

# **The Other Ideal Worker: Employers' Construction of Compliant Ethnic**

## **Minority Workers**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Adopting a postcolonial perspective that focuses on the linkage between the economic and cultural perspectives to power inequalities, this study investigates how the compliant ethnic minority worker is constructed by employers. Drawing on interviews with 22 employers, this article makes a contribution to the critical literature on the reproduction of ethnic inequality in the labor market. First, it shows how a compliant ethnic minority worker is constructed through four attributes, identifying two attributes which have not yet surfaced in previous debates on the subject of the valuable ethnic minority. Second, it signals how an ideal compliant ethnic minority worker conforms to the 'other ideal employee'. This is a, by employers, constructed entity that simultaneously accepts the imperative of the ethnic majority, the imperative of capital and shows, in the eyes of the employer, no signs of resistance to a postcolonial discourse. It is true to the entity of the ideal other worker that the employer constructs her/his benevolent Self. As such, the entity of the other ideal employee institutionalizes subordination along class and ethnic lines, in which cultural compliance to the ethnic majority is fundamental in maintaining structural economic inequality and thus, (re)produces ethnic inequality.

**KEYWORDS** ethnic minorities, organization, inequality, Postcolonialism, compliance

## INTRODUCTION

Critical diversity studies have shown that labor markets and workplaces (re)produce forms of ethnic inequality (Van Laer & Janssens, 2011; Zanoni et al., 2010). First, with organizational studies is the socio-economic explanation which highlights the unequal power relation between employer and worker, in which ethnicity is instrumental to the ethnic minority worker to be considered valuable (a.o. Anderson and Ruhs, 2010; Catanzarite, 2000; Friberg and Midtbøen, 2018; Harrison and Lloyd, 2013; MacKenzie and Forde, 2009; Ortlieb and Sieben, 2013). In doing so, this explanation downplays the role of broader cultural discursive constructions of ethnic minorities. Second, the organizational literature which focuses on discursive explanations highlights the unequal cultural power relation in organizations (a.o. Nkomo and Al Ariss, 2014; Zanoni and Janssens, 2004; Zanoni, Janssens, Benschop and Nkomo, 2010), in which the ethnic minority worker becomes constructed as inferior precisely because of their different ethnicity. By doing so, the role of economic relations in the reproduction of inequality becomes understated in this stream.

Central in this process of continued ethnic inequality, is the role of compliance of ethnic minority workers in the employment relationship. Depending on the explanations used in the organizational literature, the relation between ethnicity and compliance, and consequently, its influence on ethnic inequality is differently understood. While the economic stream identifies ethnicity as instrumental to the ethnic minority worker to be recognized as compliant, the cultural stream recognizes ethnicity instead as a sign of deficiency and inferiority, which has to be negotiated in order to be considered compliant. This study aims to go in depth on this relation between ethnicity and compliance, by looking at the employment relationship between employer and ethnic minority worker, in both economic and cultural terms. To do so, this study uses a postcolonial perspective, influenced by the ambivalence central in Bhabha's analysis. By specifically addressing how the compliant ethnic minority worker is constructed by employers,

this study aims to contribute to the critical literature on the (re)production of ethnic inequality on the labor market. It does so by exploring the way cultural construction of ethnicity becomes intertwined with the economic relations of power in this construction of compliant ethnic minority workers.

Drawing on 22 in-depth interviews with employers, this study shows how employers construct compliant ethnic minority workers through four attributes, which signals their compliance to both employer, and the ethnic majority's culture. These four attributes form the core of the 'other ideal worker, an image which proves simultaneously its subservience to the imperative of the ethnic majority, as to the imperative of capital. As such, the employment relation is shaped by a coinciding construction of the compliant ethnic minority employee and the benevolent employer. In this construction, cultural compliance to the ethnic majority is fundamental in maintaining structural economic inequality in the work context, and thus (re)producing ethnic inequality.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

Managerial thinking on ethnic diversity is currently strongly shaped by the 'business case for diversity', which constructs ethnic minorities as a valuable organizational asset (Zanoni et al., 2010). Traditionally, the managerial business case discourse ties value to this group in three main ways. First, it constructs ethnic minorities as increasingly valuable for organizations because they represent a growing proportion of the available supply of labor. Second, it constructs ethnic minorities as valuable resources as they are said to bring new perspectives, knowledge and information, allowing ethnically diverse groups to become more creative, and be better at solving complex problems. And third, it constructs ethnic minorities as valuable resources as they are believed to enable organizations to better connect to, and understand the preferences of, its increasingly ethnically diverse customer base (Cox and Blake, 1991; Page, Lewis, Cantor and

Philips, 2017; Robinson and Dechant, 1997; Van Dijk, van Engen and Paauwe, 2012). To capture these benefits, it is argued that organizations have to implement diversity management policies to ensure that employees with different ethnicities enjoy career opportunities and feel included (Cox, 1991; Ely and Thomas, 2001; Robinson and Dechant, 1997). In this way, the business case discourse promises a win-win situation for employers, who can benefit from their value, and the ethnic minority workers, who will become included on an equal footing in organizations.

Despite this rosy rhetoric, ethnic inequality continues to be (re)produced by labor markets and workplaces (Zanoni et al., 2010). In critical organization studies, two main explanations of literature can be identified which explore this continuation of ethnic inequality: an explanation which highlights the economic factors in the employment relationship, and one which highlights the cultural factors. While both emphasize the importance of compliance of ethnic minority workers in the employment relationship to (re)produce ethnic inequality, they differ on the relation between compliance and ethnicity.

### **The economic explanation: Ethnicity as instrumental to compliance**

A first body of critical literature on the continuous (re)production of ethnic on the work floor relies heavily on socio-economic explanations, by focusing on the reproduction of economic relations of power between employers and ethnic minority workers. It describes a darker version of the 'business case', as it highlights how ethnic minority workers become mainly valued on the labor market as they are more compliant to the demands of capital. Specifically, they are described as providing cheap and docile labor, and as willing to carry out jobs that, due to bad working conditions and low wages, ethnic majority labor is no longer willing to do (Anderson and Ruhs, 2010; Catanzarite, 2000; Harrison and Lloyd, 2013; Ortlieb and Sieben, 2013; MacKenzie and Forde, 2009). In turn, this compliance of ethnic minority workers in the employment relation is largely established by a number of factors leading to macroeconomic and socio-political

vulnerabilities leading to a weaker bargaining position in relation to employers, making them more compliant to capital, resulting in a reproduction of economic inequality (Fellini, Ferro and Fullin, 2007). First, they are said to be increased dependence of migrant workers on the employer due to migratory regulations. (Anderson, 2010; Anderson and Ruhs, 2010). Second, is that they are more willing to accept low-skilled and low-wage jobs, as their primary frame of reference tends to be the economic conditions of their country of origin (Matthews and Ruhs, 2007; Piore, 1979). Third, there is entrenched discrimination and a lack of social capital, which restricts the ability of ethnic minority workers to easily find other work (Anderson and Ruhs, 2010; Syed, 2008; Wickham, Moriarty, Bobek, and Salamońska, 2009). Fourth, once employed, ethnic minority labor tends to be overrepresented in highly precarious types of contracts, leading to uncertain employment with a large dependence on employers (MacKenzie and Forde, 2009).

In turn, the economic relations of power lead to a discursive translation in ethnic terms of this compliance, in which certain groups become associated with a superior ‘work ethic’ or a ‘high motivation to work’ because of their ethnic background (Frank, 2018; Friberg and Midtbøen, 2018; MacKenzie and Forde, 2009; Moss and Tilly, 2001; Shih, 2002; Waldinger and Lichter, 2003). This discursive construction obscures the economic vulnerabilities underlying them, thereby reproducing the economic relations of power on which they are based. From this economic perspective, ethnic minority workers’ value is not connected to their ability to connect the employer to a more diverse customer base or to increased creativity resulting from diversity. Rather, their value is connected to their willingness to be compliant workers and assume their subordinate position in the employment relation, reproducing economic relations of power.

### **The cultural explanation: suppression of ethnic difference as compliance**

A second body of literature in critical literature on the (re)production of ethnic inequality on the work floor is based on a cultural explanation. It argues that minority workers are forced to suppress

their ethnic differences in relation to the ethnic majority in order to be considered compliant. It argues that, reflecting historic power relations between the ethnic majority and the ethnic minority, ethnic minorities are confronted in organization with discursive constructions of being inferior and different, which establishes them as uncompliant (Reid, 2015; Van Laer and Janssens, 2011; Wingfield and Alston, 2013; Zanoni et al., 2010). These discursive construction of ethnic minority workers as culturally different, maintains the power relations between the ethnic majority and the ethnic minority by legitimizing the latter's exclusion and marginalization by the former (Kalonaityte, 2010; Prasad et al., 2006; Ogbonna and Harris, 2006; Van Laer and Janssens, 2011; Zanoni et al., 2010). To avoid such exclusion, ethnic minority workers have been described as being faced with normative pressures to comply to the majority culture (Ghorashi and Sabelis, 2013). This, however, equally reproduces the power inequalities between the ethnic majority and the ethnic minority, as it maintains the dominant culture, without guaranteeing that ethnic minority workers will ever truly be constructed as no longer fundamentally different (Van Laer and Janssens, 2014; 2017). Rather than to economic structures, this process of inequality is linked to broader societal and political discourses which permeate the boundaries of the organization (Van Laer and Janssens, 2014; 2017; Zanoni et al., 2010).

While both the economic and the cultural stream in the critical diversity literature focusses on the reproduction of ethnic inequality on the labor market and its relation with compliance of the ethnic minority worker, they offer different perspectives on what this compliance entails and how it relates to the reproduction of inequality. In the economic stream, the value of ethnic minorities is framed in terms of their compliance with capital, which leads to the reproduction of economic inequality between ethnic groups. As such, the economic perspective privileges economic factors while downplaying the role of broader cultural constructions of ethnic minorities. By contrast, the cultural stream argues that ethnic minorities are fundamentally less valuable workers, because of constructed differences in relation to the ethnic majority, which leads

to the reproduction of cultural inequality. As such, in the cultural stream privileges factors while downplaying the role of economic relations of power characterizing organizational life.

As can be noted, a discrepancy arises between the two streams concerning what makes a compliant ethnic minority worker. While the economic stream identifies ethnicity as instrumental to the ethnic minority worker to be recognized as compliant, the cultural stream recognizes ethnicity instead as a sign of deficiency and inferiority, which has to be denied in order to be considered compliant. To further explore this discrepancy, it is necessary to understand how in the construction of ethnic minority workers as compliant, the cultural construction of ethnicity intertwines with the economic relations of power. To do so, this article draws on a postcolonial perspective.

### **Postcolonial intertwinement**

Though still rather new in critical organizational studies (Jack, 2015), using postcolonial theory to consider the relation between ethnicity and compliance is interesting for two reasons: it links economic and cultural power relations, and it gives theoretical tools to understand the current discrepancy. First, it draws attention to the close intertwinement of economic oppression and constructions of cultural differences, showing how colonialism always involved the attempt to subjugate its ethnic others through a complex mix of economic exploitation and cultural subjugation (Prasad, 2003; Said, 1978). Second, postcolonialism aims to understand the processes and instruments of inequality, by moving away from the binary of postmodernism and focusing on the multilayered complexities of subjectivities in these social and cultural relations (Bhabha, 1994; Jack & Lorbiecki, 2003; Mir, 2003). The epistemological ramification of coloniality and colonial discourse has meant that ethnicity is still being used as a basic criterion for social and economic classifications (Quijano, 2007). The economic and the cultural are mutually constitutive, as cultural constructions of the Other legitimize economic exploitation, and as

material domination allows for the imposition of culture and the evermore fine-grained discourses of cultural otherness (Prasad, 2003; Özkazanç-Pan, 2008). As such, social and economic classifications find their way in organizations, where organizational identity work is put in place by the dominant group as forms of internal border control and maintenance of hierarchy (Kalonaityte, 2010).

The process of colonialism entails that the West, from a position of political, military and economic strength, constructs the Orient in binary opposition to itself, turning it into something essentially different from the self and therefore inferior (Jack, 2015; Frenkel and Shenhav, 2006; Said, 1978). Colonialism functions thus not solely through military and economic domination, but also through a discourse of domination, in which the colonizer (re)enforces him/herself as the site of power by constructing the Other as an object of knowledge (Prasad, 2003). Establishing this discourse not only allows the West to construct itself as ontologically superior, but also to establish the moral justification to have authority over the Other (Said, 1978). However, inherent to colonialism and the colonial discourse are multiple forms of and ambivalent colonial subjectivities (Jack, 2015; Bhabha, 1994). Specifically, Bhabha's idea of colonial ambivalence states that the colonial discourse is not a monolithic dichotomy, but that an inherent contradiction can be found in the colonial discourse. His theoretical elucidation highlights how the colonial discourse actually produces the colonized as an entity which is at once fully knowledgeable by Western epistemologies, yet radically different and thus, impermeable. Thus, the colonial discourse fails to fix the subject of the Other (Bhabha, 1994).

Such ambivalence finds its way back in Bhabha's concept of mimicry, where mimicry ensures regulation and control from the colonizer's perspective (Bhabha, 1994). The concept of mimicry relies on the wish of the colonizer that the colonized becomes like the colonizer, but that simultaneously the colonized should always remain different as the colonized is still the anti-self of the colonizer. In order to be effective in establishing colonial discipline, mimicry has to



continually produce its difference, as the Other is never allowed to fully establish him/herself as fully the same, or fully different. However, the mimicry is at once resemblance and menace (Bhabha, 1994): it inserts ambiguity, becoming a space of resistance for the colonized with the ability to destabilize the hierarchy. Resistance in this case is the effect of an ambivalence produced within the rules of recognition of dominating discourses, as they articulate the signs of cultural difference. Such resistance has the ability to undermine the cultural and economic hierarchy established by the colonizer.

Following the (albeit short) postcolonial legacy in organizational research, this study aims to contribute to the critical literature on the (re)production of ethnic inequality on the labor market by using the postcolonial framework on colonial discourse and ambivalence. By doing so, it not only contributes to the limited existing postcolonial studies on inequality in Western work organizations and the organization of such inequality (Kalonaityte, 2010), it also answers the postcolonial call for increased empirical research in organizations (Jack, 2015). Specifically, the study explores the way cultural construction of ethnicity becomes intertwined with the economic relations of power, in the construction of ethnic minority workers as compliant, addressing the question: how is the ‘compliant ethnic minority worker’ constructed by employers?

## **METHODOLOGY**

### ***Context of the study***

This study took place in a province of Belgium that is characterized by a highly ethnically diverse population, with at least 27% of the region’s population having a non-Belgian heritage, taking into account that these numbers only include first and second generation persons with a migration background (Steunpunt Sociale Planning, 2019). The history of such diversity can be traced back to the mining industry of the region and its need for low-skilled, cheap labor force. Originally, from the 1920’s, this mainly involved attracting low-skilled labor migrants from Poland,

Czechoslovakia and Italy. In the 1950's, Italian migration stopped and was instead during the 1960's followed by migrations from Turkey and Morocco. While all migrants were officially attracted as 'guest workers', their residence gradually became permanent as they were motivated to stay and bring over their families. Due to stricter migration policies on national level and the European open-border policy, migration flows comprise of EU-citizens from Central and Eastern Europe and of refugees from the Middle East and Central Africa (Noppe et al., 2018). Despite the multitude of ethnic minorities, in practice it is noticeable that those who are recognised in public discourse and media as Muslim are the ones considered the cultural 'Other', despite their nationality or migration background (Van Laer, 2011). Being recognised as such, leads to an increased exposure of cultural racism and prejudices concerning less professional competence and holding 'non-Western' values (Bogaers et al., 2018).

Today the region is further characterized by an economy largely dominated by SMEs with a majority of blue-collar jobs, a lack of large urban centers and a recent industrial decline. As such, the overall unemployment rate of this region is higher than the Flemish mean, and the actual employment rate of the people with a non-Belgian heritage is at least 4% lower than this in Flanders (Steunpunt Sociale Planning, 2019). This while in Flanders the societal position of people from an ethnic minority, especially non-Europeans, is already worse than those of the majority (Bogaers et al., 2018; Van Laer, 2011).

### ***Course of study and sampling***

The study is based on 22 semi-structured interviews with employers in this region, during the period of June 2017 and June 2018. The sample reflects the diversity in terms of size and sector of the organizations active in the region. In all of these companies, the majority of the ethnic minority workers were employed in low-skilled or technical jobs. None of the employers themselves were of an ethnic minority. The interviewees were recruited via the researchers' and

project partners' network. During the research, both individual interviews (16 employers) and group interviews (two groups of three participants) were used, depending on the preference of the respondents involved. The conversations lasted between 45 minutes and 2.5 hours and were recorded completely with an audio recorder. These recordings were used for a full transcription of the conversations. Each interview or focus group followed the same course, in which five major themes were discussed: how diversity on the work floor is managed; the challenges and opportunities concerning diversity and talent in the work context; the influence of diversity on relations at work; the way they perceive ethnic minority workers (and workers with a disability); and lastly the way they understand and approach the issues of prejudice and discrimination. A more detailed description of all interviewees and their companies can be found in table 1.

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Sector of the company</b>	<b>Number of workers</b>
Employer 1	Retail	>150
Employer 2	Industry	>150
Employer 3	Construction	0-10
Employer 4	Transport	11-50
Employer 5	Retail	>150
Employer 6	Service	11-50
Employer 7	Retail	>150
Employer 8	Industry	11-50
Employer 9	Industry	0-10
Employer 10	Industry	>150
Employer 11	Construction	51-100
Employer 12	Service	51-100
Employer 13	Service	>150
Employer 14	Wholesale	>150
Employer 15	Service	11-50
Employer 16	Agriculture	11-50
Employer 17	Service	11-50

Employer 18	Non-profit	11-50
Employer 19	Industry	51-100
Employer 20	Non-profit	101-150
Employer 21	Service	101-150
Employer 22	Gouvernement	>150

*Table 1: respondents and profile of their organization*

### ***Course of analysis***

For the analysis of the interviews, a coding process in different phases was completed (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Neuman, 2000; Strauss, 1987; Van Maanen, 1979). In line with the research objective of this study, the analysis focused on how employers construct the ‘compliant ethnic minority worker’. It started with a process of open coding to identify statements describing experiences with, or discussions of, ethnic minority workers in the work context. In this instance, work context was defined as any experience in the workplace and/or during business activities, with colleagues, clients, supervisors and/or subordinates. Via this emic approach, first order codes closely reflecting the interviewees’ own words concerning compliance were assigned. In the second phase of coding, the first level coding captured instances in which the employers (failed to) recognize compliance in ethnic minority workers, in line with the importance of compliance stated in the two streams of critical organization literature (e.g. MacKenzie and Forde, 2009; Ghorashi and Sabelis, 2013) The instances of coding in the first level of the second phase were compared, in order to cluster and identify possible recurring themes within the coding (Neuman, 2000; Strauss 1987; Van Maanen, 1979). In the second level coding, four sub codes could be identified in the second phase: assimilation, gratitude, tolerance, and distancing. Table 2 offers an overview and detailed description of the coding.

<b>Phase coding</b>	<b>Level coding</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Definition</b>
1 <sup>st</sup> phase	-	Ethnic minority worker	Instances in which the employer describes experiences with or talks about ethnic minority workers in a work context, with colleagues, clients, supervisors and/or subordinates.

2 <sup>nd</sup> phase	1 <sup>st</sup> level	Compliance	Instances in which the employer constructs the ethnic minority worker as (not) compliant
	2 <sup>nd</sup> level	Assimilation	Instances in which employers constructs the ethnic minority worker as (not) willing to adopt dominant group behaviour
		Gratitude	Instances in which employers constructs the ethnic minority worker as (not) displaying superior gratitude towards them or the company
		Tolerance	Instances in which employers constructs the ethnic minority worker as (not) accepting and tolerating discriminatory or racists remarks from employers, colleagues and/or clients
		Distancing	Instances in which employers constructs the ethnic minority worker as (not) sundering ties with their own ethnic group in favour of the ethnic majority

Table 2: description of used coding

### ***Reflections on the methodology***

This empirical material was collected as part of a larger project that aimed to combat discrimination on the labor market towards ethnic minority workers and workers with a disability.

This study is the outcome of a larger project aiming to better understand prejudices towards ethnic minorities and people with disabilities in the labor market, with the objective of creating more awareness for discrimination. The study was conducted by two authors, of different academic seniorities and different gender, but both member of the ethnic majority in Belgium. While the interview guide was devised together, all of the interviews were conducted by the first author of this paper. The interviewees were twice informed of the objective of the research: during the recruitment process and before the start of the actual interview. The interviewees' sameness in terms of ethnicity with the first author might have created a 'safe haven' for the interviewees to openly express their experiences with and opinions about ethnic minority workers. However, this cannot be certain, as the first author is often mistakenly recognized as a member of an ethnic minority in Belgium. As the interviewees were generally older than the interviewer and had already established a relatively successful career as managers, this did sometimes generate a sort of teacher-pupil relationship (Zanoni and Van Laer, 2015). Additionally, the analysis and writing process might also have been influenced by the identities of the two authors and by their theoretical

frame of reference inspired by postcolonial, discursive approaches to diversity and ethnicity, and that this study is based on interviews with employers whose ethnic minority workers are mainly employed in low-skilled or technical jobs. As a result, what follows is cannot be seen as an objective, general reflection of reality but rather as experiences of the interviewees produced in a particular setting and translated by specific authors.

## **FINDINGS**

### ***Assimilation to ethnic majority behavior***

First, employers construct a compliant ethnic minority worker as somebody who is assimilated, or actively willing to assimilate to the ethnic majority and does not appear ‘too different’. This is exemplified by employer 10, who describes the compliant ethnic minority worker as somebody who does not appears too culturally distinct from the majority’s cultural practices.

*“It sounds racist but it is not. You have to make a selection [...] Getting the right people. What I would find horrible, is if we would have somebody who brings his little carpet to the building site and starts praying. We don’t want that here. I’m like, you have to adapt yourself. They have to adapt themselves. We also should not act like a Catholic in Morocco. I don’t want that, so we will select them based on that [...] Rafik [a Muslim worker], he has evolved fantastically towards our side. I always tell him ‘one day we will eat frikadel [pork liver sausage] together’.” – Employer 10*

It is the responsibility of the ethnic minority worker to adapt her/himself to the ethnic majority. When not appearing culturally too different, the ethnic minority worker is praised for her/his willingness to be like the ethnic majority. With the importance of assimilation, employers construct the ethnic minority workers’ cultural identity as something different to the extent that it

becomes something that needs to be actively managed so that it does not lead to behavior that would violate the dominant norms.

*“The Arabic culture, that causes problems. That doesn’t fit in all stores. If you have a team that is entirely white and you are a Moroccan, that’s difficult. You can say what you want. That requires more time and energy from the manager to make that work” – Employer 7*

For employer 7, the difference in culture is seen as hampering the organization, as something that would make the work of employers more difficult. Ethnic minority workers who show assimilation are thus constructed as less hassle and more compliant to the needs of the employer. Employer 7 considers different cultures as time-consuming, and thus rather be avoided.

When talking about assimilation, a clear distinction is made between the cultural behavior of the ethnic minority and this of the ethnic majority. To explain what makes a compliant ethnic minority worker, employers makes a clear distinction between ‘we’ and ‘them’, as two different sides. This central role of assimilation in the construction of the compliant ethnic minority worker and the division between ethnic majority and minority is exemplified by employer 17.

*“For us, if we want to work and live somewhere, then we learn the language, we learn the culture, we will adapt ourselves. We say: we want to work here now. But that is not the case with many of the migrants who come here. [...] They don’t come here to adapt themselves. [...] You really notice it when somebody adapts himself [...] He [an ethnic minority worker] will never complain that he doesn’t get a free day on the sugarfest [Dutch word for Eid al-Fitr], but that he does get it on Christmas. He realizes he is in Belgium and that is just the way it is. He is conscious of the differences and respects our culture so much. But there are others, really” – Employer 17*

Employer 17 makes a clear distinction between the ethnic minority worker who adapts himself to her standards, and thus is constructed as compliant, and those whose behavior (*the others*) is evaluated as too different, thus constructing them as the non-compliant ethnic minority workers. While doing so, she constructs herself, and the ethnic majority at large, as generally willing to adapt to the cultural norms of the majority if they would hypothetically be the minority. Similarly, employer 13 shares the experience of the employment of an ethnic minority worker who, because of her hijab, was considered as not sufficiently assimilated. For employer 13, employing her and thus, managing the ‘difference’ on the work floor was difficult as an employer:

*“We once employed somebody with a headscarf. That was immediately much harder. [...] With the headscarf, there were a lot of comments. You feel from other workers, other people, that they were wondering what she was doing there. It’s immediately a much greater challenge, a headscarf. [...] It’s just a too large difference. It’s very clear. If you have somebody walking with you, and they don’t eat, that doesn’t bother you. But a headscarf is immediately visually very present.”* – Employer 13

What precisely is (not) considered assimilation, is constructed by the employer. It is the employer who decides on the border between normative and different behavior. Any act that is perceived by the employer as deviating from the dominant behavioral norm is seen as a hostile act of differentiating themselves. Employer 13 constructed in this case that the hijab was ethnically too different, while participating in the Ramadan was not. In this construction, he additionally emphasized that it was not he specifically who had a problem with this difference, rather it was the other employees. A similar personal construction of what culturally too different or not is given by employer 16.

*“It’s actually really fun, like when that one of Moroccan background brings Moroccan cookies, that’s just really fun, isn’t it [...] So there was one guy, we didn’t care that he*



*was of a different background. But he participated in Ramadan, so he couldn't join us during lunch. That was a real shame. And I understand that, I really understand that. But still... He missed a lot of social contact that month during lunch” – Employer 16*

Employer 16 states that when one worker brought biscuits specific to her culture, it was celebrated; he did find it a ‘real shame’ this worker did join lunch for a four-week period. It shows how the employer constructs the extent of assimilation according to her/his own judgment. Additionally, it shows again how employers, when describing what is culturally too different, feel the need to simultaneously construct themselves as open for different cultures.

### ***Gratitude towards the employer***

Second, employers construct a compliant ethnic minority worker to be superiorly grateful to her/his employer. A compliant ethnic minority worker is a worker who is constructed as highly appreciative towards the employer for receiving the chance to work and who will, therefore, stay longer in employment. As such, employer 17 states how ethnic minority workers are preferred in her company, as they are constructed as loyal and grateful to the employer who actually offers them a job.

*“When they [people from an ethnic minority] come to apply, we really think “hooray, somebody who will stay”. We are actually happy when somebody like that comes to apply for a job, because then we know they will stay working [...] People with a migration background [...] they are happy that they found work. They are grateful that they found work and are loyal. They stay and continue doing the job [...] a normal Belgian, he has been to school until his 18<sup>th</sup> and who starts here, well, maybe there is only one in ten who will still be here in a year [...] it's a bit the other way around here,*

*isn't it. It's not very pretty, but it means that if we have a Belgian before us, or a migrant, we will lean more towards the migrant.” - Employer 17*

By doing as such, employer 17 constructs the compliant ethnic minority worker in comparison with the ethnic majority. The ethnic minority worker is valued specifically for the vulnerabilities which his/her ethnicity entails. A similar example is given by employer 18:

*“For certain jobs, we specifically look for workers via an organization that helps the employment of ethnic minority workers. Just because we know that other people won't do this kind of job. And they [the ethnic minority workers] do their very best to stay on board in our company [...] Sometimes these are people with a lot of knowledge and experience, who start new in a different country, and who are indeed overqualified for our jobs. They have difficulties with finding a job somewhere else, so they are happy [to have a job with employer 18]” – Employer 18*

Employer 18 mentions that he specifically searches for ethnic minority workers who have experienced difficulties with finding a job in the past, and thus, employs them via an organization that is specialized in job coaching such profiles. Ethnic minority profiles are constructed as compliant ethnic minority workers who show gratitude and surplus loyalty, as their options for another job would be limited. Moreover, due to the limited opportunities, these ethnic minority workers are constructed as submitting themselves easier to the employer, as they will do all they can to stay in the company.

As a result, employers seem extra shocked when this gratitude is, in their eyes, not sufficiently expressed. Compliance entails staying at an organization for as long as the employer requires the ethnic minority's services, and remaining grateful about this employment. An

illustration of this is employer 4, who was left astonished and felt betrayed when an ethnic minority worker who had been employed for nine years in his organization decided to quit his job.

*“If somebody needed me, I would always help them. I always saw the good in people, which made me hit a wall, and I really have to be clear in this: specifically, with allochtonen [derogatory term to refer to people with a migration background and their descendants] [...] They just do not feel like working anymore. I had one, who was here for 9 years. Last week I had to stop a contract with a man, after four weeks of being on holiday, he says: [name Employer 4], I do not want to work anymore. Nine years he was in service.” – Employer 4*

Employer 4 constructs himself as a helpful person who always went out of his way to aid others. In this context, he experienced the resignation of an ethnic minority worker as a personal let-down, and associated the ‘early’ resignation of the ethnic minority worker with a general unwillingness to work, despite the worker’s nine-year loyalty. The high expectancy of gratitude reflects how confused employers are when ethnic minority workers refuse certain job assignments. By emphasizing that ‘they’ don’t have work ethic, employer 4 constructs the (non-compliant) ethnic worker in comparison with the ethnic majority, whom he considers as loyal workers. When this expected gratitude is not shown, employers resort to repeating stereotypes about the bad work ethic of ethnic minorities to explain this unexpected behavior.

Additionally, employers construct the compliant ethnic minority workers as grateful for any job that is offered to them, unaffected by possible objectionable conditions of the job. When ethnic minority workers decline a job, employers feel scandalized, as by offering the job, in their perception, they had come to the ethnic minority’s help. In the following statement, employer 3 talks about her experience with Antonio, who rejected a position, after hearing that another worker almost died on the job:

*“So I tell Antonio [during the job interview] that once, another worker was stuck in a sewage pit. If they hadn’t pulled him out, he would have been death. They had to pull him up by his knees. But those things happen. And so I tell these stories to give a heads-up, but then, to come back to diversity and migration background: after hearing this, they didn’t want to work here anymore, I guess they just don’t have the motivation to want to work.” – Employer 3*

Employer 3 recognized the refusal of Antonio as an unwillingness and demotivation to work. When talking about the demotivation, employer 3 stopped, similar to employer 18, talking about Antonio specifically and rather used the pronoun ‘they’, referring to people from an ethnic minority background in general, emphasizing how this behavior is specific to ‘them’.

Gratitude becomes thus an attribute by which ethnic minority workers who are seen as compliant are constructed, in which they accept their subordinate position in the labor market and on the work floor, by displaying a high(er) level of gratitude towards the employer and any of the jobs that they are offered. In the case these ethnic minority workers fail to show exceptional gratitude, this will be constructed as a result of their ethnic identity and expressed by the repetition of negative stereotypes linked to their ethnicity.

### ***Tolerance for discriminatory remarks***

Third, employers construct a compliant ethnic minority worker to accept discriminatory remarks from their employer, colleagues, and clients. Discriminatory statements, racial comments or crude ethnic humor are seen as a normal and unavoidable part of working lives. It is the ethnic minority workers who should learn to accept, deal with in a non-confrontational way, and preferably even adopt. Employer 3 states how he longs for ethnic minority workers who specifically can laugh with jokes based on racial or ethnic prejudices.

*“I have no prejudice, but not everybody is like that [...] I almost experience racism myself if what I say is understood wrongly. It’s all blown out of proportion. That whole Black Peter-debate for example. [...] They [ethnic minorities] take advantage of that, I’m convinced of it. [...] they use too quickly the racism-card. [...] We have a friend and he has a Moroccan as an employee, but actually he is like a Belgian, that well integrated. I also want such people. You can say to him: ‘Ali, you are not wearing your bombs belt today’, and he can laugh with that” – Employer 3*

It is the ethnic minority worker’s responsibility, in order to be recognized as compliant, to accept that (s)he will have to adapt and accept the remarks and not the other way around. If the employer’s remarks are evaluated as racially or ethnically inspired and degrading, the employer considers it the ethnic minority worker’s personal fault for not correctly understanding the remarks, and thus, the employer is able to divert any responsibility of his/her own communication towards the employee. The employer will construct her/himself as being non-racist and any diversion from this construction is due to the ethnic minorities’ own wrong interpretation. Employer 4 states that his ethnic minority workers should be able to handle being addressed to as ‘brown guy’ (a pejorative based on race and skin-color), as he has no specific intention to insult, and rather expresses these remarks as form of humor. For employer 4, it is the role of a compliant ethnic minority worker to adapt her/himself to his communication and the workers should not expect that he changes his behavior.

*“I sometimes say: ‘hey brown guy, do your job better [...] I feel that if you know who says something like that, you should be able to handle that. [...] I think they focus more on us. That they see the comments much more negative than they actually are meant to be. I think, they quickly go into a ‘slave-mode’. For a long time, we have been playing a king-slave story and now they will more quickly think: we are nothing. [...] They are*

*too sensitive for such things [cf. discriminatory remarks]. They take advantage of that a bit. I don't think they should do that [...] There are a few who very quickly remark: 'yes, but you say we are brown guys'. Yeah, they have that issue a lot. All of them, and then I am talking the whole lot of them, from Moroccans to Turkish people.” – Employer 4*

When ethnic minority workers do not comply to this expected behavior, employers resort to a stereotypical discourse in which the ethnic minority worker is identified as being too emotional, not being able to put comments into perspective, being quick-tempered or as lacking a sense of humor, and by doing so, leaving the door open for more negative evaluations of the worker.

Similarly, employer 2 praises the ethnic minority workers who display tolerance for discriminatory remarks, as it is part of his style of humor and communication with ethnic minority workers and those remarks are not intentionally discriminatory.

*“I am quite a funny boss. So once in a while, I bullshit around. [...] They know I am open-minded. So, Ibrahim, he passed by for a coffee [during a day of work] and his evaluation, and he was wearing a long white robe. I said to him: just be normal already! He can laugh about it. [...] I can say anything to these guys, they never make an issue about it.” – Employer 2*

Accepting the negative verbal remarks or discrimination based on their ethnicity coming from customers or clients is equally considered a part of the job. It is the ethnic minority workers who should subordinate her/himself to the market. As such, the employers construct the market also to be predominantly sharing the same normative values the employer. As such, employers abdicate their responsibility over the worker and place the management to (psychologically) deal with such discriminatory remarks in the hands of the workers themselves. Employer 1 mentions that they

specifically ask their ethnic minority workers if they can withstand the discriminatory remarks of the customers, as they take priority over the workers. For employer 1, the ethnic minority employee can be replaced, but the market not.

*“We really hear clients sometimes say “go back to your country” and “go work for IS”, you hear that once in a while. [...] but we need all the customers we can get [...] We ask our workers if they can handle that. Do you think you are strong enough to handle such remarks?” – Employer 1*

As such, tolerance for discriminatory remarks becomes an attribute by which compliant ethnic minority workers are constructed, in which they are expected to subjugate themselves to the degrading and dominating discourse of the ethnic majority.

### ***Distancing from the own ethnic minority group***

Finally, employers construct a compliant ethnic minority worker as one who distances her- or himself from any potential allegiance with their own ethnic background. From the moment more individuals of the same minority ethnicity become employed, employers construct them as forming groups with others of the same ethnicity. This grouping is considered problematic by the employers as they fear it makes the ethnic minority workers less compliant to the employer. Employer 10 and 8 express how ethnic minority employees are considered compliant on an individual base, but that once there is a multitude of ethnic minority workers from the same ethnicity, they become a collective.

*“The larger your amount of foreigners [on the work floor] is, the more they have the tendency to stick together” - Employer 10*

*“We had the feeling that the amount of Turks increased in the company, from 3-4 workers to 10-12. In the past, I did not feel there were groups present. But then suddenly,*

*those people really started to stand together during breaks [...] If a Turk starts here, they immediately know other Turks on the work floor as well. That one knows that one, who knows another one and they are family [...] What the foremen say now, it that they [the Turkish worker] are good, but they should not be with too many. Then they start to stick together and get stronger. They become more vocal and they feel stronger in the sense that they speak Turkish among themselves, because nobody would notice it anyway [...] They are one big family. If you have one against you, you have them all against you. They gang up on you” - Employer 8*

As the group becomes more prominent, employers don't recognize individual ethnic minority workers anymore, rather they see a non-compliant collective. The ethnic minority collective is by the employers constructed as a threat which holds the possibility of revolting against the dominion of the employer and empowering themselves, by sharing important information with each other to the disadvantage of the employer.

A compliant ethnic minority worker is thus for employers an ethnic minority worker who distances her/himself from their own ethnic group and does not form a community which is, by the construction of the employer, there to take advantage of the employer and the organization.

*“From my experience: they all know each other; it is one community. And they know how to get things done to their advantage. If you do it like this, and this and this [...] they all share this info with each other, to get for example unemployment benefits or healthcare. They believe it is their right, because this is Belgium. [...] While we, we don't do that, socially we don't. And because they are small communities, they know everything. They are a very close knit community” – Employer 21*



Employer 21 constructs the ethnic minority workers in her company as a community, which is able to distort hierarchy and manipulate rules by sharing information with each other and only among themselves. The comparison is made with the ethnic majority who is constructed as not clustering together as such and taking advantage of the workplace. To decrease the possibility of ethnic minority workers to form a collective and distorting the established hierarchy, employers take active precautions when employing ethnic minority workers. An example is employer 18 who has an active policy to limit the number of ethnic minority workers they recruit from a certain ethnic background.

*“Turks and Moroccans, that is a problem [...] because together, they feel strong and they start expressing that. [...] Then you get a cultural problem. They don’t accept your authority anymore. So we limit the amount of Turkish and Moroccan people in one team. I’m not saying that they are all like that. There are also good ones among them.”* –

Employer 18

By limiting the amount of workers of a specific ethnic minority group, she ensures that no potentially non-compliant allegiance between the ethnic minority can emerge. The compliant ethnic minority workers are specifically those who do not partake in the ‘community’-building and thus not display any resistance towards the employer.

This fear for the creation of an unwanted ethnic alliance additionally occurs in relations with customers. Employers are anxious that minority ethnic workers might form alliances with customers from their own minority ethnic background. They are convinced that ethnic collectives give rise to non-compliant behavior, such as giving them forms of preferential treatment or discounts.

*“[When having Turkish employees] when your shop is located in a predominantly Turkish area [...] These people they come in and pretend it is their neighbourhood shop. You notice that discounts are very quickly given, which really isn’t supposed to happen. To the cousin, to the aunt, everything goes. That’s just how it goes, and then you think: no.” – Employer 7*

For employer 14 this meant he felt he had to actively manage his new ethnic minority worker, as to make sure she would not abuse her position in his organisation.

*“We hired our first Turkish woman. Suddenly we had given somebody a position in that community. We had to manage her to not abuse that position. Because what did you see suddenly: our clients were saying that they had to go to Öznur [the Turkish female worker] to approve their files, cause Öznur could do that for you.” – Employer 14*

As such, distancing from their own ethnicity becomes an attribute by which compliant ethnic minority workers are constructed, in which they accept that they should strive to connect rather with the ethnic majority than to make collaborations with their own ethnicity.

## **DISCUSSION**

The goal of this article was to understand how employers construct a compliant ethnic minority worker. Drawing on interviews with 22 employers, this article makes a contribution by showing how employers construct compliant ethnic minority workers through four attributes, which signals their compliance to both employers, and the ethnic majority’s culture. This study argues that the employment relation is shaped by a cultural hierarchy between ethnic minority and ethnic majority, in which cultural compliance to the ethnic majority is fundamental in maintaining structural economic inequality in the work context.

### *The different aspects of compliance*

A compliant ethnic minority worker is construed by employers through four attributes. While the first two attributes - Gratitude and Assimilation - are in line with earlier findings in the critical literature with respectively an economic (e.g. Anderson and Ruhs, 2010; Catanzarite, 2000; Harrison and Lloyd, 2013; MacKenzie and Forde, 2009) and a cultural (e.g. Reid, 2015; Van Laer and Janssens, 2011; Wingfield and Alston, 2013;) focus, this study also identifies two additional attributes - Tolerance for Discriminatory Remarks and Distancing – which have received less attention in previous debates on the subject of the compliant ethnic worker.

First, reflecting the cultural explanation in organization studies (e.g. Ahmed, 2007; Nkomo and Al Ariss, 2014; Van Laer and Janssens, 2014), the attribute Assimilation entails that compliant ethnic minority workers are constructed as willing to adopt the behavior of the ethnic majority and not display any behavior that is considered (too) ‘different’. Non-compliant ethnic minority workers are constructed as deficient as they are perceived to display cultural otherness, while compliant ethnic minority workers are constructed as valuable as they are perceived to conform to the cultural norms established by the ethnic majority and employer.

Second, reflecting the economic explanation in critical organization studies (e.g. Anderson and Ruhs, 2010; Catanzarite, 2000; Harrison and Lloyd, 2013; MacKenzie and Forde, 2009), the attribute Gratitude entails that compliant ethnic minority workers should accept that because they do not have equal opportunities to be employed, they should show superior gratitude towards the employer. Thus, the study shows that the compliant ethnic minority worker is not only constructed as accepting the economic dependence on the employer, but he/she is also constructed as grateful to the employer for being able to occupy her/his subordinated position in this relation.

Third, the attribute Tolerance for Discriminatory Remarks entails that compliant ethnic minority workers are constructed as showing acceptance and tolerance of discriminatory or racist

remarks coming from the ethnic majority. While previous studies adopting the cultural explanation (e.g. Ahmed, 2007; Nkomo and Al Ariss, 2014; Ogbonna and Harris, 2006; Reid, 2015; Van Laer and Janssens, 2011) have pointed to the prevalence of negative constructions of otherness in organizations, and while the critical literature (e.g. Zanoni et al., 2010) has often argued that organizations are not sufficiently addressing discrimination, this study points to a new problematic aspect relating to discrimination in organizations. By constructing the compliant ethnic minority worker as accepting discriminatory remarks, the ethnic minority worker becomes subjectified and subjugated by the discriminatory discourse and simultaneously, as the ethnic majority is not expected to change their behavior, it establishes a hierarchization between the majority's culture and the worker of an ethnic minority. Specifically, it shows employers' expectation that ethnic minorities accept they will be faced with negative constructions of them by colleagues, supervisors and the market.

Fourth, with the attribute Distancing, compliant ethnic minority workers are constructed as sundering ties with their own ethnic group, in favor of the ethnic majority. While in line with the negative construction of otherness, distinctive to the cultural perspective (e.g. Ahmed, 2007; Janssens and Zanoni, 2005; Nkomo and Al Ariss, 2014; Ogbonna and Harris, 2006), the attribute Distancing goes further. The fear of cultural minoritarian communities, emerging in opposition to economic oppression, reflects back to the far-reaching effects of such possible collectivities. A compliant ethnic minority worker involves one that simultaneously accepts the imperative of the ethnic majority and the imperative of capital. A compliant ethnic minority worker is not simply one who accepts worse employment opportunities, as described by the economic perspective (e.g. Anderson and Ruhs, 2010; Catanzarite, 2000; Harrison and Lloyd, 2013; MacKenzie and Forde, 2009), nor one who simply assimilates to the ethnic majority, as presented in the cultural perspective (e.g. Ahmed, 2007; Nkomo and Al Ariss, 2014).

### *The other ideal worker as recognition*

A compliant ethnic minority worker is not simply one who accepts worse employment opportunities, as described in the economic explanation (e.g. Anderson and Ruhs, 2010; Catanzarite, 2000; Harrison and Lloyd, 2013; MacKenzie and Forde, 2009), nor one who simply assimilates to the ethnic majority, as presented by the cultural explanation (e.g. Ahmed, 2007; Nkomo and Al Ariss, 2014). Reflecting arguments in the postcolonial literature (e.g. Bhabha, 1994; Mir, Mir, and Upadhyaya, 2003; Prasad, 2003; Said, 2003) this study shows that a compliant ethnic minority worker involves one that simultaneously accepts the imperative of the ethnic majority and the imperative of capital. When understanding the four attributes through a postcolonial lens, each attribute is embedded in the coloniality of power (Balaton-Chrimes and Stead, 2017). First, the attribute of assimilation is a form of regulation in which the ethnic minority worker is expected to mimic the ethnic majority while staying inside the borders of an authorized version of otherness, as established by the employer (Bhabha, 1994; Said, 2003). Second, the attribute of gratitude is an expression of the need of the employer to have the established cultural division in labor and the employer as exceptionally benevolent recognized by the Other (Bhabha, 1994; Prasad, 2003). Third, the attribute of tolerance for discriminatory remarks represents the required continuous articulation of differences and modes of discrimination to maintain cultural and economic hierarchy (Bhabha, 1994; Said, 2003). And fourth, the attribute of distancing disallows any political empowerment, new modes of agency, symbolic representation and recognition of the Other (Bhabha, 1994).

The ethnic minority is constructed as simultaneously the ‘desired’, as the ‘unwanted’ one, in which the compliant ethnic minority worker is categorized as the desired one in opposition to the *other* ethnic minority workers, who act out of order of the attributes. Through the construction of the compliant ethnic minority worker, the employer expresses her/his desire for a “reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite

[...] *almost the same, but not white*” (Bhabha; 1944: 86–89). By establishing the rules of ‘reformation’, through the attributes of the compliant ethnic minority worker, the employer ensures control and regulation over the ethnic minority worker, making sure that the ethnic minority worker adheres the cultural and economic imperative of the ethnic majority. Yet, even as the desired one, the compliant ethnic minority worker, a strict separation between the ethnic majority and ethnic minority is upheld (Kalonaityte, 2010).

Whereas the employer constructs the ethnic minority worker, the ethnic minority worker equally holds the ability to construct the employer. In the colonial discourse, the colonizer’s Self faces the same ambivalence as the colonized (Bhabha, 1994): while the ethnic minority is constructed as the desired or unwanted one, the ethnic majority is simultaneously the benevolent or the oppressive one.

*“‘Be the father and the oppressor ... just and unjust’ is a mode of contradictory utterance that ambivalently reinscribes, across differential power relations, both colonizer and colonized. For it reveals an agonistic uncertainty [...] The refusal to return and restore the image of authority to the eye of power has to be reinscribed as implacable aggression, assertively coming from without: He hates me.* (Bhabha, 1994: 95-96).

The compliant ethnic minority worker, as the reformed Other, has to fulfill its role of justifying the employers’ desire to be recognized as the benevolent one, who stands in comparison with the *other* ethnic majority who are constructed as the discriminating oppressors.

*“The narcissistic, colonialist demand that it should be addresses directly, that the Other should authorize the self, recognize its priority, fulfill its outlines, replete, indeed repeat, its references [...] The colonialist demand for narrative carries, within it, its threatening reversal: Tell us why we are here. It is this echo that reveals that the other side of*

*narcissistic authority may be the paranoia of power; a desire for 'authorization' in the face of a process of cultural differentiation.*” (Bhabha, 1993: 98)

This ambivalence in the colonizer’s Self and the need for recognition of the Self-narrative, shows how the cultural and economic imperative is essentially unsecured. Modes of (un)conscious resistance are constantly possible between the spaces of employer’s expectations and the ethnic minorities’ response (Bhabha, 1994). Due to the inherent ambivalence of both the Other, as the Self in colonial authority, this resistance has thus the potential to dismantle the established economic and cultural imperative and break the employer’s Self construction of being the benevolent employer. In reaction to this constant threat, the employer constructs the entity of the ‘other ideal worker’.

The other ideal worker simultaneously exhibits economic and cultural subordination through the four attributes by which a compliant ethnic minority worker is constructed, but also actively disavows, what would be perceived by the employer as, resistance. This active disavowal of resistance in the image of the other ideal worker is specifically through the four attributes. First, by showing superior gratitude, the worker is perceived by the employer as not resisting the colonial discourse and not questioning the moral justification of the employer’s self. Second, by not passing the authorized version of otherness, the ethnic minority worker does not resist or undermine the status-quo of the majority’s culture and the employer’s self as the dominating and controlling subject. Third, by accepting and adopting the discriminatory remarks, the ethnic minority worker does not counter the process of subjectification and the employer’s/ethnic majority’s self as the authorized manager of the Other’s identity. Lastly, by not forming a minority collective, the ethnic minority worker is perceived by the employer as not posing a threat to the moral order. The need to counter possible, as perceived by the employer, colonial resistance from the ethnic minority workers, is expressed by how the employer utilizes in cases of perceived resistance stereotypical rhetoric in which the ethnic minority is constructed as

morally inferior and weak compared to the 'better' ethnic majority. Consequently, the stereotypical rhetoric is used to mask the employer's uncertainty and once again fix the colonial project of subjugation (Bhabha, 1994).

As such, the entity of the other ideal worker is constructed as an ethnic minority subject who accepts that the economic chances it receives are always reliant on her/his economic and cultural submission to the ethnic majority and the employer. Being an authorized Other, the subject of the other ideal worker becomes a tool for employers to (re)produce cultural and economic hierarchy and by doing so, acts as an organizing system which actively reproduces ethnic inequality along class and ethnic lines by sustaining the economic and cultural hierarchical imbalances, while the employer's self maintains a sense of moral justification.

## **CONCLUSION**

At the beginning of this article, it was argued that despite the overall understanding that compliance is central in the (re)production of ethnic inequality on the labor market, a discrepancy existed in critical diversity literature about how this compliance of ethnic minority workers should be interpreted. The findings of this article suggest that the economic and the cultural perspective on ethnic inequality are not in contrast with each other, as would first appear, but that through the construction of the compliant ethnic minority worker the cultural construction of ethnicity is intertwined with the economic relations of power. This paper has done so by utilizing a postcolonial lens on the four attributes which are crucial in the construction of the compliant ethnic minority worker by employers. As such, the entity of the 'other ideal employee' surfaced, which is the idealized construction of compliant ethnic minority workers, in which the 'other ideal employee' institutionalizes subordination simultaneously along class and ethnic lines, and shows no signs of resistance towards this institutionalization. As such, this study provides a new understanding of how ethnic inequality in organizations is (re)produced through the construction



of and longing for an idealized compliant ethnic minority worker. As a result of this paper, future studies on the matter would benefit from understanding the different forms of mimicry and hybridization of ethnic minority workers, as how they express forms of (hidden) resistance to the entity of the ‘other ideal employee’; how the discursive construction of the market as ‘white’, influences the (re)production of ethnic inequality; and how, once employed, capital manages the ethnic minority workers into the framework of the ‘other ideal employee’.

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