’s new institutionalism, Tarrow’s Political Opportunity Structure, Easton’s system analysis, etc.) and thus carry specific connotations. I will not, however, make a rigid distinction between these terms, and will instead use them interchangeably. For the purposes of this dissertation, my main argument is that features of the context of a country or city have an impact on the opportunities that ethnic minority politicians have to gain access to politics, the development of their careers and their discourses on representation. On this last point, I will follow Koopmans and Olzak’s argument that dominant discourses form a “discursive opportunity structure” (Koopmans & Olzak, 2004).

While I choose to use the term “structure”, I will not utilise the terminology of structure and agency. Firstly, I wish to avoid the implicit implications of these terms, as well as the opposition between them that is conveyed by the debate on structure versus
agency. In particular, the term “agency” expresses the idea of the autonomy of actors. Instead, I adopt the term “practices”, which I believe to be more neutral with regard to the phenomena observed. Furthermore, the term “practices”, in combination with that of “structure”, stems from the work of de Certeau (1990 [1980]), whose analysis of the combination of both perspectives is illuminating. De Certeau’s urge to investigate the interaction between “structure” and “practice” will allow me to enrich the structuralist or institutionalist assumption that characterises much of the existing literature. Once the structure and the orientations it entails are defined (which is the subject of Chapter III), I will go on to investigate the individual “arts de faire” (“une manière de penser investie dans une manière d’agir, un art de combiner indissociable d’un art d’utiliser”; de Certeau, 1990, [1980], p.xli). When defining the “arts of doing”, de Certeau uses the example of people watching television, arguing that asking how much time people spend doing this, and which programmes they watch, is less interesting than studying what it is that people do (“la fabrication”) with this time spent watching the TV (idem, p.xxxvii). The question raised by de Certeau thus concerns how individuals (or groups) make the structures that guide their behaviour their own. Discussing Foucault’s work on surveillance, de Certeau explains that along with the question of how surveillance is imposed on each and every one of us and everything, one must also look at the ways in which surveillance is played with and distorted by popular practices:

This line of research has been particularly appealing to studies of individual and collective counter-strategies in totalitarian regimes (Bayart, 1985, p.344). However, the aim must then be to distinguish between anecdotal – thus isolated – tactics, which reflect a particular inventiveness, and those which become recurrent and can highlight a collective practice, thus making the totalitarian regime vulnerable (idem, p.359).

The point of distinguishing between the perspectives of structure and practices is to see which of the latter can be expected given the former, and which practices run counter to what might be expected given the structure, especially in the case of those that go beyond anecdotal creativity and form a shared phenomenon. The advantage of using de Certeau’s terminology is that it enables the focus to be more specifically on the interaction between structure and individual actions, while explicitly choosing the perspective of the latter, and not, like most of the existing research, the role of the context. This leads me to the necessity of defining which practices will be studied and why, and how the structure is defined.
II. “Structure” and “practices” put into practice

The operationalisation of this two-level framework is based on my understanding of practices as being comprised of three aspects: access to political careers, the development of careers, and discourses on representation. My reason for focusing on these features has been highlighted in the previous chapter. The issue of access has been central in existing research, and this study, with its original design, can contribute to the crucial debate about the incorporation of ethnic minority representatives in the political arena. As I will argue below, I believe that this concerns the issue of how newcomers are integrated into politics more generally, which is why I will contrast knowledge of ethnic minorities in politics with the position of women in this field. The second issue, the development of careers, stems from the need to complement the existing research. I have explained previously that while access to politics has been central to the current academic literature, other aspects of the political careers of members of ethnic minority groups have typically been neglected. Accordingly, the purpose of the present study is to scrutinize how the careers of ethnic minority politicians develop, as well as how they, eventually, come to an end. The third issue is linked to my original question: does the fact that representatives can be identified as being from an (ethnic) minority connect to or clash with the commonly adopted notion that representatives must look after the general interest? This question is mainly addressed by analysing the discourse of respondents, and does not, therefore, strictly speaking consist of a “practice” as defined by de Certeau. To paraphrase him, the respondents’ discourses on representation are not “arts de faire” but “arts de dire.” I do, however, believe that because representatives are asked to talk about what they do in that role, their discourses reveal what they do and involve a performative element. I also wish to include this focus on conceptions of representation in order to answer my original question, which has been rarely addressed in the existing research.

The study of practices is at the core of this study and the distinction between the three types thereof (access to politics, development of careers and discourses on representation) will guide the rest of this chapter. I will detail which aspects of these practices are under study, as well as scrutinise which elements of the structure may have an influence and how. I adopt a general understanding of the structure, which refers to features of the electoral system, the political system, the political culture, and national ideologies. In doing this, I broadly rely on Easton’s definition of systemic properties, which includes “aggregate characteristics of a system,” “states of the political system” and “institutional patterns” (Easton, 1990, p. 141). The discussion of each practice and the related structural factors will lead to the formulation of questions (sub-questions of the research question), which are summarised at the end of this chapter (see Table 1.1.)

a. Access to politics

The literature on political recruitment has, broadly speaking, two main fields of interest: the process of recruitment and the profile of recruited politicians in particular and the political elites more generally. While the first perspective focuses on organisational processes and institutional constraints, the second is more concerned with issues of
background, socialisation, and “political cultures” (Eldersveld et al., 1995, p.3). Much of
the existing literature has focused on the national level and legislative recruitment, but
the insights from a number of studies are, nevertheless, relevant for the present work.

Two issues are, therefore, important: who gets access and how? Studies focusing on
the individual characteristics of political elites highlight their homogeneity in a number
of features; over time and across countries, elected politicians are generally male and
well educated, and rarely have a modest social background (see e.g. Putnam, 1976, p.22-
23; Lagroye et al., 2002, p.468). Most of the studies of political elites focus on MPs and
members of government, although one of the few studies of local elites (Eldersveld et al.,
1995) reveals that in the United States, Sweden and the Netherlands, local politicians are
less highly educated than national elites. Moreover, a relatively greater number of local
politicians have a working class background compared to their national counterparts
(idem, p.37).

One might wonder to what extent ethnic minority politicians conform to the
homogeneity of elites in respect of these features. To my knowledge, only Rupp et al.
(2003) have explored this issue. Their study of the background of all municipal councillors
elected between 1980 and 1998 in the four main Dutch cities revealed that immigrant
and native councillors have very similar educational backgrounds (Rupp et al., 2003,
p.113). This illustrates the “agglutination” of elites highlighted by Putnam, which stems
from the process of recruitment and post-recruitment socialisation (Putnam, 1976, p.39).
Post-recruitment socialisation is defined as the training and experiences acquired by
the aspirant after entering an elite institution (idem, p.96). As Putnam argues, there are
two ways to look at this: either one believes that “where you stand depends on where
you sit”, or that “where you get to sit depends on where you stand” (idem, p.97). The
first explanation, which is described by Lagroye and his colleagues as the “prise de rôle”
when entering an institution (Lagroye et al., 2002, p.141), stresses the framing role of
the institution or organisation. The second explanation relies more on the past socialisation
of and choices made by an individual, but deeper structures may play a role as well (the
class structure of a society, for example). This issue will be addressed in this research by
studying the background of ethnic minority councillors, as well as their past experiences
and the ways in which they take on the position of representative. More specifically, the
questions that arise here are: whether, and to what extent, ethnic minority politicians
conform to the general homogeneity of elites; and whether and how newcomers adapt
to the elite and its rules, and acquire the knowledge and skills attached to an elected

Knowing that women are generally under-represented in politics (Hazan, 2002;
Phillips, 1991), the issue of access thereto is particularly interesting to study from their
perspective, since their experiences as “newcomers” can be compared to those of ethnic
minority politicians. Furthermore, the experiences of women in politics obviously also
reflect those of ethnic minority women. Hazan (2002, p.116) demonstrates that the under-
representation of women in the Lower Houses (which ranges from around 40 percent in
Scandinavian countries to less than five percent in Turkey) is due to the obstacles that
they encounter at the levels of entry, candidate selection, and elections. One specific
hurdle is the fact that incumbents – among whom there are generally only a few women

3. In September 2009, 42 percent of the 150 Dutch MPs were women (see http://www.parlement.
com/9291000/modulesf/gm5ihvnw). In France, 18.5 percent of the 577 MPs have been women since the 2007
elections (see http://www.observatoire-parite.gouv.fr/travaux/doc15/cartographie_parite.htm).
have a greater chance of being both chosen as a candidate and re-elected (idem, p.117). Looking only at the issue of access provides a partial picture, since it appears from studies of women in politics that they generally only achieve political access at the local level and/or in relatively marginal positions. As Phillips puts it, “the numbers [of women] rise where the power of office is less” (Phillips, 1991, p.60-61).

From this perspective, it appears that gender creates a relevant cleavage in politics, and the issue of the position of ethnic minority women in the political arena continues to be unaddressed. The literature has primarily focused on native women in national politics, and to my knowledge a comparison of the two groups has not yet been conducted. This means that we have no answer to the questions of: whether immigrant women in politics should be viewed as immigrants or women; or how and when one of these identities prevails. I will, therefore, treat this issue with specific care and attention.

Nevertheless, the work of Guionnet (2002) reveals that there is more to one’s position in politics than one’s gender. Indeed, Guionnet demonstrates that there is a significant difference between women who are incumbent politicians or long-term party activists and those who are political newcomers. In fact, both male and female established politicians share many features. After the law on parité was adopted in France in 2000, which compelled political parties to include 50 percent of female candidates on electoral lists, a large number of women entered the political arena for the first time. Guionnet focused on the women elected after the municipal elections of 2001, many of whom had little political experience, but a background in associational activities (associations of parents, environmental organisations, ATTAC, etc., idem p.119). Moreover, these newcomers to the municipal councils appeared to be more prone to highlighting differences between men and women than the women with more experience of local politics (idem, p.116). Guionnet draws a parallel with workers elected in French politics after 1848: in both cases the existing stigma of a lack of competence and experience – reflecting a form of discrimination on the basis of class or gender – is reversed, and the features of the newcomers are presented as positive qualities (idem, p.126). Each group of newcomers has underlined both its more practical approach to reality and the value of the presence of its members in terms of equal representation (idem, p.124). A legitimate issue in the present research is, therefore, the need to explore the extent to which ethnic minority politicians are newcomers to the political arena, and what the implications of this are.

One of the possible implications is linked to an issue raised in the introduction, namely that in the existing research ethnicity has commonly been regarded more as a handicap in politics than an asset. We all know examples of political parties mobilising the presence of women and ethnic minority candidates on their lists and in political positions as an expression of their tolerance and belief in equality. The strategic element to this is that parties believe that this explicit positioning can appeal to (groups of) voters. Party leaders may thus have an incentive to both include newcomers and maintain their visibility, meaning that there is, therefore, a risk of continued “stigmata” for newcomers. One’s identification as an ethnic minority politician might, thus, be both an advantage (holding the role of a “political niche”) and a handicap if it becomes a yoke that people cannot free themselves of. This issue will be addressed when studying the access of these politicians to politics and the development of their careers.

The references to studies of female access to politics demonstrate that there can be an overlap between the issues of who gets access and how they do this. Focusing on the
“how” question is particularly helpful when it comes to identifying the roles of context and structural features. On the basis of a comparative study of legislative recruitment, Norris (1997) explains that the rules and procedures of political recruitment (in this case for positions in national parliaments) are influenced and constrained by the legal, electoral and party systems (idem, p.2). Among these systemic features, Norris particularly mentions the mode of election, the number of seats available, the frequency of elections, the rate of renewal of elites, the status of political functions, the material compensations of politicians, the prerogatives of the assembly and its members, and the competition between political parties. According to Norris, all of these factors form a “structure of opportunities” for recruitment, i.e. for access to politics (idem, p.11). She separates the recruitment process within parties, meaning the “rules and cultures” presiding over the selection of candidates, from the structure of opportunities (idem, p.12). I, however, argue, that the rules regarding who can stand as a candidate, who selects candidates and how, and the degree of centralisation of the selection process (the four aspects of intra-party recruitment distinguished by Hazan, 2002, pp.111-114) are also part of the “structure of opportunities” that the people who want to get access to politics have to face and cope with (see also Leijenaar et al., 1999). Indeed, Achin’s research, which compared women’s access to politics in France and Germany, has highlighted the role of party organisations. There are far more female MPs in Germany than in France (Achin, 2004, p.85), which Achin argues is related more to the gender policies and recruitment rules of political parties (idem, p.92), than to the general “ideology” regarding gender and the overall participation of women within society (in which Germany is more traditional than France; idem, p.86). Other scholars also stress the importance of parties, compared to other institutions: Phillips emphasises the crucial role of party quotas for women in the Scandinavian case (Phillips, 1991, pp. 84-85), while Lovenduski posits that “the crucial arena for strategies to improve women’s political representation in modern democracies is political parties” (Lovenduski, 2005, p.139). The study of the process of recruitment within parties is, therefore, both necessary and interesting. This is because it informs us about how, and at what stages, ethnic minority politicians encounter obstacles or, in contrast, in what particular situations ethnicity might be an asset. Furthermore, the description of the rules that govern the process of candidate selection can be contrasted with the experiences of individuals who have gone through this process.

When describing the structural features of the contexts in which ethnic minority politicians get access to politics, I will, therefore, look at the electoral system (the mode of election, the frequency of elections, the number of seats available), the power structure (the prerogatives of the council, the rewards for councillors), the party system, and the party culture (the process of candidate selection, the attitude towards newcomers.) These issues can be summarised with a sub-question:

- Which features of the structure determine the opportunities that ethnic minority politicians have to gain access to politics and how?

The aspects of practices that have been identified are the following: the profile of politicians; their past socialisation, background and activities before entering the political arena; and their experiences of the candidate selection process. This leads to the following sub-question concerning the practices of individual politicians:

- Who gets access to politics?
- How do these individuals get access to politics?
b. The development of careers

Although the literature offers valuable guidance on how to study the issue of access to politics, other elements of politicians’ political careers have been examined less often, particularly so far as local representatives are concerned. The study of the development of political careers in this research will, therefore, be mainly explorative. I will use longitudinal data in the form of interviews conducted with elected politicians in the early 1990s, as well as a new series of interviews with these same individuals. Their careers, and eventually the process of leaving the political arena, can thus be ascertained, while a number of factual questions will also be addressed. My focus will be on the political mandates that the representatives had after their first election, their responsibilities within the party and, ultimately, the point at which they left politics. This last issue is particularly understudied; we do not know much about when, how and why such exits occur. In addition, the interviews explore the respondents’ evaluations of their careers in terms of their assessment of their mandate, their position as an elected politician, and their aspirations and the extent to which these have been achieved.

The exploration of the development of political careers will be guided by the typology of politicians produced by Weber. People, he writes, may be politicians by vocation (“Berufspolitiker” or “Hauptberufliche Politiker”) or avocation (“Gelegenheitspolitiker” or “Nebenberufliche Politiker”; Weber, 1919 [2009], pp.10-11). Based upon his definition of these two options, there are two types of political careers and forms of career development; when politics is an avocation, a political career comes about by chance and opportunity:

Politics as an avocation is today practiced by all those party agents and heads of voluntary political associations who, as a rule, are politically active only in case of need and for whom politics is, neither materially nor ideally, ‘their life’ in the first place. (Weber, 1946 [1921], p.83)

However, when politics is a vocation, a political career is a necessity:

He who lives ‘for’ politics makes politics his life, in an internal sense. Either he enjoys the naked possession of the power he exerts, or he nourishes his inner balance and self-feeling by the consciousness that his life has meaning in the service of a ‘cause.’ In this internal sense, every sincere man lives for a cause also lives off this cause. (Idem, emphasis in original)

When looking at the types of mandates and party positions held, the length of political careers and the aspirations of politicians can inform us about the kind of politician that an individual is. From this perspective, the relationship to the party appears to be a highly relevant issue, particularly when relying on Bourdieu’s insights (1981) into politicians with a working-class background. These individuals, Bourdieu argues, rely, but also greatly depend, on the party for the development of their career. Indeed, those who have little cultural and economic capital when they join a party rely heavily upon it, gaining new forms of capital and a possible change in their living conditions because of

---

4. One exception is Birnbaum’s study of the political elites of the French 4th and 5th Republic. He focuses on the professional careers of former MPs (1977, p.80-90).
their activities. On this basis, party activists with a working-class background are often under the impression that they owe “everything” to the party (idem, p.22). In the case of ethnic minority politicians with a working-class background, and/or with little “capital” (in terms of material resources such as networks of supporters), it might be argued that a similar mechanism is indeed at play.

The literature on women’s political careers indicates that gender differences can be seen when it comes to how careers develop. A comparative study of gender differences and similarities in political and business elites in 27 countries (Sansonnetti, 2004; Liebig & Sansonnetti, 2004) revealed that women enter politics at a later age than men (see also Sineau, 2001, p.215), but it takes them less time to reach elite positions: “on the whole [they] reached [the] top positions at about the same age as their male colleagues” (Liebig & Sansonnetti, 2004, p.380). Liebig and Sansonnetti argue that this shorter career path to the top can be explained by the general awareness in a number of countries of the need to feminise top positions: once women have entered the political arena, they benefit from the desire to achieve more equality between the sexes (idem, p.401). Sineau’s study of female MPs elected in France in 1997 also highlights the different career paths of men and women, but from a slightly different perspective; she links the process of access to the national mandate to the development of the careers of female MPs. Compared to men, female MPs have been unsuccessful candidates more often and also run for election in a legislative district less often (Sineau, 2001, p.217-218). Furthermore, Sineau argues that their shorter careers, which accumulate fewer political mandates and are more frequently restricted to the local level, lead to the development of the notion that women are, and remain, political neophytes (idem, pp.222-224). The present study will, therefore, explore the differences in career paths along these lines.

The experiences of the female MPs studied by Sineau reveal how individual practices are linked to features of the electoral and political context in which they take place (e.g. the French practice of the “cumul”, see Chapter III). The systemic features that come into play when studying the development of political careers are very similar to those highlighted when the issue of access was examined. Electoral rules determine the length of terms of office, whether political mandates can be cumulated or not, and what the material rewards for elected politicians are. In this sense, they have an impact on how careers evolve. The same applies to some features of the political system. A highly volatile party system may mean that political careers are precarious, for example. The relative openness of the political system also plays a part: a system that is open to newcomers necessarily means that politicians do not keep hold of their seats for very long. Finally, written and unwritten rules concerning political careers influence the development thereof, e.g. regarding what is seen as being a success.

In summary, the study of the development of careers will focus on features of the electoral system and the power structure within the party system. The rules about the accumulation of mandates and other aspects of what a political career entails in a given context will, therefore, be examined. This leads to the following sub-question concerning structure:

• What kind of development of political careers can be expected given the structure, and, more specifically, to which features of the structure can this be attributed?
The study of practices will concern the way in which a political career is conceived (in terms of Weber’s typology), while assuming that the relationship with the party is a crucial matter and that gender differences can be observed. Activities (both within the party and elected assemblies) after the first election and, ultimately, the reasons why people leave politics will, consequently, be scrutinised. This is summarised in the following sub-questions:

- How do political careers evolve after the first election?
- When, how and why do political careers come to an end?
- What features of political careers can be linked to ethnicity?

c. Discourses on representation

I now turn to a very different type of “practice”, namely what ethnic minority politicians say about what it means to be a representative and what the role involves. These questions are the subject of ongoing theoretical discussions and empirical analysis in political theory and political sociology (Pitkin, 1972; Dovi, 2006). Pitkin recalls that representing means making present what or whom is absent (Pitkin, 1972, p.3; p.8) and, for many, this straightforward definition continues to be the most useful. In other words, at the heart of representation is the notion that the role is about “making citizens’ voices, opinions, and perspectives ‘present’ in the public policymaking processes” (Dovi, 2006).

When looking at what representatives do, the most important controversy concerns whether a politician should act as a delegate (following the wishes of those who are represented) or a trustee (acting as he thinks is best; Pitkin, 1972, p.145; Dovi, 2006). The former approach supposes that: there is a clearly defined constituency; the representative has access to its opinions; and he/she is able to identify its interests. The electoral and political systems influence the extent to which representatives are seen as delegates or trustees. In the case of a constituency-based electoral system, one or more representative is elected to represent a particular geographical territory. If each constituency elects only one representative, it is very likely that he or she will act as a delegate. In the Dutch and French local electoral systems, however, the constituency (the inhabitants or voters of the city) is represented in a council, which is elected via a list-system with party competition. A trustee-conception of representation is, therefore, more likely to be both valued within the dominant ideology and observed empirically.

However, delegation-forms of representation might also be valued and observed within the French and Dutch local systems; group representation may not only be linked to the representation of a constituency, but can also refer to the representation of the interests of groups in society. Scholars who have highlighted this point usually relate it to historically disadvantaged minorities (women and national and ethnic minorities in particular; see Dovi, 2002; Mansbridge, 1999); in such circumstances, group representation works as a corrective mechanism. As Kymlicka, who is one of the advocates of this position, highlights, the fact is that some minorities – African-Americans and Hispanics in the US and Aboriginal peoples in Canada – are politically under-represented, leading to a presupposition, namely “that people can only be fully ‘represented’ by someone who shares their gender, class, occupation, ethnicity, language, etc.” (Kymlicka, 1995, p.138). At the same time, this author also admits that mirror representation has its drawbacks; it can become unworkable and serve as an excuse not to care about those
who are represented by their “own people” (idem, p.139-140). Indeed, in such a scenario, representatives are less concerned with the general than with group interests. Despite the practical difficulties that this might entail, Kymlicka argues in favour of minority group representation when equality, legitimacy, and symbolic issues are at stake (idem, p.151).

A conception of representation based on the idea of group representation may not necessarily mean that politicians resemble those they are supposed to act for in terms of their lives and experiences. This is the case when representatives represent a group symbolically (in this case “accuracy of correspondence is not an issue”, Pitkin writes; 1972, p.99) or, more generally, when they choose to look after the interests of a given group without being part of it. Accordingly, the discussions concerning who representatives are on the one hand (i.e. what significance is attached to their gender, colour of skin, origin, and physical abilities etc.) and what they do on the other (i.e. what interests they represent and how their decisions are made) must be separated.

When discussing the significance attached to who representatives are, a crucial discussion, which is also highly relevant to the present study, concerns the extent to which elected assemblies (more often than governments) should resemble those who are represented. For advocates of descriptive representation, true representation “depends on the representative’s characteristics, on what he is or is like” (Pitkin, 1972, p.61, emphasis in original). Among these scholars, Young stresses that representatives cannot put aside their particularities, instead believing that an elected politician should not be seen as the representative of one particular group (Young, 2000, p.133) even though identity and personal features have important functions. Young stresses the intrinsic value of diversity if democracy is to work well:

A democratic public ought to be fully inclusive of all social groups because the plurality of perspectives they offer to the public helps to disclose the reality and objectivity of the world in which they dwell together (Young, 2000, p.112).

Young focuses on the equal participation of all groups in terms of representation. The diversity of the elected assemblies is what matters here, and the link between an individual representative and the group that he/she may represent is less strong than in Kymlicka’s argument (see above).

The case put forward by Young for descriptive representation refers to what Mansbridge calls the aggregative function of democracy, namely the need to reach legitimate decisions, even when interests conflict (Mansbridge, 1999, p.634). Indeed, according to Mansbridge, the deliberative function of democracy (i.e. aiming for the common good) also calls for the proportional presence of representatives from disadvantaged groups:

(…) disadvantaged groups often need the full representation that proportionality allows in order to achieve several goals: deliberative synergy, critical mass, dispersion of influence, and a range of views within the group (idem, p.636).

This view has many critics, who instead focus on normative and practical arguments. These critics question the notion that one can easily define which groups have the right

5. Pitkin defines symbolic representation as: “symbolic representation seems to rest on emotional, affective, irrational psychological responses rather than on rationally justifiable criteria” (Pitkin, 1972, p.100).
6. Mansbridge says a group is disadvantaged when “group mistrust, uncrystallized interests, a history suggesting inability to rule, and low de facto legitimacy” apply to it (Mansbridge, 1999, p.628).
to proportional representation, deriding the static definition of society that this entails. So, what is being reflected with descriptive representation? Difficult questions have to be answered from a practical point of view: how many seats should a group have? How are group representatives held to account? Does the presence of descriptive representatives also guarantee that these individuals will defend the interests of their group? Some argue that foreseeing the implications of the full proportional representation of all groups in society means that descriptive representation is impracticable (see Pitkin, 1972, pp.64-65; Mansbridge, 1999, p.629-630). Many of these criticisms do, however, pertain to the idea of “microscopic representation” (the notion that an assembly should be a miniature of society; idem, p.631), and this principle is even rejected by the proponents of descriptive representation (Kymlicka, 1995, p.139). Other critics dismiss the very idea that individual characteristics play a role in the decision-making process. The classic Republican approach encompasses the view that the aim of the democratic process is to define the common good, while the representation of groups, factions or parties divides sovereignty (Rousseau, 1978 [1762], p.203). Followers of Rousseau argue that sovereignty belongs to the people, and the people (the nation) are conceived of as being indivisible (idem, p.198). Pitkin underlines that most critics of descriptive representation stress that it ignores the actions of representatives (Pitkin, 1972, p.64). We, therefore, return to an issue that was raised earlier: what is it that representatives do? The literature does not provide us with many clues regarding how to analyse the daily work and actions of representatives. We do, however, know how to categorise the relationships they have with the electorate and specific groups within it.

Another crucial political actor must be introduced when discussing representation in the Western European context: political parties. Much of the literature on representation is concerned with the relationship between one individual representative and a defined constituency: what constitutes this relationship, how does it work, and what are the normative implications of different approaches? (See Mansbridge, 2003) This reflects a focus on how systems of national legislative representation work, in particular in their Anglo-American forms. In other countries, including some Western European nations, representative bodies are elected through lists. This is also the case at the local level in most countries. In the case of a list-system, parties are an important actor in how representation functions. Mansbridge only briefly addresses the implications of this “party discipline” model, which she sees as a form of “gyroscopic representation,” although she does highlight a few of its features:

(...) representatives look within to a set of principles and commitments that derive partly from their own ideals and partly from their commitment to the collective decisions of the party. The representative is also subject to party sanctions for not obeying the party, and the party in turn is subject to sanctions from the voters. (Mansbridge, 2003, p.521)

Being elected to represent a constituency – a city or city districts – via a party list thus adds to the complexity of the work of a representative. Reading Mansbridge, it seems that party-dependent representatives do not have any contact with their constituency,  

7. Mansbridge talks of gyroscopic representation when voters choose a representative from whom they accept that after the election, he/she will act on the basis of his/her own ideological choices and principles only (Mansbridge, 2003, p.515).
but is this empirically the case? The findings of Bourdieu (1981) tend to support this idea; his analysis of a crucial point in the relationship between the political party and his/her representative, namely the investiture, underlines the dependency of representatives vis-à-vis their party. When it designates a candidate, the party recognises him/her as being entitled to represent the party in an election, and this symbolic act has significant performative power. The party – in Bourdieu’s words: the institution – can only designate people upon whom it can fully rely:

La loi qui régit les échanges entre les agents et les institutions peut s’énoncer ainsi : l’institution donne tout, à commencer par le pouvoir sur l’institution, à ceux qui ont tout donné à l’institution, mais parce qu’ils n’étaient rien en dehors de l’institution et sans l’institution et qu’ils ne peuvent renier l’institution sans se renier purement et simplement en se privant de tout ce qu’ils sont par et pour l’institution à laquelle ils doivent tout. (Bourdieu, 1981. p.19; emphasis in original)

Bourdieu insists on the relationship of subordination that results from this process of designation. According to him, this process strengthens the dependence of the candidate on the party for those who were already dependent upon it; in fact, this is the time when the candidate becomes a full agent of the party. This raises many questions: are representatives indeed the agents of the party? Do they have the means to let their own ideas prevail, or do they follow the decisions of the party? Does the commitment to voters play a role in the representatives’ decisions? Do representatives have contact with the electorate in any event? This study seeks to address these issues.

In summary, the features of the structure which seem relevant from this perspective are the dominant conceptions of representation and the position of political parties. To define these dominant views, I will utilise electoral rules regarding the function of a representative, study analyses of the dominant definition of what or whom representatives should represent, consider the designation of candidates (and the implications thereof) and look at the relationship between representatives and their party. This is summarised in the following two sub-questions:

• How is representation generally regarded?
• What is the role of ethnicity in the dominant conceptions of representation?

The “practices” that are studied here refer to the discourse of ethnic minority representatives in terms of who or what it is that they represent, with a particular focus on the extent to which parties intervene and politicians wish to represent specific groups (and, ultimately, their ethnic group) and/or their party. Furthermore, what the politicians say it is that representatives do will also be addressed. The research questions relating to the issues raised here are:

• Who or what do politicians wish to represent and how?
• What does representation involve?
• What role does ethnicity play in the conceptions of representation related by the respondents?

The main research questions deriving from the theoretical discussions presented here are summarised in Table 1.1. As referred to earlier, two perspectives are contrasted: structure and individual practices. I have chosen to focus more specifically on individual practices,
since these have been typically overlooked in the current research on ethnic minority political participation.

Based upon the distinction between structure and practices, and on the understanding of both that I have detailed here, I will now proceed to describe the methodological design of my study and the data that was gathered in order to answer the questions I have just posed. Consequently, Chapter III will focus on the description of the structure, while Chapters IV, V and VI will deal with each of the three types of practices that I have highlighted herein.

**Table 1.1: Summary of research questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access to politics</td>
<td>Which features of the structure determine the opportunities for ethnic minority politicians to gain access to politics and how?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of careers</td>
<td>What kind of development of political careers can be expected given the structure and, more specifically, to which features of the structure can this be attributed?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptions of representation</td>
<td>How is representation generally regarded? What is the role of ethnicity in the dominant conceptions of representation?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>