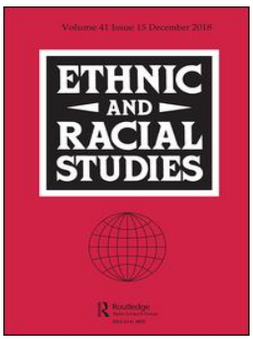

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Knowledge production, reflexivity, and the use of categories in migration studies: tackling challenges in the field

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ABSTRACT

Recent debates in migration studies target the non-reflexive use of categories that derive from nation-state- and ethnicity-centred epistemologies. However, what a category is and how categorization works remain undertheorized. Our paper addresses this gap. Through a qualitative study on experiences of Othering among migrant descendants in Zurich (CH) and Edinburgh (UK), we scrutinize the perspectival, political, and performative nature of categories. We show how the persons informing our study were highly reflexive when using the category *migrant descendant*: They contested, negotiated, and navigated it in multiple ways. Although this specific category is firmly embedded in the "national order of things", it ultimately proved to be *inclusive*. We argue that reflexivity in the field can not only create space for the often-muted voices of research participants, but also helps to overcome important pitfalls that derive from issues of legitimacy, representation, and power relations in scientific knowledge production.

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Introduction[1]

Liisa Malkki (1992, 25–26) was among the first scholars to emphasize how the "national order of things" impacts taken-for-granted ways of thinking about identity and territory, displacement and refugees. She argued that common-sense ideas of soil, roots, and territory, based on a national logic, are not only built into everyday language, but often also implicit in scholarly work. Ten years later, Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller (2002) published their seminal article on methodological nationalism. It triggered a vivid debate about the ways in which migration studies are entangled with the logic of nation-states and concomitant epistemological underpinnings.

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More recently, Boris Nieswand and Heike Drotbohm (2014) launched a discussion on the reflexive turn in migration studies. Their idea of reflexivity pertains to the basic assumptions and ideologies that shape knowledge production in this field. Consequently, the reflexive turn promotes a fundamental theoretical reorientation through which crucial concepts like *society*, *culture*, and *migration* are revised. An increasing number of studies addresses single aspects of these issues, and many scholars have started to think about knowledge production in migration studies. For instance, some have critically scrutinized the role of expert knowledge in migration-related policymaking (Boswell 2009; Scheel and Ustek-Spilda 2019; Scholten, Entzinger, and Penninx 2015). Others have questioned the uncritical use and normalization of the grid of nation-states through migration maps (van Houtum and Bueno Lacy 2019, 1–2). However, the risk remains that migration studies may reproduce particular hegemonic power relations and concomitant forms of social and political exclusion. In extreme cases, contributions to the field of migration studies build on and reproduce racist and neo-colonial reasoning (Schinkel 2018).

This paper contributes to these timely debates on reflexivity and knowledge production by focusing on one particular aspect, namely the working of *categories* within migration studies. We ask how we can reflexively address the problems tied to the use of categories during fieldwork and what the consequences are for reflexivity and scientific knowledge production.

Our understanding of reflexivity derives from three different sources. First, we use insights from the reflexive turn in social anthropology and postcolonial scholarship (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Abu-Lughod 1991; Said 1978; Connell 2017). Here the focus is on questions of legitimacy, representation, and power relations in contexts of knowledge production. Second, we base our idea of reflexivity on feminist standpoint theory (Harding 2004) and the claim for situated knowledge production and the inclusion of marginalized voices. Finally, we adopt the Bourdieusian idea that reflexivity should be considered a methodological procedure in terms of "objectiver le sujet de l'objectivation", applying one's analytical tools to the reflexive analysis of one's own work (Bourdieu 2001): researchers are always embedded in cultural scientific traditions and should therefore convert reflexivity into a constitutive disposition of their scientific habitus in order to objectify their relation to the research object. In a nutshell, we define reflexivity as *a process of "decentring" by distancing one's research from well-established ideas while developing alternative ones*. We argue that this form of decentring allows researchers to critically reflect on their research objects and theories, the relations they establish in the field, the data they generate and their interpretations of these data. Reflexivity also requires scrutiny of both common-sense and analytical categories,[2] which are often tied to specific systems of dominance. Reflexivity thus makes it

possible to focus on structural inequalities, power relations, and scientific knowledge production (Denzin and Lincoln 2005).

Of course, a reflexive approach towards categories in migration research is not new as such. Many scholars have raised concerns regarding the reproduction of essentializing nation-state- and ethnicity-centred categories in migration studies and discussed the political consequences of such categories in policymaking, including, for example, the consequences of the label *refugee* for the governance of forced migration and refugee protection (Zetter 1991; Scalettaris 2007; Crawley and Skleparis 2017). Scholars have also scrutinized the category *integration* (Schinkel 2018; Korteweg 2017), revealed the ways in which the category *migration* is directly entangled with the logic of the nation-state (Favell 2014), and demonstrated how more recent categories like *migration background* mirror a shift from class-centred problematizations to individualizing and culturalizing discourses (Horvath 2019). Still, we identify and address three main research gaps in these debates.

First, the above-mentioned body of literature has not explicitly scrutinized the concept of *category*. Indeed, what a category is and how categorization works remain vague and undertheorized.

Second, previous work has proposed ways to reorient research to denaturalize categories at a theoretical and conceptual level. Scholars have proposed to "de-ethnicise" (Wimmer 2009), "de-naturalise" (Amelina and Faist 2012), "de-migranticize" (Dahinden 2016) and "de-nationalise" (Anderson 2019) research designs in order to address the effects of hegemonic power relations in knowledge production (see also Levitt 2012). However, little has been said about how we should practically engage with issues of categorization and the different roles categories play at different stages of the empirical research process. How do we deal with categories in the field, during interviews, in interaction with our research participants? This gap is surprising, because it is in the field and during interactions with our research participants that data and hence scientific knowledge are produced and that categories are used and performed.

Finally, we not only "deconstruct" categories, but also show alternatives when confronting the pitfalls of categorization in the field. Our paper addresses the three identified gaps through a micro-sociological perspective on the use of categories, thus contributing to the issue of knowledge production in migration studies.

As a case study to inform our arguments, we examine the category *migrant descendants*. We use a qualitative study on experiences with Othering (Spivak 1985) among descendants of migrants that we conducted in Zurich (CH) and Edinburgh (UK). *Migrant descendants* here refers to people who were born and raised in Switzerland or the United Kingdom, respectively, but whose parents were born elsewhere, be it in another European or in a third country. We conducted twenty-six interviews in Zurich and twenty-four in Edinburgh with

people between the ages of twenty-five and forty. In our attempt to apply a reflexive study design, we were confronted with many dilemmas related to this category during fieldwork.

In the following, we first discuss two basic properties of categories that are highly relevant for empirical research – their perspectival and performative character. We then discuss three methodological pitfalls we encountered in our research related to the category *migrant descendant* and analyse how we addressed them.

We show that taking into account the perspectival, political and performative character of categories allows researchers to avoid reproducing hegemonic structures and essentalized ideas. Subsequently, we argue that reflexivity on the part of researchers during interviews can allow research participants to develop their meanings for and positions towards categories, sometimes by challenging the researchers. The fact that research participants are also reflexive and that their reflexivity is situated differently than that of the researchers is of crucial importance for knowledge production. In this sense, reflexivity becomes an important instrument for the co-construction of knowledge between researchers and participants. Paradoxically, while the category *migrant descendant* is undoubtedly embedded in the "national order of things", in the field it became *inclusive*, pointing to the transformation towards post-ethnic or post-migration societies. This transformation demands further attempts to "de-migranticize" research approaches (Dahinden 2016) and "migranticize citizens" (Anderson 2019).

Scrutinizing the perspectival, political, and performative character of social categories

Researchers are confronted with a dilemma that, while not new, remains important: categories are problematic, yet we need them, in everyday life and the social sciences alike (Brubaker 2004; Jacobs 2018). In the social sciences, it is neither possible nor desirable to avoid using them when doing empirical research. In his seminal monograph on social categorization, social identity, and social comparison, Tajfel (1981) summarizes the essential function of social categorization – to situate oneself and others in society:

> 'Social categorization' is a process of bringing together social objects or events in groups which are equivalent with regard to an individual's actions, intentions and system of beliefs … . [S]ocial categorization can therefore be considered as a system of orientation which helps to create and define the individual's place in society. (Tajfel 1981, 251–255)

Categories result from the homogenous grouping of data or persons based on unequivocally shared features (Scott and Marshall 2009). Critiques thus do not pertain to the use of categories within the social sciences, but to "an

unreflective use of social categories by social scientists [, which] results in the same risks as those evidenced in lay thinking" (Gillespie, Howarth, and Cornish 2012, 396), like reproducing racism and other hegemonic forms of exclusion. To tackle this dilemma, and thus approach categories reflexively, we first need to understand how categories work.

According to Gillespie et al. (2012, 392), categories are always *perspectival*. It is impossible to assign persons a "true" category, because categorization derives from a specific social position, from historically determined ways of interpreting the world and from particular interests. This implies that categories – regardless of whether they are analytical or common sense – are never natural or neutral, but embedded in political and historical contexts: they produce situated knowledge.

A voluminous body of literature in migration studies addresses the situated and perspectival nature of categories. Scholars have shown that *migration* as such is not a neutral social-scientific category, but a driving force for societal differentiation. It is the product of and embedded in the logic of the nation-state. In this logic, every move across national borders is a violation of the rule of sedentariness, and those we call migrants thus become the paradigmatic example of the Other who needs to be integrated, managed or controlled (Römhild 2014; Favell 2014). *Migration* as a category is therefore, if we consider it reflexively, *situated*: it is the producer of a particular worldview that normalizes the national order.

The category *migrant*, however, contains many subcategories, each of which has specific connotations and policy implications. Whether persons are labelled *skilled expats*, *labour migrants*, *refugees*, *asylum seekers* or *irregular migrants* shapes their position and entitlements in society, as well as their representation in public discourse. Rather than representing real and objective categories, these labels are all constructed and produce particular economic and political constraints (Sigona 2017; Kunz 2019; Elrick and Schwartzman 2015). For instance, Crawley and Skleparis (2017) demonstrate how categories like *refugee* and *migrant* serve to create distinctions between people on the move and affect the legitimacy of their claims for international protection. These categories are a tool to distinguish between acceptable and desirable migrants, on the on hand, and undesirable migrants, on the other (Pastore 2015). In other words, migration categories do not simply represent or reflect the world, but simultaneously create and limit it.

One major problem with categories and their politicized underpinnings is that they turn persons and groups into administrative objects rather than active agents. People do not simply behave according to roles defined by categories, and they often do not fit neatly into categories. They have a capacity for meaning-making and reflexive action (Gillespie, Howarth, and Cornish 2012, 399) that is difficult to reconcile with the external imposition of categories. For instance, migration experiences do not necessarily correspond

to the state's categories of *migrants*, *asylum seekers*, *refugees*, *transit migrants*, or *undocumented migrants*. State-centred categories also fail to capture the multidimensionality of human identity (Sen 2006). Moreover, there is a disjuncture between conceptual and policy categories and the lived experiences of those on the move. Migrants were not migrants before they left their countries: they became migrants when they crossed a national border (Gillespie, Howarth, and Cornish 2012).

A first step towards developing a reflexive approach to categories in migration research, therefore, is to understand the perspectives, social positions, situatedness, historical conditions, and interests at play when categories are introduced and used, and the above-quoted studies are examples of such an endeavour. Disentangling these contextual specificities enables us to illuminate the political consequences that result from the ways in which categories are used and the work they do. Or to go back to Bourdieu (2001, 182), to objectify the subject of objectification is to bring to light scientifically the social conditions of the sociological construction and the subject of this construction, in this case the categories in question. In the words of Crawley and Skleparis (2017, 13), "We need to explicitly engage with the politics of bounding, that is to say, the process [through] which categories are constructed, the purpose they serve and their consequences".

Once categories are socially and politically constructed and filled with a particular meaning, they take on a life of their own (Jacobs 2018, 134). This is as much the case for social-scientific categories as it is for common-sense and policy categories. Categories are *performative*. As a result of their perspectival nature, this performativity of categories is inherently relational, meaning that people see and respond to each other from their specific standpoints, and thus mutually influence each other in the course of their interaction (Emirbayer 1997). Social scientists contribute to the creation of the social world not only within academia, but also in the world at large, when their categories are perceived and employed by others, whether policymakers, lay persons, or journalists, for example.

Regardless of their social, educational, and professional background, people appropriate and employ categories in their everyday life. Categories may be used in a strategically essentialist way to support certain claims or draw attention to discrimination based on ethnicity, race, or gender (Fox and Jones 2013; Spivak 2012 (1988)). Likewise, people may re-appropriate and normatively invert categories. For example, adherents of the so-called *Secondo* movement in Switzerland explicitly used and attributed a positive meaning to the category *second generation*, which had previously had negative connotations (Wessendorf 2007).

Analytically, we can distinguish between three ways of using categories that are central to their performative nature. Categories are used to classify

ourselves, classify others, and indicate how we feel about the classifications imposed on us by others (Jacobs 2018, 139). Jenkins (1997, 1996) draws an analytical distinction between groups based on self-categorizations and those based on external categorizations: Both instances of categorization are entangled with power relations, albeit with different consequences for the persons or groups to whom categories are being applied He also draws attention to the resources available to those who have been categorized. Such dynamics of categorization are not restricted to micro-level interactions between individuals. Categories like *foreigner* and *migrant* are formally anchored in legal documents and national statistics, for example.

These properties of categories have important implications and concomitant challenges and raise the following question: how do we reflexively deal with the perspectival and performative character of categories in the field when collecting data?

Categories and categorizations at three different stages of empirical research: Migrant descendants?

In the following, we demonstrate how we tried to account for the perspectival and performative character of the category *migrant descendant* in empirical research. While generating empirical data, we encountered several challenges relating to this category. The first challenge derived from our attempts to be reflexive with regard to categorization when defining our subject of inquiry. The second was linked to our attempts to access the research population in question. Both challenges highlight the perspectival and political character of categories. A third challenge lay in the need to reflexively account for the ways in which research participants performed and attributed meaning to this category during interviews and in interacting with us as researchers.

Defining research participants: Dilemmas regarding the category migrant descendant

This first stage of the research process required us to reflexively engage with the categories we used to define our research population. We were confronted with the dilemma of assigning a category to the social group of interest – persons with two migrant parents who were born and raised in either Switzerland or the UK – while trying to avoid an essentialist approach to the research population. In other words, we reflexively attempted to avoid othering research participants from the outset (Abu-Lughod 1991) and detach ourselves from the contextual conditions of our scientific field by objectivizing categories usually applied within migration studies. Still, we needed a category to identify potential research participants and communicate our research objectives and findings to both the participants and

academic audiences. How to label them? We deliberately refrained from using the term *second generation*. Although widely used in migration studies, the term implies non-belonging. It suggests that only multigenerational sedentariness in a specific national territory turns a person into a true citizen. We also refrained from using the highly contested category *migration background*, which is used mainly in German-speaking countries and has changed from a statistical category into a social one (Elrick and Schwartzman 2015). After critical reflection, we decided to use *migrant descendant*.

We started by scrutinizing the concrete meaning of this category. *Migrant descendant* clearly has problematic biological underpinnings in that it suggests that migration can be inherited. In this sense, the term alludes to ideas of ancestry and thus carries an essentialist subtext. It implies Othering in terms of non-belonging to the national community, and it reproduces a nation-state-centred logic by assuming sedentariness as the rule and the "state as the home of the family" (Duyvendak 2011) – a family from which migrant descendants are symbolically, and sometimes also formally, excluded. In sum, *migrant descendant*, like *second generation*, is a signifier of non-belonging and essentialized understandings of sedentariness and migration. There is a risk that using this category will produce situated knowledge and reproduce nation-state-based power relations.

Notwithstanding these concerns, the category retains considerable analytical value, in three regards. First, and most importantly, it transcends an "ethnic lens", whose implications are inherently political (Glick Schiller, Çağlar, and Guldbrandsen 2006). Previous work on the lives and experiences of migrant descendants has focused largely on distinct groups that are defined in terms of shared ethnicity, culture, or country of origin (Wessendorf 2010; Schmitt and Witte 2018; Asghari-Fard and Hossain 2017). By focusing on individuals as bearers of a supposed ethnic background, these studies run the risk of drawing culturalizing conclusions. The latter, in turn, support essentializing and sometimes hostile debates regarding certain groups of migrant descendants in public and political discourse. Conversely, our aim was to go beyond a focus on ethnicity as a primary category of difference and the defining feature of our research participants. We were eager to treat ethnicity as an empirical question. The potentially problematic category *migrant descendants* helps circumvent an ethnic bias because it includes persons from multiple ethnic, religious, socio-economic, and professional backgrounds. In regard to the country of origin of the participants' parents, we left the scope of our sample deliberately broad, including EU and non-EU countries. This strategy allowed us to access narratives that vary along multiple axes of difference and avoid tautologically interpreting results in terms of culture or ethnicity.

Second, as we understand the category, *migrant descendant* is not clear-cut and may be charged with different meanings that vary according to actors and the contexts in which they are embedded. People do not necessarily

share similar experiences or claim specific positions in society simply by virtue of being migrant descendants. Also, they may not self-identify with this category, or they may move between this and other categories. Likewise, they may perform this category in various ways. These reflections informed our approach to interviews in terms of giving the participants the opportunity to determine how to position themselves with regard to this category.

Finally, that we collected data in two field sites, Zurich and Edinburgh, caused us to become aware of some of our own assumptions regarding, for example, the importance of citizenship policies for the construction of belonging and self-identification as a migrant descendant. In addition, working in two sites facilitated reflexive distance vis-à-vis categories that we – often unintendedly – normalize as a result of surrounding discourses. Our approach thus enabled us to acknowledge the *perspectival* character of categories. Generating data at different sites also revealed the extent to and ways in which being a migrant descendant means different things, depending on the context. One important difference is connected to citizenship legislation. As a result of the *ius sanguinis* principle, migrant descendants in Switzerland are not automatically Swiss nationals, and citizenship acquisition is a lengthy process. Consequently, several of our research participants in Switzerland did not possess a Swiss passport. In the UK, in contrast, children of immigrant parents face fewer hurdles in obtaining British citizenship. In fact, all our interview participants in Edinburgh were British nationals. The different citizenship regimes also affect related categories: while hyphenated identities – "British-Pakistani", for instance – are fairly common in the UK, the same is not true in Switzerland. Referring to oneself as "Swiss-Kosovar", for example, is interpreted as a sign of non-integration. Different citizenship regulations in the two countries also affect the claims people make vis-à-vis the state and the categories they use to position themselves in making these claims. Similarly, the two countries' different immigration histories and concomitant representations of immigrants and ethnic minorities influence how people situate themselves in society – and how our research participants used these categories in the interviews.

Accessing research participants who are not a group

Having determined the basic – and deliberately broad – parameters of our research population, we faced the difficulty of identifying individuals who fell into the broad category *migrant descendants* who were of a certain age and lived in a specific city. Usually, categories such as *ethnicity*, *nationality*, and *religion* serve migration researchers as pathfinders to the respective research population. Ethnic organizations and religious institutions often serve as entry points or gatekeepers to research populations. However, the category *migrant descendants* did not offer any leads to specific social spaces or institutions we could turn to in our search for research participants.

Migrant descendants do not form a "group" in a sociological sense. Although descendants of migrants constitute a significant proportion of both Swiss and British society, we found it challenging to identify persons who met our criteria. There is no social space where individuals with migrant parents with various ethnic, professional, religious, and class backgrounds meet or organize on the basis of being migrant descendants. For this reason, we had to pursue multiple strategies to identify and recruit potential interviewees. We used personal contacts and the snowball technique, and we contacted organizations based on their areas of activity. In addition, we approached people on the street and in corner shops and restaurants, filtering them according to our presumptions regarding their national origin or physical appearance. Such attempts to recruit research participants are of course highly perspectival, as it is the researcher who decides the criteria according to which she frames and ultimately approaches people as potential interviewees. Ironically, this recruitment strategy brought us close to what we would otherwise criticize as racial profiling. It therefore has important political and ethical underpinnings in the sense that some of the persons we approached may have been reminded of unpleasant or even discriminatory confrontations with state authorities. Ultimately, we were able to reach out to migrant descendants from very different backgrounds. At first sight, our research participants had little in common apart from the fact that they were raised in immigrant families. Similarities in terms of shared experiences and responses to these experiences emerged at a later stage during data analysis.

More importantly, and in contrast to what we have described above, the fuzziness of the category *migrant descendant* and our difficulty in finding research participants underline that migration is an integral part of our societies. People neither necessarily stick out as migrant descendants, nor do they primarily self-identify as such. The challenge of recruiting persons who are not a "group" but met our criteria required us to consider society as a whole with all its potential subgroups. Thus, ultimately, our category for classifying research participants led to de-essentialization in the sense that we refrained from framing our research population primarily in ethnic terms and instead considered them an integral part of society. In this sense, we contribute to more recent theoretical approaches postulating a switch from seeing migrants as exceptions in societies to new definitions of societies as post-ethnic (Hollinger 1996) or post-migration (Espahangizi 2018).

Performative character of categories and reflexivity during interviews: creating space for negotiating the category migrant descendants

In the remaining part of this paper, we analyse the negotiations in view of the category *migrant descendants* as they occurred during the interviews.

Interview contexts are spaces of interaction in which relations between researcher and participant unfold, and those relations are inevitably shaped by the perceived attributes and social positions of both the researcher and the participant (Fontana and Frey 2005). The rapport between interviewee and researcher is shaped by dynamics of mutual framing and categorization (Denzin and Lincoln 2005; Riley, Schouten, and Cahill 2003). As a result, interviews open a platform for negotiating the categories at stake, and it is through these negotiations that the performative character of categories becomes visible. Our interview partners used the category *migrant descendants* to position themselves towards the researchers, but also towards wider political and societal discourses, as we will show.

Approaching research participants as migrant descendants and asking them about their experiences with Othering and discrimination inevitably places them in a specific box. Our external categorization affects how research participants present their experiences and their strategies of engaging with them. Our objective was to open up space during the interviews to enable the research participants to negotiate the category *migrant descendant*. This endeavour can be understood as an attempt from our side to be reflexive regarding the legitimation and representation of this category and the concomitant knowledge we produce. We followed two strategies. First, during interviews, we used a semi-structured interview guide and a series of open questions. As much as possible, we let the research participants introduce categories that we could subsequently take up to better understand how they used them and the meanings they attributed to them. We placed particular focus on their negotiations of being categorized as *migrant descendants*. Second, although we employed this category, we tried to phrase our questions as openly as possible, without attributing specific meanings or connotations to them. We tried to avoid imposing preconceived connotations regarding, for instance, individuals' ethnic, religious, or cultural background.

The interviews revealed that research participants were highly reflexive and proposed alternative meanings regarding the category. The following exchange, which occurred at the beginning of an interview with a person whose mother is white European and her father black Senegalese, illustrates one form of negotiation:

I: "I would like to start by asking you where and how you grew up? Or rather, how your parents came to Switzerland?"

RP: "Aww, that's always … I find that a funny question. Would you like me to speak high German?"

I: "It doesn't matter, you can speak either".

RP: "I'll speak Swiss German, then. Do you understand me? Are you sure? Well, if this wasn't for an interview, I would hate this question. Because it constantly reminds me of a training I once participated in. I met a girl there, and on the very first day she asked me, 'Where did your parents meet?' I

> mean, my God, how can you ask something like that? […] It's none of your business where my parents met 30 years ago. Just as a little anecdote. They met in Senegal". (Interview Zurich, December 2016)

In this excerpt, the research participant engages with two issues that shape the interview setting and dynamics of exchange between researcher and participant. First, like many other interviewees, she rejects the researcher's question. She explicitly considers being asked where and how she grew up as related to the racializing external categorizations with which she and her parents are regularly confronted. Insisting on her discomfort when asked about her parents, she classifies the question as very rude if it is brought up in other social contexts. In other words, she clearly rejects the question and instead positions herself as belonging to Zurich.

Second, she asks which dialect she should speak, which also underscores her positioning as being from Zurich. High German is the standard German spoken in Germany and Austria. Germans and Austrians tend to have difficulties understanding Swiss German dialects. Our research team consisted of a German national who speaks standard German and a Swiss national whose native language is a Swiss German dialect. This is an important detail, because all the participants we interviewed in Zurich spoke Swiss German as their first language. The interviewee repeatedly asks the researcher, who is German, if she can understand her, thus underlining her own position as a native speaker. In the current Swiss context, language skills serve as an important yardstick in both public discourse and integration policies for whether migrants are properly integrated. The fact that this participant employs her language skills as a native speaker can be interpreted as a performance of belonging to Swiss society. Put bluntly, this research participant clearly relegates the non-Swiss-German-speaking researcher to the position of a non-belonger while situating herself as belonging, and thus considers inquiries about where and how she grew up as simply out of place. This is an example of a research participant turning the "symbolic violence" (Bourdieu 1993) that is usually inscribed in the relationship between researchers and participants upside down.

Research participants often overtly contested the category *migrant descendant* and related interview questions. They challenged the interviewer and the interview situation by questioning or criticizing the questions asked and the categories implicitly or explicitly imposed on them. The following exchange occurred at the end of an interview, when the participant was asked whether he would like to raise any thoughts or questions regarding the interview:

> I: "Just as a last question. Is there something else we didn't talk about, concerning all these things? Concerning origin, identity, your biography, something you find important to add?"

RP: "No, I don't think so. I knew, I imagined you'd focus specifically on these things. But actually, I don't know. Of course, we are what we are based on our past, somehow, what we decided to do and did do, etc., or what happened to us, and this influences our thinking and actions. But I think a lot of people put too much weight on these things. For me, identity based on these things – nation, origin – doesn't matter very much … . Because I moved a lot and everything. I lived in [a city in south-west Germany] for six years, then I was in Turkey for two and a half years, then I came back and my parents separated … these things, you know. I moved for the job". (Interview Zurich, October 2017)

In this example, our research participant uses the open question to challenge what he perceives as our biased view of him as a child of migrants from a particular country of origin. He reflexively contests our framing and refuses to accept his parents' national origin as an important marker of identity. Instead, he specifies what he believes has shaped his personality more fundamentally – having lived in several different places. More specifically, he criticizes research on migrant descendants for its overemphasis on national origin and national identity – for, in other words, simply not being relevant.

Another participant also emphasized the touchiness of questions about someone's country of origin or where they are "really from", but the way he used the category *migrant descendants* and how he positioned himself towards it are very different from the previous examples. This participant was a young man whose parents are from Germany and Rwanda. His family history is complex, because his parents separated when he was young. Although he spent his formative years in Switzerland, he travelled often between different countries and family members while and after doing various rounds of vocational training. He experienced various forms of Othering wherever he spent extended periods of time. When speaking about questions of origin, he stated:

RP: "Well, I appreciate it if people don't ask me where I'm from. Admittedly, I ask this too, but simply out of pure interest. But it's never the first or second question I ask". (Interview Zurich, December 2016)

As in the previous example, being categorized as a migrant descendant is an issue this research participant has thought about. The interviewer affirms his point:

I: "Yes, this really is a dilemma. […] On the one hand, you are interested in knowing such things, [but at the same time] such questions are charged … yeah, it's really difficult to ask this question without conveying an implicit message or running the risk of being understood in a way one doesn't want to be, but … ".

The researcher thus acknowledges the dilemma the participant refers to. In reaction, the participant discloses more facets of his ambivalent relationship

with questions of origin, stating that he sometimes lies when feeling obliged to reply:

> RP: "Well, sometimes I lie. Quite often, actually. I often say that I'm half-Swiss and not half-German. It depends. When I speak with Congolese, I don't say I'm from Rwanda. Instead I say I'm from Burundi or whatever. But Rwanda and Congo are … . There's a lot of tension. Not in the countries themselves, but here in Europe, in Brussels. So I say, 'Yeah, I'm from Burundi'. In a way that's true. Well, I partly grew up there. […] But in those … well, at the African clubs I don't feel comfortable at all. Or at the hairdresser's. It depends. The hairdresser himself is OK, but all the other people there … I try to speak as little as possible".

His way of dealing with these issues differs starkly from the confrontational reaction of the participant we introduced above. He has developed a deep reflexivity based on his knowledge of different contexts and the ways people might other him. This reflexivity allows him to navigate diverse situations and position himself in a way that allows him to avoid being othered.

These examples point to some important issues. First, by adopting a reflexive stance on categories during interviews and keeping in mind the perspectival, political, and performative elements of those categories when asking questions, we were able to open up an important space during interviews. Within this space, research participants could elaborate on the meanings they attributed to categories and position themselves vis-à-vis those categories' political connotations. They reflexively conveyed their own knowledge and opinions on the issues at stake. The reflexivity of the interview partner and the interviewer mutually affected each other and allowed a more legitimate knowledge to emerge. In other words, reflexivity on the part of research participants not only allowed them to demonstrate their agency (they did not fit this category, in their view), but was also highly valuable for scientific knowledge production. We make a plea for researchers to include this knowledge in terms of a muted voice in the sense of standpoint theory (Harding 2004). The interview partners were socially situated in such a way that they asked other questions and saw other things than the researchers did. To accommodate this knowledge, we need to enlarge our definition of reflexivity and include the reflexivity of our research participants as well.

Second, the three examples show that research participants can turn power relations upside down during interviews. They criticized us for conducting research using this category, which in turn triggered many debates among the research team, including those we present below.

Conclusion

In searching for ways to engage critically with categories in migration studies, scholars have argued for greater reflexivity. In this paper, we have addressed

this issue with the intention of contributing to debates on questions of knowledge production in migration studies by defining reflexivity on multiple levels. Knowledge production happens at different stages of the research process and thus requires different types of reflexivity. This paper contributes to these debates by focusing on the dilemmas migration researchers confront while using categories in their studies. While these issues are not new, we have theorized the concept of *category* by highlighting that categories are both *perspectival* and *performative* and discussing the consequences that follow from this fact. Through the example of the category *migrant descendants*, we have reflected on the ways in which we dealt with this category in the field.

Our understanding of reflexivity goes beyond a mere deconstruction of this category, however. We have shown ways to overcome the inherent dilemmas this category poses and the implications for scientific knowledge production. We draw the following conclusions.

First, the category *migrant descendant* is undoubtedly embedded in the "national order of things", is essentializing, and signifies non-belonging. Paradoxically, however, in the field this category became *inclusive*: the challenges we faced accessing this research population, which is not a group in the sociological sense, led us to see migrant descendants instead as an integral part of contemporary societies. They do not stick out, and they can be found everywhere. This insight reinforces scholarly claims for a theoretical switch: instead of seeing migrants as exceptions in societies – which is the outcome when wearing a national lens – scholars have pled for a new definition of societies as post-ethnic (Hollinger 1996) or post-migration (Espahangizi 2018). The ways in which our research participants rejected, questioned, or navigated the category *migrant descendant* reinforces this claim. However, these results raise another important question: does it still make sense to study migrants or migrant descendants? Basically, this plea entails "de-migranticizing" research further (Dahinden 2016) while "migranticizing the citizens", as Anderson (2019, 8) put it recently. In our case, this would have meant studying questions of belonging among any people of our age group in Zurich or Edinburgh and investigating how those people enact citizenship and migrancy.

Second, the perspectival character of categories requires researchers to actively engage with categories during interviews, which yields insights into the politics at play in the becoming of those categories. A decisive advantage of qualitative over quantitative research is that encounters between researcher and participant open space for negotiating and even contesting the issues raised and the questions asked. The *performative* character of categories plays an important role in the interactions between researcher and participant. People react to categorizations. In doing so, they demonstrate that there is no necessary congruence between one's self-image and one's (imagined) public image. Rather, people engage with categories in order to

pro- or reactively identify or not identify with them. In other words, researchers' reflexivity can open up an important space and allow research participants to develop their own meanings and positions regarding and towards categories, sometimes also challenging the categories researchers introduce. This point contains two important elements that need further elaboration. First, research participants were highly reflexive regarding the category *migrant descendant* (for similar results regarding the reflexivity of bureaucrats working in the Norwegian social security system regarding the category *transnationals*, see Talleraas (2019)). We argue that this reflexivity on the part of research participants is highly valuable for both scientific knowledge production and a revised definition of reflexivity: through this reflexivity, research participants produce important situated knowledge, in the sense of standpoint theory. This knowledge asks to be "unmuted" and recognized because research participants are socially situated such that they see other things and ask other questions than researchers do. For instance, research participants sometimes simply considered our research question irrelevant, an important hint when it comes to scientific knowledge production and the question of legitimacy and representation (Clifford and Marcus 1986). Second, we argue that this reflexivity among research participants should be included in the general definition of reflexivity. In other words, the reflexivity of participants and the reflexivity of researchers are mutually constitutive and produce scientific knowledge that is potentially co-constructed. This would be a step forward in terms of more legitimate and representative scientific knowledge production.

Notes

1. This article was jointly written by the three authors. The first author had the lead and mainly wrote the theoretical, conceptual, and analytical parts. The second and third authors did the fieldwork and contributed with data, data analysis and conceptual issues.
2. By *common-sense categories* we understand categories as they are used by actors in everyday life and in politics and political regimes. *Analytical categories* are conceptual tools that originate in the social sciences, often in disciplines other than migration theory ((Dahinden 2016), see also (Brubaker 2004)).

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