Ethnic minorities in local politics: comparing Amsterdam and Paris
Michon, L.B.

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Chapter II
Methodology

The aim of this chapter is to reveal the research design of this work and the methodological choices made herein. I will begin by reflecting upon the fact that I used data which was collected for another study in the early 1990s, meaning that the form and method of the 1990s’ research have guided the decisions made concerning my own piece of work. Subsequently, I will detail the comparative method that I have chosen to apply, and will then explain my research design. Finally, the ultimate section of this chapter describes how the data was collected and analysed.

I. Initial methodological choices

About 30 city councillors, district councillors, (district) deputy mayors and party officials of Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese and Antillean origin were interviewed in Amsterdam in 1990 and 1994 for a research project set up by Cadat. In addition, in 1992, some 30 migrant politicians, candidates and elected councillors of Antillean or North-African descent were interviewed in Paris and its regions. The characteristics of this research population and, linked thereto, the reasoning behind the selection of Amsterdam and the Paris region as case studies, must both be highlighted here. Cadat initially focused on ethnic minority politicians who were elected and/or held party positions. He also interviewed people with foreign backgrounds (first and second generation immigrants), as well as those from overseas territories. This approach led to me defining the research population in terms of “ethnic minorities”, as I have explained in the Introduction.
Cadat then decided to compare the circumstances in Amsterdam with those in Paris. Accordingly, Parisian politicians were also interviewed. However, since their number was too small for comparison purposes, the research population in France was extended to include elected politicians (municipal and regional councillors), candidates in various elections, and party officials in the entire Paris region (Ile-de-France). While identifying the research population in Amsterdam was straightforward (all of the councillors of foreign origin and from overseas territories, as well as a few high profile party officials), in the Paris area the identification of ethnic minority politicians took place through the analysis of election news (during the 1992 regional elections) and a snowballing technique.

I adopted some of the characteristics of Cadat’s study, but also chose to re-focus on certain other aspects. In the Introduction, I explained that the focus on the local level, and the comparison between the capital cities of France and the Netherlands, was both necessary and appealing. As I also made clear, I am particularly interested in the (potential) tension between representation and ethnicity, which is why I chose to use only the 1990s’ interviews that were conducted with elected representatives. Moreover, given that a large majority of the interviewees had been elected at the local level, I chose to concentrate on those who held municipal mandates. The research population herein, therefore, includes those born, or who have at least one parent who was born, abroad or in overseas territories and who have been elected to a city council or a district council. Both a positional and an ethnic criterion are thus used to describe the research population.

For the new series of interviews conducted with elected councillors who currently hold office, I chose to re-focus on Paris. My reasoning related to the fact that after their (respective) 2008 and 2006 elections, a representative sample of ethnic minority councillors could be identified both in Paris and in Amsterdam. A neat comparison of access to politics, and discourses on representation in two different contexts but at a similar point in time, is, therefore, now possible.

Crucial to the design of this study is the distinction between groups of interviewees. There were two groups in each city/region, the first of which was composed of politicians interviewed in the 1990s and who have been re-interviewed, while the second included ethnic minority councillors who currently hold office. By cross-cutting both the research focus, as set out in the previous chapter, and the available data, different comparisons can be distinguished for the analysis in the following chapters:

1. The comparison of access to the local political arena in Amsterdam after the 1990 and 2006 elections (cross-time);
2. The comparison of access to the local political arena, at a similar point in time, in Amsterdam (2006 elections) and Paris (2008 elections) (cross-city);
3. The comparison of the development of the political careers of councillors who were elected in Amsterdam and the Paris region in the early 1990s (both longitudinal and cross-cities);

These different analytical elements of the study are set out in Figure 2.1. In Amsterdam, a neat comparison can be made between the interviews conducted in 1990 and 1994
and those from 2008. This is because the issue of access to the local political arena is at the heart of the study in both cases, while the research population is either the total population or a representative sample thereof (first arrow in figure 2.1).

**Figure 2.1: Levels of comparison in the study of ethnic minority politicians**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amsterdam</th>
<th>Parisian region/Paris</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time of interview</td>
<td>Data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006/2007</td>
<td>Same respondents re-interviewed (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Interviews with currently elected councillors (15)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Furthermore, I also studied the issue of access to politics in terms of the ethnic minority councillors in Paris in 2007 and 2008. The findings made can be compared to the situation in Amsterdam at the same time, with representative samples of the total population being used in both cases (second arrow).

The longitudinal data (the interviews conducted in the early 1990s and, with the same respondents, in 2006 and 2007) is used to describe political careers over time. In Figure 3.1, this longitudinal aspect for Amsterdam is depicted in the dark grey area, while this is portrayed for the Paris region in the light grey section. The longitudinal analysis of political careers is then compared across the different contexts (third arrow in Figure 3.1).

Now that the groups and cities under comparison have been defined, it is important to explain how the comparisons will be conducted and to what end. A comparison is not a self-evident analytical tool, but must be informed by a comparative strategy or method. Accordingly, the design of the comparative method used in the present study will now be explained.

**II. The comparative method**

In the social sciences, comparisons are seen as being one of the most efficient ways of arriving at general conclusions because of the difficulty of conducting experiments. The purpose of comparisons is to control for certain variables so as to be able to describe and explain the effect of an independent variable on a dependent one. Accordingly,

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1. In the comparison of access to politics, the group of first interviewees in the Paris region is not included, because it is not a representative sample of the population of ethnic minority councillors in a given context and at the particular time.
causation is the ultimate aim of a comparison, and this is the bottom-line of some of the most well-known works on this tool. Mill’s A System of Logic (1904), although mainly concerned with the “laws of nature” (idem, p.255), has been very influential in the social sciences, due to the clarity of the different methods of comparison that he presents therein. According to Mill, there are two basic comparative methods. The first is the “Method of Agreement”, and its aim is to define the one variable that is present in two instances where the same phenomenon occurs (idem, p.255). The second method is called the “Method of Difference”, in which the purpose is to define the one variable upon which two situations differ when a phenomenon occurs in one but not the other (idem, p.256).

Although both methods are based on the same principle of eliminating variables that are neither the cause nor the effect of the phenomenon observed (idem), there are important differences when it comes to the type of conclusions that can be reached. Mill argues that the Method of Agreement can only lead to “laws of phenomena” (idem, p.258), since the researcher can never be certain that the variable that is common to the observed circumstances is the only cause of the phenomenon under study (idem, p.257). Accordingly, to Mill, the Method of Difference is, therefore, the only suitable way of defining causation (idem, p.258). This is because it is a method of “artificial experiment,” in which the two instances compared must be similar in every respect except for the single variable under study (idem, p.256).

In their Logic of Comparative Social Inquiry, Przeworski and Teune (1970) also distinguish two comparative methods, both of which have much in common with those proposed by Mill. Crucial to these scholars is the concept of system, which is defined as a stable pattern of interactions between “individuals, groups, communities, institutions, or governments”. This is generally taken to refer to societies, nations or cultures (idem, p.12). How one makes a comparison, and for what purposes, depends upon whether the systems compared are mainly different, or mainly similar. In the case of mostly similar systems, the purpose of the comparison is to identify variations within each of the systems being compared. These variations are then explained in terms of the features of the systems themselves. This is called the “most similar systems design” (idem, p.33).

In the case of mostly different systems, the research design starts with an assumption, namely that the units of analysis (at “the lowest level observed in the study, most often individuals”, idem, p.36) were drawn from the same population, albeit observed in different systems: “in other words ... systemic factors do not play any role in explaining the observed behaviour” (idem, pp.34-35). The features of the systems that are compared only come into play if this initial assumption is rejected (idem). As the authors explain, this “most different systems’ design centers on eliminating irrelevant systemic factors” (idem, p.35).

The present study is not primarily concerned with causation; the aim is not to describe the effect of explanatory variables on a dependent variable, as in the methods proposed by Mill and Przeworski and Teune, but to instead explore the role of ethnicity in three types of political practices (access to politics, development of career and discourses on representation). I, therefore, decided to rely upon a form of comparison that focuses on the end of finding general mechanisms, as in the definition provided by Lagroye and his colleagues, who explained that comparison reveals: the variety of types of “objective orders” (which I call structures); the diversity of historical dynamics; and other general processes:
While I have avoided defining causal mechanisms, I do use the definitions of comparison proposed by Mill and Przeworski and Teune for the comparative design of the present study. So, the comparison in a similar context (Amsterdam), but across time, is combined with the comparison across cities (Amsterdam vs. Paris) and across time. Using Przeworski and Teune’s terminology, a “most similar systems design” is thus used in the comparison of the access of ethnic minorities to politics in Amsterdam over an interval of 15 years (Przeworski & Teune, 1970, pp.32-34). Within this form of comparison, the focus is on finding crucial differences between the two situations in order to draw general conclusions. The ability to do this requires conditions that are difficult to achieve. As Mill comments on the method of difference, true similarity is difficult to attain. Lijphart has also argued that “the same country is not really the same at different times”, although he did concede that the diachronic study of the same case is “an alternative way of maximizing comparability” (Lijphart, 1971, p.689). It will, therefore, be necessary to be cautious in terms of considering the extent to which Amsterdam has retained a similar system between 1990 and 2006.

The comparison of access to politics, the development of careers, and discourses on representation in Amsterdam and Paris will proceed from the perspective of a “most different systems design.” In the next chapter, I will demonstrate that the two cases are mainly different in terms of the systemic variables which may influence the political actions of immigrants and ethnic minorities. Subsequently, if the comparison reveals similarities between the two cases, general conclusions may be reached. These conclusions may be of different kinds. Firstly, as Przeworski and Teune explain, if the populations being examined appear to have similarities in terms of the variables under study, it is possible to regard them as homogeneous, despite the dissimilarity of the contexts in which they are situated. In other words, the context would appear to have had no influence on the practices studied. Secondly, similarity can (also) take the form of similar patterns of relationships between variables. Przeworski and Teune argue that different findings across countries do not mean that their systems differ; systems differ only if the relationship between variables differs:

*The countries differ with regard to their levels of education, class structure, and family socialization, but they do not differ as systems so long as their patterns of relationships are the same. Systems differ not when the frequency of particular characteristics differ, but when the patterns of the relationships among variables differ (Przeworfski & Teune, 1970, p.45, emphasis in original).*

In other words, if the study of ethnic minority politicians in Amsterdam and (the region of) Paris reveals similar patterns in terms of: who has access to the political arena and in what form; how careers evolve; and what the ethnic minority politicians’ discourses on representation are, a general conclusion might be drawn about ethnic minorities in
Western-European local politics. If, however, the practices identified are dissimilar, but
the mechanisms are similar, a general conclusion could again be drawn about the ways
in which those belonging to ethnic minorities get access to politics, lead their political
careers, and develop discourses on representation in Western-European cities. If not, no
general mechanism will arise, which will highlight the role of the context; i.e. practices
differ because the contexts are different.

The methodological choices made in the 1990s’ study are incorporated into the
initial methodological decisions made in the present research. They have also orientated
its comparative design. The next section, however, concerns the more practical choices
made while conducting my fieldwork.

III. Gathering data

The attention paid in this work to issues of both structure and practices implies that
several methods are used to obtain information. However, the originality of this research
lies in its longitudinal, qualitative data at the level of individual practices. Accordingly,
there is a particular focus on the analysis of the data collected about these practices, i.e.
at the level of the individual political careers of the subjects of the study. This assessment
is based on in-depth, semi-directed interviews.²

a. The interviews

• Sampling

There were different criteria governing the choice of interviewees in the 1990s’ research
when compared to the circumstances of the current study. So, the group of respondents
interviewed in Amsterdam in 1990 reflected the total research population, since all ethnic
minority councillors were approached and a large majority of them were interviewed.
In the Paris region in 1992, Cadat held interviews during the election campaign for the
regional council. In doing so, he used his personal network, got names from newspaper
articles and used snowballing techniques to form his pool of interviewees. I looked for the
people who were interviewed in the 1990s by using the internet, telephone directories,
and the town halls of the municipalities where they were (or had been) elected (see
subsection below on response and non-response).

For the new series of interviews, and given the size of the research population in
both Amsterdam and Paris, I had to select representative samples. I, therefore, started
by gathering data on all ethnic minority councillors, which I then entered into (Excel)
databases. The information gathered in this way was obtained from official sources (the
city and district websites), press archives and through internet searches.³ I, thus, created
a database which contained the details of all of the ethnic minority councillors elected
in Amsterdam after the 2006 elections (eight to the city council and 75 to the district

². See Appendix 1 for a list of all interviewees.
³. Information found on the internet was only used when it had been cross-checked.
councils in January 2008). The information included data about gender, party affiliation, origin, and, if available, additional facts such as occupation, education and civic activities. For Paris, I began with a database of all of the Parisian councillors elected in 2007 (during my first fieldwork period there, see Appendix 2), which included details of gender and party affiliation. Then, since the Conseil de Paris’ website included information about its representatives’ date and place of birth, I was able to identify 23 people elected thereto who had been born abroad. I also identified seven councillors elected in the districts of Paris who could also be regarded as belonging to the research population. A new database was created during the second fieldwork period in Paris (June-July 2008). This included the details of 58 ethnic minority councillors elected in the 20 districts of Paris and the Conseil de Paris after the March 2008 elections, with information about gender, party affiliation, date and place of birth, occupation, and civic activities, if available.

Gender, origin, party affiliation and district elected to were the criteria used to create the samples of interviewees. This is information that was available for all of the councillors, and each criterion is presumed to have some influence on both how people got access to the local political arena and their discourses on representation. As was explained in the previous chapter, women have a particular position in politics and it was, therefore, important to ascertain if this was also the case for ethnic minority women. The issue of party affiliation is important, because of the dominance of some parties in each city and district, while the origins of the councillors interviewed were intended to be as diverse as possible, enabling this variable to be controlled for (and meaning that conclusions would not be drawn based on a group of respondents of the same origin). Variation across districts was also sought, because the share of the ethnic minority population differed from one district to another, which might have been related to the contacts that councillors have with specific groups within the population. Moreover, the relative presence of ethnic minority councillors in the district council was also taken into account since some respondents were elected to councils where they were the only (or one of a few) ethnic minority representative(s), while others were elected in districts where ethnic minority councillors were present in significant numbers. This was important in terms of the discourses on representation, and was based on the assumption that in district councils with many ethnic minority councillors, it is less likely that these individuals will identify with (or be identified as) being part of a minority group and, thus, be expected to relate to the ethnic minority electorate and population. In the Parisian case, an extra criterion was used to create the sample, namely whether someone was a (district) deputy mayor, a councillor with a “delegation” or “simply” a councillor. This was taken into account both as a way of identifying what the position of ethnic minority councillors was in the hierarchical political structure of Paris, and as a way of checking if position and (the type of) access were linked.

One important characteristic of the groups of respondents both in the 1990s and more recently is that native or autochthonous councillors are not included. Accordingly, unless information was collected on the profiles of all councillors (which was possible to a limited extent in 2007 and 2008 in Paris and Amsterdam), the study’s conclusions will not relate to councillors in general, or to the differences and similarities between ethnic minority and autochthonous representatives. In particular, the ethnic minority councillors’ discourses on representation cannot be compared to those of their native counterparts. This limitation is acknowledged and taken into account in the conclusions that are drawn.
• Response and non-response

The fieldwork began in Amsterdam in November 2006. It proved to be relatively easy to get in touch with people via email (contact information was found on the internet), and none of those I contacted refused to cooperate. Nevertheless, three individuals I got in touch with were not keen to make appointments (promising that they would call back, but did not, in fact, do so). So, with these people, although I had been able to contact them, I was not able to meet them. Four of the initial group of the 1990s’ respondents were untraceable by the means that I used. One subject preferred to have a (brief) conversation by telephone, while 15 face-to-face interviews were held between November 2006 and February 2007 (except for two which took place in November 2007 and March 2008).

The first stage of the fieldwork in the Paris region also related to the 15 interviewees who had been interviewed in 1992. I contacted these respondents by post after finding addresses in phone books (four respondents), on the websites of the relevant municipalities (for three respondents who were elected at the local level), or via their work (two respondents), or acquaintances (again two interviewees). One respondent had died and three others could not be traced. All of the other respondents (11) were contacted and replied positively to my request. The interviews were subsequently conducted between March and June 2007 (with one taking place in January 2008).

During this first fieldwork trip to Paris, I interviewed the ethnic minority politicians elected there and in two suburb municipalities. I also sent letters and emails to 23 members of the Conseil de Paris who were either born abroad (six in Algeria, five in Morocco, three in Tunisia, and the others in the USA, Madagascar, Lebanon, Spain, Switzerland, Canada and Germany – a large number of these people were of French origin), or were presumed to be of foreign origin (one councillor). I also contacted six district councillors who, according to their name, colour of skin, or information provided by others I had been in touch with, belonged to the research population. Only three councillors replied to my letter, one of whom agreed to be interviewed, while the other two referred me to colleagues. A long process of telephone calls and using the postal service (or trying to), therefore, had little success.

The electoral campaigns of April/May 2007 (presidential) and June 2007 (legislative) were often used as a reason not to cooperate. Above all, the main problem I faced was related to the fact that there were very few direct ways to get in touch with the councillors, while their secretaries and assistants were not particularly helpful (with a few notable exceptions). Practical reasons thus played a major part in the difficulties I encountered. The topic being addressed added to this problem; my letters and emails, in which I explained that the study concerned ethnic minority councillors, were also sent – without notice – to deputy mayors and councillors in charge of (“délégation”) integration, diversity, equality and the like. Ultimately, seven ethnic minority councillors elected in Paris (of the 29 I contacted) were interviewed in June, July and December 2007 and in January 2008. Discouraged by the poor response rate, I considered abandoning the idea.

4. I did not try to get in touch with Tara Singh Varma, a former city councillor in Amsterdam and former MP for the green party, GroenLinks. This is because she is known to have had a psychiatric breakdown. Fortunately, however, a lot is known about the development of her political career via newspaper articles, and I will deal with this in Chapter V.
5. I would like to thank Meindert Fennema for interviewing one respondent in Willemstad, Curaçao.
of interviewing current councillors and instead focusing on the longitudinal data. In the meantime, I turned to a new series of interviews in Amsterdam.

These were conducted between March and May 2008. Eighteen potential respondents were selected on the basis of their gender, origin, party affiliation and district. These representatives were contacted via the details available on the websites of the relevant municipalities and districts, and included eight ethnic minority municipal councillors. In the district councils I focused on the 53 councillors who had not been elected in 2002, since the focus was on access to politics and making a comparison with the newcomers elected in 1990. Of these newcomers, the only person elected to a right-wing party was asked to give an interview. All of the other potential respondents were either members of the social-democratic or the green parties (which corresponded to the party affiliation balance in the entire research population). Given the gender ratio in the group of newcomers (30 men, 23 women), six males and four females were approached about an interview. Three councillors of Turkish origin were contacted, because 30 percent of the ethnic minority councillors were of Turkish descent, while two councillors of Moroccan origin and two with a Surinamese background were also approached, which is again in line with the share of these groups among the newcomers to local politics. Finally, the choice of potential respondents was also influenced by the differences between districts. In Oud-Zuid, Westerpark and Zeeburg, those with an ethnic background were in a small minority in the council, despite their presence in the district. Accordingly, these councillors were also approached for interview. In contrast, the large presence of Turkish and Moroccan immigrants (and their descendants) in Geuzenveld and Slotervaart, and their significant presence in the district council, led to a focus on these districts. Two people did not reply to my emails and could not be contacted by telephone. Furthermore, because of the topic of the study, another municipal councillor was reluctant to cooperate (although she didn’t explicitly refuse to do so). Ultimately, it was not possible to make an appointment with her. Nevertheless, with 15 interviews, the response rate was pleasingly high and the councillors were cooperative and friendly.

The second phase of the Parisian fieldwork was conducted in June and July 2008, when I had the opportunity to spend time at the CEVIPOF (Centre de recherches politiques de Sciences Po, Paris) as a guest researcher. Fortunately, the March 2008 local elections proved to be very interesting, since the issue of what the French call “diversité” was high on the political agenda (after the 2005 “banlieues” riots and the later appointment by President Sarkozy of three ministers of foreign descent). Moreover, the number of ethnic minority councillors also increased significantly. I first began my search for ethnic minority and migrant councillors in the 20 districts of Paris by checking the names and photographs on the websites of the district municipalities. I then ran the names I had found in this way (those councillors who most obviously belonged to the research population) through a press database (Factiva) and the internet. This not only helped me to find information (date and place of birth, occupation, origin) about several potential subjects, but also helped me to identify other ethnic minority councillors. Finally, through

6. This appeared to not be a completely reliable indicator of whether people had held a seat in the council before the 2006 elections; during the interviews, it appeared that three respondents had accessed the council during the 2002-2006 period, and that one had held a seat in a council a few years before then.
7. This councillor said that she did not want to be identified as an immigrant, and was opposed to the idea of the study.
my interviews and discussions, I was gradually able to add a number of individuals to the list. Ultimately, 58 councillors (of a total of 517) were found to be of foreign descent and/or belonged to ethnic minorities.

Fifteen people were contacted for an interview, and this choice of potential respondents was based on a number of criteria; as I had already interviewed some of the councillors who were successful in the previous elections, only those elected in 2008, who had not been a councillor in a previous period, were approached. Moreover, more women (9/15) than men were asked for an interview, because this reflected the ratio of female ethnic minority councillors elected in Paris, while more left-wing than right-wing councillors were approached (13/15), again because of the ratio thereof in the research population. The districts played a role as well: two councillors elected in districts where they were the only ethnic minority representative (5th and 16th district) were asked for an interview, as were those elected in districts where there was more than one ethnic minority representative. Moreover, in some districts, all of the ethnic minority councillors were newly elected (the 10th), while in others (the 19th for example) they had held seats for longer. Councillors from both of these districts were interviewed. I also approached councillors who were in the role of the opposition in their neighbourhood, as well as those who were in the majority. These respondents included deputy mayors and councillors with a “délégation.” So far as the issue of origin was concerned, valuable variation was easily achieved.

Three of the councillors I contacted did not reply and could, therefore, not be interviewed. I had also got in touch with another respondent, but since the date of the interview was postponed several times, it was not possible to proceed. Eleven interviews were held, and the response rate was, thus, high. After the experiences I had a year earlier, this came as a pleasant surprise. A few factors may have played a role in this improved scenario: newly elected councillors may be more approachable than those who have been in office for several years and the status of the institute where I was a guest (CEVIPOF) might have also increased the willingness of councillors to cooperate with the study (a few respondents asked about the CEVIPOF, although I always made it clear that I was affiliated to IMES and the University of Amsterdam).

- The questionnaires

In order to make a comparison possible, the interview questions were based on the questionnaire used in the early 1990s (Appendix 4a). It included questions on: the profile and background of the interviewee (date and place of birth, education, occupation, occupation of parents), political socialisation (political activities of parents) and party membership. Topics also covered were how the subject related to the electorate (in particular, the electorate of migrant origin), the role of ethnicity in politics in general and in the respondent’s political activities in particular, the respondent’s analysis of discrimination, and his/her conception of political integration.

The new questionnaire used for the panel-interviews (Appendix 4b) started with questions on the profile of the respondent (to see if changes had occurred in terms of education, occupation, party membership), and went on to deal with experiences within the party and politics since the 1990s’ interviews. More general questions about the position of ethnic minorities in politics were also included.
The new questionnaire for the current politicians (Appendix 4c) was based to a large extent on the document used in the early 1990s, and included similar questions on the profile and experiences of the respondent within the party and politics. However, the project which started in the early 1990s focused on discrimination, the perceptions of differences in discrimination and reactions thereto. These are not central themes in the present study and the questions on these issues were, therefore, not repeated. Furthermore, I paid more attention to the process of political integration than had been the case in the 1990s, meaning that more questions were included on political socialisation and the type of contacts and experiences that had led to party membership and an election.

- Conducting interviews

I prepared for the interviews by carefully reading those from the 1990s (for the panel interviewees) and using information found in press archives (both Factiva and Lexis Nexis were used) and on the internet. Data identified in this way was always checked during the interviews.

I did not usually have a very strict line of questioning, instead following the interviewees’ reasoning as much as possible. A number of issues did, however, need to be addressed and I also required some factual information; so, if these matters were raised spontaneously by the respondent, I did not always explicitly ask about them. I was usually only directive at the very start and the very end of the interviews, so as to make sure that I had gathered all of the information that I needed to obtain. My aims in the interviews were to collect facts about the development of the respondents’ political career (with questions about membership of parties and associations, the length of the mandate etc.), and to understand the motives, analysis and frame of mind of the interviewees. I tried to identify if there were any dilemmas and, if so, how these were resolved. I also highlighted any contradictions, but only in order to understand the respondents’ line of reasoning. The interviews generally lasted for one hour.

The way I envisaged the interviews was influenced by the work of Sayad, who viewed the technique as a form of socio-analyse, where the interviewee is his/her “own analyst,” or, in Sayad’s words, “en mesure d’élaborer lui-même les questions et les réponses de nature à donner (relativement) plus de sens et d’unité à son existence” (Sayad, 1991, p.257). Sayad applied this approach by repeating interviews with the same respondents, which my research design did not enable me to do. Moreover, the interviews I conducted were relatively short, and the level of trust and free speech required to attain “socio-analysis” was, therefore, difficult to achieve. Nevertheless, I believe that through a largely empathetic attitude and the use of questions aimed at understanding the frame of mind of the interviewees, the quality of the interviews was, by and large, satisfactory, particularly given the friendly and cooperative approach of most of the respondents.

The interviews were conducted in different places: cafés (eight in the Paris region and seven in Amsterdam); at the offices of the respondent (work office: three French respondents and five in Amsterdam; political office: 16 French respondents and seven in Amsterdam); at the home of the respondent (one French respondent and five in

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8. For details on how the interviews were conducted in the early 1990s, and the implications of this in terms of their use, see Appendix 3.
Amsterdam); or at the researcher’s institute (five respondents in Amsterdam). The difference in setting does not seem to have had an influence on the interview content, save in the cases where it was conducted in a space where colleagues or acquaintances could pass by and eventually hear some of what was being said. In such situations, which occurred twice, I chose to stop recording and made notes instead.

I tried to be sensitive to cues regarding how the respondents perceived me as an interviewer. In the Dutch context, my affiliation to the Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies (IMES) and the University of Amsterdam seems to have been an important marker. I was seen as being Dutch, and respondents assumed that I was well aware of the political context and the basic rules of the political game. In the French context, this was less self-evident, but because of my French name and knowledge, the respondents did not usually perceive me as an outsider. It was, however, sometimes useful to reiterate that I came from the Netherlands, which enabled me to legitimately ask about certain issues.

I kept fieldwork diaries in which I recorded all of my attempts to contact people, the telephone conversations I had and my impressions following the interviews. These diaries were also useful for recording information that the respondents did not provide during the taped part of the meetings.

- Analysis of interviews

All of the interviews conducted in the 1990s were taped and subsequently fully transcribed.  

9. The act of transcription is a time for reflection, and notes were taken during this phase concerning issues that surfaced. Whenever possible, the interviews were transcribed during the fieldwork, so that the strengths and weaknesses (questions that were misunderstood, for example, or questions or cues that yielded interesting reflections from the respondents) of the initial interviews could serve a purpose for the rest of the fieldwork.  

10. Unfortunately, not all of the interviews could be transcribed, either for practical reasons or because two respondents did not agree to having the conversation taped (one because of a claim that her Dutch was poor, while the other was only prepared to say that she did not want to be recorded). In total, 12 of the 59 interviews could not be taped. Notes were taken during these interviews, which were completed immediately after the interview in order to record as many details as possible, despite the absence of a full transcript.

Following a typology of Scott and Alwin, I distinguished between the different types of information gathered in the interviews: events, an accumulation of experiences, and evaluation or interpretations (Scott & Alwin, 1998, p.100-102). The first type relates to the reconstruction by the respondent of past events in his career and his political socialisation. The second refers to “where people are” at the time of the interview. These two types are regarded as concerning relatively objective data, such as elements of the profile of the respondents (age, education, occupation of parents, socialisation, party
membership, etc.). This type of data was summarised in (Excel) databases so that it could be compared and analysed.

The third type of data is considered to be more subjective, but what is interesting here is not only what the respondents tell us, but also how they tell us about it. Therefore, when transcribed, the interviews were analysed and coded using software (MaxQDA). This involved many readings of the interviews, while grounded coding, in which the respondents’ words and meanings are categorised, was utilised. The conceptions of representation of the respondents (Chapter VI) will be analysed this way.

b. Other data

A brief mention should be made about the data which will be presented in this study and which was not based on the interviews. Chapter III, which deals with the context of Amsterdam, Paris and the Paris region in terms of the electoral system, the political system, the political culture and the role of migration, was written using secondary sources. To the extent that elements of the party structure and political culture could not be retrieved in this way, I conducted a few interviews with experts in the field (Madani Cheurfa, Jean Chiche, Elisabeth Dupoirier, Florence Haegel and Claude Dargent).

Chapters IV and V, which concern the political careers of ethnic minority politicians, are predominantly based on the data obtained from the interviews. However, the databases that I created on the ethnic minority councillors in Amsterdam and Paris (which were used to create the samples) were also used as a source of information, since they provided insight into some of the features of the total research population.

IV. Conclusion

Given the fact that this research is partly based on a previous study, the methodological choices made in the 1990s had to be taken into account. I have explained how I dealt with this material and made decisions about what would be used in the present study. The study’s focus on ethnic minority politicians in Amsterdam and the Paris region was orientated towards a concentration on both the representatives elected at the local level and Amsterdam and Paris. The previous study also guided the comparative design of the present work: the interviews collected in the 1990s form the starting point of a longitudinal study of political careers, and the interviews conducted in Amsterdam are the basis of a “most similar systems design”, whereby access to politics over time is studied, focussing on changes between the early 1990s and the current circumstances. The comparison of the interviews conducted in Amsterdam and Paris provides an opportunity to analyse access to politics, the development of careers and discourses on representation in different contexts and across time; in other words, a “most different systems design.” As explained above, the conclusions that will be drawn from the analysis will depend upon the degree of similarity of the practices which will be observed in the two cities. Reaching general conclusions about ethnic minority politicians in Western European cities, and the mechanisms guiding their political careers, is the purpose of the comparison across cities.
In the final part of this chapter, I have provided information about how the data for this dissertation was gathered. Most of this section focussed on the interviews, as these are the cornerstone of this study. By providing extensive details on the choice of respondents, the questionnaires, the interviewing of subjects and the way in which the interviews were analysed, I have shown what the data can be used for. The samples of respondents in the 1990s were very different: the one in Amsterdam covered an entire population, while that in the region of Paris was not representative of the ethnic minorities elected there. The new samples, however, are representative of the population of ethnic minority councillors with regard to a number of features (principally gender and party affiliation). However, because of the relatively small number of interviews held with each group of respondents, the generality of the conclusions will mainly depend on the comparative analysis.