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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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An exploration of how Moroccan ethnic minority women navigate and negotiate their entrepreneurial identity in the Netherlands: a postfeminist analysis

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to further our understanding of how Moroccan ethnic minority women entrepreneurs in the Netherlands navigate and negotiate their entrepreneurial identities. Using postfeminism as an analytic device, we interrogate how gendered, ethnicised, and postfeminist discourses intersect in shaping the entrepreneurial identities of ethnic minority women entrepreneurs, drawing out the enabling and constraining factors that attach to this. Recognizing that postfeminism as a global culture may also resonate with ethnic minority women entrepreneurs, we empirically illustrate the (dis)enabling functioning of postfeminism and the ambiguities and contradictions of it. Doing so, we add to the literature on women entrepreneurship and postfeminism. Mobilizing postfeminism as an analytic device, we identify three core themes: 1) the recognition of persistence of inequality in these women's experiences, 2) the articulation of postfeminist agency, and 3) the recourse to resilience and bounding back from adversity. We demonstrate how engagement with the postfeminist discourses, underpinning these three themes, contribute to the emergence of the postfeminist ethnic minority woman entrepreneur.

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Postfeminism; entrepreneurial identity; ethnic minority women entrepreneurs; resilience; agency; transformation

1. Introduction

In the field of entrepreneurship studies, identity research with a focus on entrepreneurial identity has emerged as an important area of study. This scholarship argues that the meanings individuals attach to their subjective sense of self as they constitute an entrepreneurial identity are fundamental to understanding entrepreneurial activities, processes and possibilities (Brown 2020; Fauchart and Gruber 2020; Radu-Lefebvre et al. 2021). Simultaneously acknowledged is that gender is central to the constitution of an entrepreneurial identity, since entrepreneurship by definition is a gender biased activity (Swail and Marlow 2018). The persistence of a dominant masculinity that infuses entrepreneurship is still evident and has had significant consequences for women as their entrepreneurial identities often do not straightforwardly align with this masculine norm. Women must engage in various forms of gendered identity work to address the stigma attached to femininity within an entrepreneurial context where masculinity is preferred (Giazitzoglu and Down 2017; Lewis 2006, 2013; Ogbor 2000; Swail and Marlow 2018).

Earlier studies have investigated the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs as they engage in entrepreneurial identity work as a way to acquire legitimacy in masculinized industries (Marlow and McAdam 2013). Byrne, Fattoum, and Garcia (2019, 155, 179) have moreover critically discussed how Western discourses have promoted heroic role models of successful women entrepreneurs, casting

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individualized entrepreneurial femininity as a neo-liberal, meritocratic, 'everybody is capable' view of entrepreneurship. Such discourses suppress the experiences and needs of not only women entrepreneurs in general but particularly hamper those women who are (dis)advantaged by ethnicity or class.

Women entrepreneurs may draw on specific gender discourses present in their social environment to construct a favourable entrepreneurial identity. For instance, Lewis (2014) in a review of the gender and entrepreneurship literature and Lewis, Rumens, and Simpson (2022) in an empirical study of mumpreneurs, discuss how women entrepreneurs construct their identities within the framework of postfeminism, exploring how they engage in identity work to align with the normative gendered expectations of their socio-cultural contexts. There is a growing body of scholarship (Branicki, King, and Norbury 2023; Byrne, Fattoum, and Garcia 2019; De Simone and Priola 2022; Lewis 2014; Lewis, Rumens, and Simpson 2022; Nadin, Smith, and Jones 2020; Rugina and Ahl 2024; Sullivan and Delaney 2017) within the gender and entrepreneurship field that employs postfeminism as an analytic device to reflect on the ways entrepreneurial identities can be constructed by women entrepreneurs to align with the normative gender expectations in their surrounding milieus.

Within scholarship on postfeminism and its impact on contemporary women's work identities – including those shaped through entrepreneurship – there is often an implicit assumption that postfeminist discourses primarily target and construct the identities of white, Western women. According to Butler (2013, 48) the claim that postfeminism 'speaks' only to white women is 'overly simplistic and empirically unfounded'. Similarly, Dosekun (2015, 961) argues that postfeminist culture 'hails not only women in the West but also others elsewhere'. Although previous research has offered insights into how white women entrepreneurs draw on postfeminist discourse in shaping their identities and how women in male-dominated entrepreneurial contexts engage in identity work to gain legitimacy through postfeminist ideals (Essers, McAdam, and Ossenkop 2025), less is known about how these dynamics unfold for ethnic minority women entrepreneurs.

We seek to address this lacuna by drawing on postfeminism to investigate how ethnic minority women entrepreneurs navigate and negotiate their entrepreneurial identities. In doing this we do not engage with postfeminism as a theoretical stance, rather we use it as a critical analytic device to interrogate how gendered, ethnicised, and postfeminist discourses intersect in shaping the entrepreneurial identities of ethnic minority women entrepreneurs, drawing out the enabling and constraining factors that attach to this. Accordingly, as researchers we are 'critical analysts of postfeminism', not postfeminist analysts (Gill 2017, 607). Rather than aligning ourselves with postfeminism's celebratory rhetoric of individual choice and empowerment, we use it as a critical concept to uncover its ambivalences – how it simultaneously encourages (masculine) agency alongside adherence to traditional gender behaviours thereby reproducing postfeminist and ethnicized norms of femininity. We therefore position our use of postfeminism as an analytic tool (not a theoretical perspective) to develop a more nuanced understanding of how ethnic minority women entrepreneurs, when creating an entrepreneurial identity, are neither positioned outside of nor are immune to the ideological reach of postfeminist discourses (Butler 2013; Dosekun 2015; Dutta 2021).

In this study, we focus on women entrepreneurs of Moroccan descent in the Netherlands. These ethnic minority women entrepreneurs have to relate to the Dutch socio-cultural and institutional setting which is characterized by liberal individualist values and alleged equal gender norms[1] At the same time, they continue to be influenced by the gendered cultural expectations on appropriate behaviour as a woman within their ethnic minority communities (Essers, Doorewaard, and Benschop 2013). Drawing on postfeminism as a critical analytic device, the aim of our study is to explore and theorize how Moroccan ethnic minority women entrepreneurs in the Netherlands navigate and negotiate their entrepreneurial identities through postfeminism.

Accordingly, our article contributes to the literature on women's entrepreneurship and postfeminism by making empirically visible how the entrepreneurial identities and lived experience of these women are informed by postfeminist discourses. In doing so, we illustrate the inherent

ambiguities of postfeminism – highlighting how it concurrently empowers and burdens ethnic minority women entrepreneurs. Through our analysis which identifies three overarching themes – recognition and persistence of inequality, the articulation of postfeminist agency, resilience and 'bouncing back' from adversity – we surface the entrepreneurial identity of the postfeminist ethnic minority woman entrepreneur.

Our article begins with a theoretical section which brings the concepts of postfeminism, entrepreneurial identity and ethnic minority women entrepreneurship together. Next, we outline our methodological approach, followed by the presentation of the empirical sections which comprise of a thematic analysis of our respondents' entrepreneurial stories. We conclude by considering the study's main contributions relating to the constitution of entrepreneurial identities – informed by postfeminism – by women entrepreneurs of Moroccan descent in the Netherlands, plus a few recommendations for further research.

2. Postfeminism, entrepreneurial identity and ethnic minority women entrepreneurs

Mobilizing postfeminism within empirical studies of women's entrepreneurial experiences is complicated by the array of interpretations associated with this polysemic concept. Postfeminism has been variously interpreted as an epistemological break with second-wave feminism, or a historical shift within feminism which marks a move away from a particular form of feminist activity, or as a backlash against feminism (Gill 2007). While acknowledging these interpretations, we align with the majority of scholars who agree that the most useful conceptualization, particularly in relation to empirical work, is one which treats postfeminism as a cultural sensibility (Gill 2007) or 'discursive formation which governs our everyday life, framing and shaping our thinking' in relation to women's changing position in society as subjects of economic and entrepreneurial capacity (Lewis 2018, 25). It is important to note that there is no centrally located source for this cultural phenomenon. Rather, it emerges from the influence and actions of a range of semi-autonomous institutions, groups and individuals who deliver similar and related messages across public discourse – such as gender discrimination has ended and gender equality is now part of our common sense – without organized co-operation (Lewis and Benschop 2023).

The specification of the characteristics of postfeminism by gender scholars, through which the message that gender discrimination 'is over' is delivered, has made visible the empirical regularities and material effects of this cultural phenomenon. The naming of these features shows the impact postfeminism has on how women (and men) live their lives in contemporary times and how it can evolve, take on new forms and develop new dimensions, thereby facilitating its use as an analytic device for critical scrutiny of women's experience of entrepreneurship. The recurring and evolving themes of postfeminism include individualism, choice and empowerment with an emphasis placed on the innately unique, choosing, autonomous and self-determining individual who can personally deal with challenges; an emphasis on self-optimization, self-transformation and the ongoing pursuit of our 'best self' often by means of a psychologized inner-directed focus; a renewed prominence given to 'natural' sexual difference in terms of biological and psychological distinctions between men and women; an emphasis placed on choosing to engage in active childcare and achieving balance between home and work responsibilities; and finally, attaching importance to confidence and resilience as affective and psychic dimensions of postfeminism. This emphasis on confidence and resilience are presented as psychological supports for women so that they can overcome any discrimination or (gender) challenges through individual strategies (Gill 2007, 2017; Gill, Kelan, and Scharff 2017).

The importance attached to autonomy, individual responsibility and self-transformation means that postfeminism is closely aligned with neoliberalism which places significant emphasis on agency, self-governance and entrepreneurialism. As Gill and Scharff (2011, 7) state: it is clear that the autonomous, calculating, self-regulating subject of neoliberalism bears a strong resemblance to the active, freely choosing, self-reinventing subject of postfeminism (. . .) (and) that postfeminism (. . .)

is at least partly constituted through the pervasiveness of neoliberal ideas. Thus, the neoliberal core at the heart of postfeminism, calls women to adapt to a mode of living which is entrepreneurial, market focused, driven and self-regarding (Lewis, Rumens, and Simpson 2022). As Gill interviewed by Rottenberg (2019) asserts, postfeminism is one of the central means by which neoliberalism has individualized women. Postfeminism interpellates women to constitute an individualized, entrepreneurial identity through engagement in masculine behaviours of drive, determination and self-actualization alongside highly stylized traditional feminine performances connected to beauty, make-over and motherhood.

As postfeminism has contributed to the marked transformation of women's social and economic identities, it can be deployed as a critical analytic device to examine the entrepreneurial identities which form the basis of women's inclusion in entrepreneurship (Lewis 2014). Entrepreneurial identity denotes the processes of entrepreneurship and helps an individual to make sense of questions such as 'Who am I?' as an entrepreneur, as a means of achieving legitimacy and belonging in the world of business ownership (Essers et al. 2021; Marlow and McAdam 2015; Radu-Lefebvre et al. 2021; Stead 2017).

Our understanding of identity aligns with a social constructionist and discursive perspective: identity is not a fixed attribute or an inner essence but a dynamic and ongoing process of negotiation within specific socio-cultural and institutional contexts. It is produced relationally – through interaction with others, within discourses, and across multiple axes such as gender, ethnicity, class, and religion (Bell et al. 2020; Essers and Benschop 2007). This understanding of identity as both relational and performative informs our empirical analysis of how postfeminist discourses intersect in shaping entrepreneurial identities. Using postfeminism as a critical analytic device, we reveal how the cultural raw material of this phenomenon – individualism, self-transformation, 'natural' sexual difference', resilience – are drawn on in the creation of an entrepreneurial identity. In particular, we draw on postfeminism as an analytic tool to interrogate how its discourses travel across ethnic and cultural contexts, shaping the entrepreneurial identity of ethnic minority women entrepreneurs in ways that are simultaneously enabling and constraining.

A growing body of work illustrates how postfeminist discourses are central to the constitution of entrepreneurial identities by women living and working within a postfeminist setting. A number of studies (Byrne, Fattoum, and Garcia 2019; Lewis 2014; Nadin, Smith, and Jones 2020) highlight the dominant and preferred representation of the individualized, heroic, superwoman entrepreneur and the overwhelmingly positive portrayal of entrepreneurship for women, with self-improvement, reinvention and happiness presented as available to those who put in enough effort. Common to this optimistic representation of women's entrepreneurship is a downplaying of any tensions in taking up an entrepreneurial identity. Nevertheless, studies such as Lewis, Rumens, and Simpson (2022) which investigate how women engage with the entrepreneurial identity of the mumpreneur, highlight the tensions between successful and less successful 'mumpreneur' women, and the challenges attached to managing home and work concurrently. In response to such tensions, a postfeminist emphasis is placed on the ideal of the strong and tough woman able to overcome any difficulties by building up their self-confidence and resilience (Gill and Orgad 2015, 2018).

Resilience – bouncing back quickly from setbacks and turning problems into opportunities – has become a central premise of postfeminism. To be seen as successful entrepreneurs, women must show resilience (McDermott 2022). Resilience in postfeminism involves recovery as well as turning negative experiences into useful resources for success. As such, showing resilience is expected of women because transforming setbacks into strengths is highly valued (McDermott 2022). This aligns with postfeminism's focus on individualism, self-improvement, and constant reinvention (Gill and Orgad 2018). Women are encouraged to keep reinventing themselves and to be resilient when they struggle, so they can overcome feelings of failure. This means women are made responsible for handling structural barriers, like balancing business with caregiving, on their own (McDermott 2022). By placing the burden of success on women themselves, postfeminism makes setbacks feel personal, with resilience promoted as the way to bounce back and turn challenges into valuable social capital

(Baker and Brewis 2020; McDermott 2022). Accordingly, resilience has become a new norm tied to self-management and entrepreneurship, acting as a tool for recovery and personal growth (McRobbie 2020).

This emphasis on resilience encapsulates both the empowering and disciplinary facets of post-feminism. It demonstrates how women are invited to understand themselves as autonomous, self-managing subjects who transform hardship into opportunity – while simultaneously masking structural inequalities of gender, ethnicity and religion. Our analysis of the lived experience of women entrepreneurs of Moroccan descent builds on this insight to show how postfeminist notions of resilience are at the heart of their entrepreneurial identities.

As highlighted in the introduction to this paper, to our knowledge there are few empirical studies that have investigated ethnic minority women entrepreneurs' interaction with postfeminism when constituting an entrepreneurial identity. Earlier studies (Essers and Benschop 2007, 2009; Essers, Benschop, and Doorewaard 2010; Romero and Valdez 2016) do explore the intersections of gender and ethnicity in relation to entrepreneurship. However, this research highlights how women draw on Islamic values as the underpinning of their individualism and entrepreneurship as a means of challenging traditional gender roles. While it can be argued that there is some overlap with postfeminist culture here, postfeminism through its emphasis on self-transformation and self-optimization pushes women to achieve more as an individual business owner. Thus, the embrace of postfeminism in relation to entrepreneurial identity formation may lead to extra pressures on these women such as additional household responsibilities, exhaustion, experiences of anxiety, fear and fatigue and the need to continually prove their legitimacy as women entrepreneurs (see also Essers et al. 2021). In addressing the lack of research on ethnic minority women entrepreneurs' engagement with postfeminism, we reveal how originally Moroccan women entrepreneurs in the Netherlands, navigate and negotiate their entrepreneurial identities and how in this process post-feminist discourses both enable and constrain them.

3. Dutch context

This study employs empirical material obtained in the Netherlands. In Dutch public discourse, ethnic minorities of Moroccan descent-one of the largest groups of ethnic minorities in the Netherlands and descendants from former 'guest workers' in the 1970s and 1980s – are often negatively stereotyped as not emancipated and insufficiently adjusted to Dutch culture with its Western, Christian norms and values (Güveli and Platt 2011). Together with the often traditional gendered public – private divide within the Moroccan migrant community (Essers, Doorewaard, and Benschop 2013), this creates a social context in which women entrepreneurs of Moroccan descent construct their identities and navigate sometimes conflicting expectations regarding gender, religion, and work.

To be a woman of migrant descent, an ethnic minority, and a Muslim simultaneously may add up to being pictured as less professional, because of alleged low education and restricted gender rights within the home. Yet, research shows that these women do not passively internalize such views, but exercise agency by selectively drawing on both Dutch and Moroccan gender norms to craft hybrid identities (Essers and Benschop 2009).

The ideas of right-wing politicians such as Pim Fortuyn and Geert Wilders and their articulation of anti-Muslim sentiments have reinforced negative stereotypes (Hass and Lutek 2018). Hostile views on the headscarf, mosque building, and migration have contributed to this stereotyping. Gustavsson, van der Noll, and Sundberg (2016) note that negative attitudes towards Muslims are increasing rather than diminishing in the Netherlands.

In the Netherlands, the labour market participation of women of Moroccan descent is steadily increasing (around 50%), and among second-generation women even higher (around 70%; SCP, 2020). In addition, statistics show that particularly second-generation Moroccan women increasingly hold higher professional or managerial positions, compared to first-generation women and first-generation men (SCP 2020), which shows their emancipation in Dutch society. With regard, to

entrepreneurship, of the 20,000 Moroccan entrepreneurs in the Netherlands, 15% are women. Many women entrepreneurs of Moroccan descent operate in gender-typed or ethnic niche markets such as beauty salons, fashion, or retail (Essers and Benschop 2007; Essers et al. 2021), but are increasingly active in sectors such as business services, consulting, and real estate as well.

Entrepreneurship allows them to redefine gender roles and articulate alternative visions of empowerment that blend cultural, religious, and economic values (Essers and Benschop 2009; Essers et al. 2021). Taking up entrepreneurship enables professional agency, transforming 'traditional' domains into spaces of cultural and entrepreneurial innovation which challenge dominant Western ideas of emancipation and professionalism (Rindova, Barry, and Ketchen 2009). Rather than simply being constrained by these 'traditional' expectations, they actively construct their entrepreneurial identities that reinterpret what it means to be both 'professional' and 'Muslim' in Dutch society.

4. Methodology

The analysis presented in this paper is based on 15 narrative interviews conducted by the first author with women entrepreneurs of Moroccan descent living in the Netherlands for a long period of time. Such interviews provide insight into the entrepreneurial life experience of these respondents, uncovering meanings and the interviewee perspective on what it is like to be an ethnic minority woman entrepreneur in this setting (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015). The interviews were underpinned by the principle that it is through the practice of narration that individuals develop understanding of their experiences and for our purposes their entrepreneurial identities (Benwell and Stokoe 2006). The small sample size is reflective of the desire to build depth as opposed to breadth of understanding of these women's entrepreneurial experiences. Additionally, we approached these narrative interviews as social stories derived from cultural and institutional formations, creating an interdependency between a wider cultural setting and the personalized, local experiences which the respondents shared (Ashcraft 2004; Benwell and Stokoe 2006; Somers 1994). Accordingly, we explore how postfeminist discourses may influence women entrepreneurs of Moroccan descent when constructing their entrepreneurial identities, drawing out the connections between their local personalized entrepreneurial narratives and postfeminism as a wider discursive formation.

All of the respondents had been in business for at least a year at the time of the interview and each participant was interviewed for an average of 1.5 h. For these narrative interviews, the first author adopted an open-ended question format with a particular focus on identity-related issues. Examples include Could you tell me something about your background; what made you start your own business; did you have entrepreneurs in your family; which barriers and opportunities did you experience in your entrepreneurship; how did being a woman, originally Moroccan and having a migrant background impact on these barriers and opportunities; do you receive (at this moment) professional support and coaching, and if not, why not; to what extent did entrepreneurship help you to gain a stronger social and economic position as a woman with ethnic minority roots? The interviews were recorded with the permission of the interviewees and mostly occurred at the entrepreneur's place of business. The first author as interviewer emphasized that all information would be anonymized and dealt with confidentially. Therefore, we use pseudonyms in the findings.

The interview data, comprising verbatim transcripts from the 15 participants, was first analysed using an open coding approach (Peters and Wester 2007). We engaged closely with the data, identifying initial codes that emerged directly from participants' accounts, allowing recurrent patterns and topics to surface organically. At this stage, themes related to individual responsibility, personal choice, and change appeared prominently across the interviews. As our analysis progressed, we re-coded the data with an increased postfeminist analytic focus as we identified connections between the interview data and postfeminism, paying attention to discourses such as individualism, self-transformation, 'natural' sexual difference, resilience, and the decision to engage in active caregiving – patterns suggestive of postfeminist logics that respondents drew on as they

negotiated and created their entrepreneurial identities. This phase involved collaborative interpretation, with the authors comparing individual readings and refining themes through a series of in-person and virtual discussions. Throughout the process, we remained attentive to the contextual specificity of participants' narratives, examining what was said, how they interpreted their experiences and how these meanings shaped their entrepreneurial identities. From this iterative coding process, we identified three overarching patterns or themes that illuminated how postfeminist elements informed the process of identity construction articulated in the data, while also revealing the tensions and contradictions that were present. These three themes are *(1) recognition of the persistence of inequality, (2) the articulation of postfeminist agency, and (3) resilience and 'bouncing back' from adversity*. Together these three themes give rise to the entrepreneurial identity of the postfeminist ethnic minority woman entrepreneur. Please see Figure 1 for a summary of the data

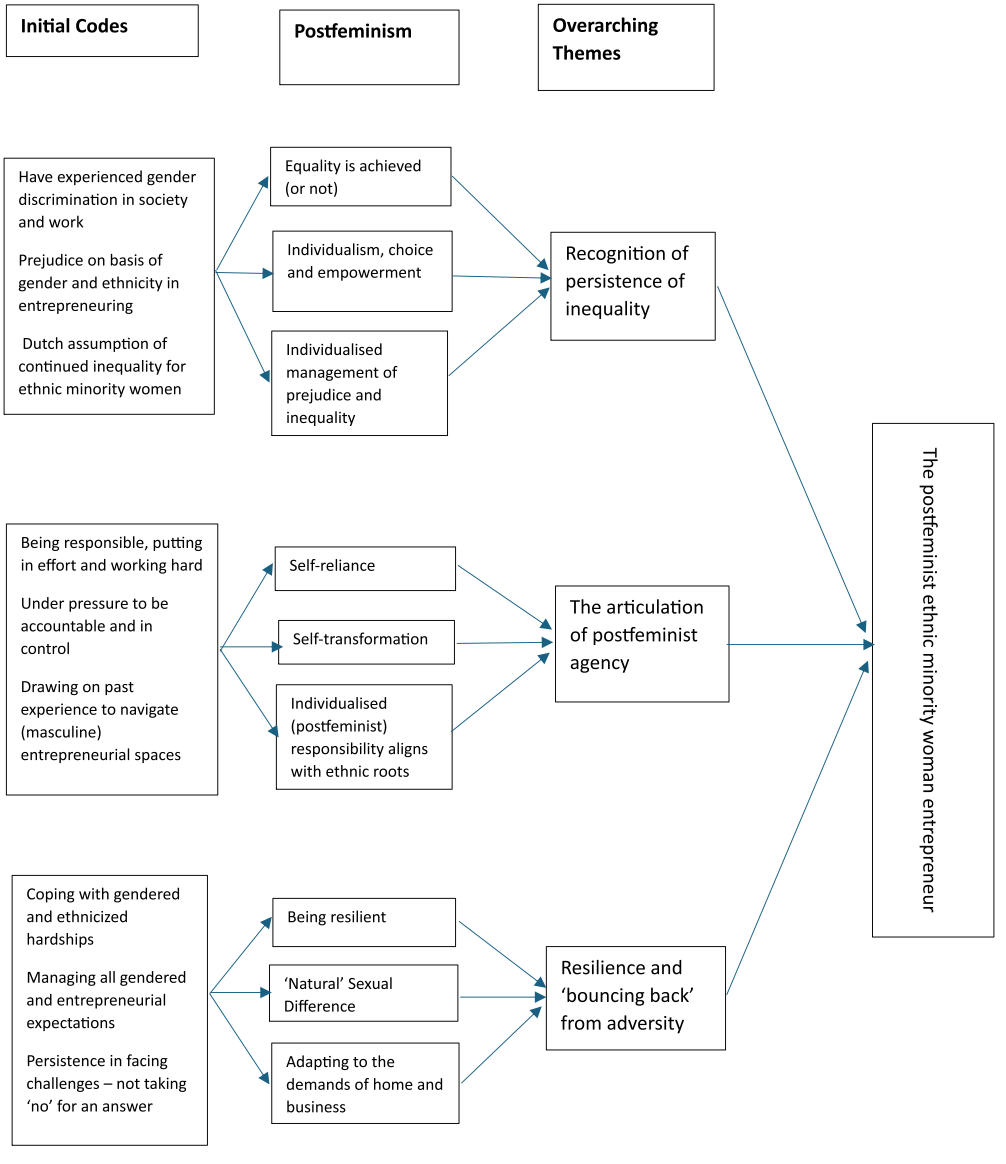


Figure 1. Summary of data analysis.

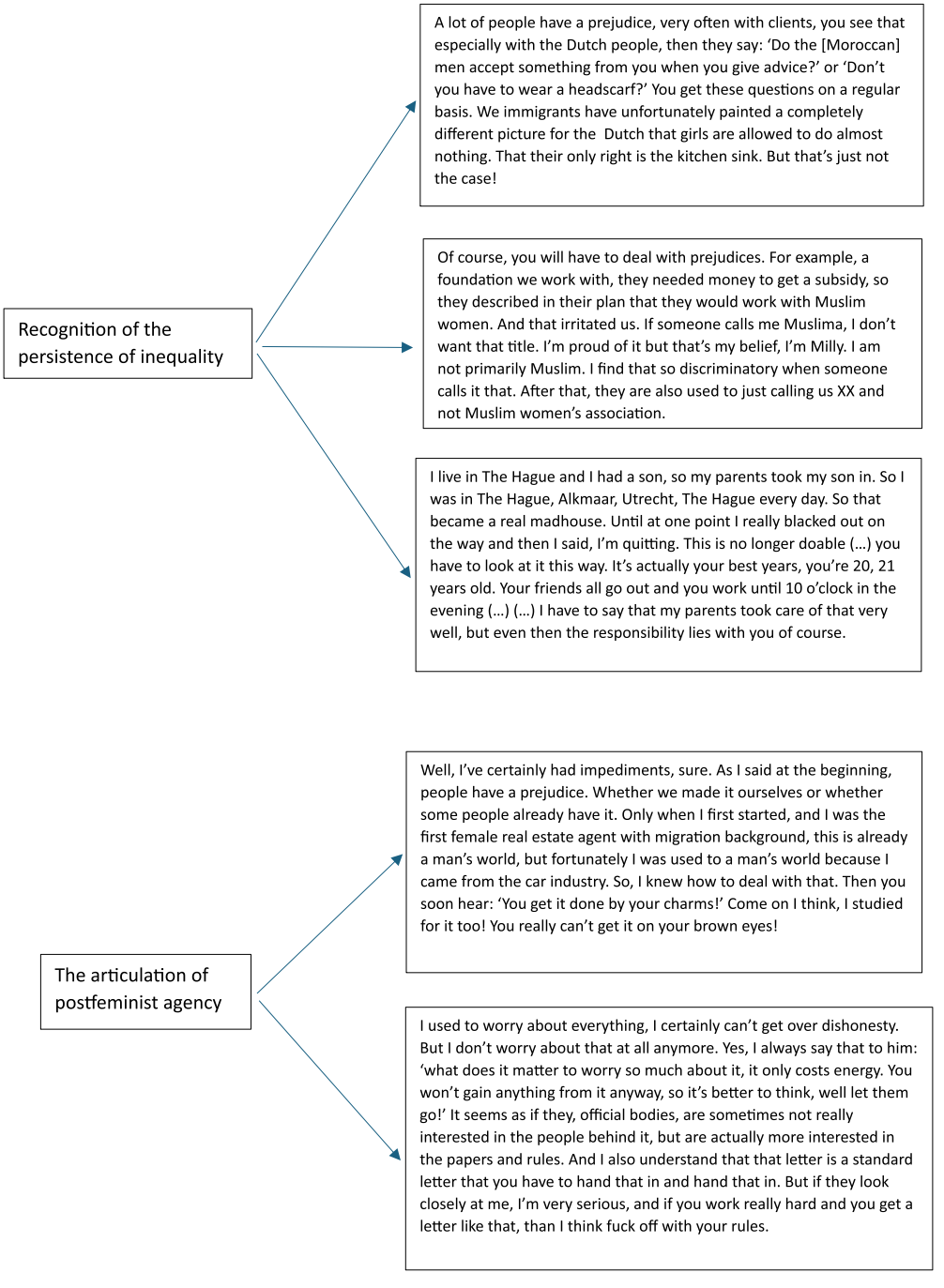


Figure 2. Themes and examples of interview quotes.

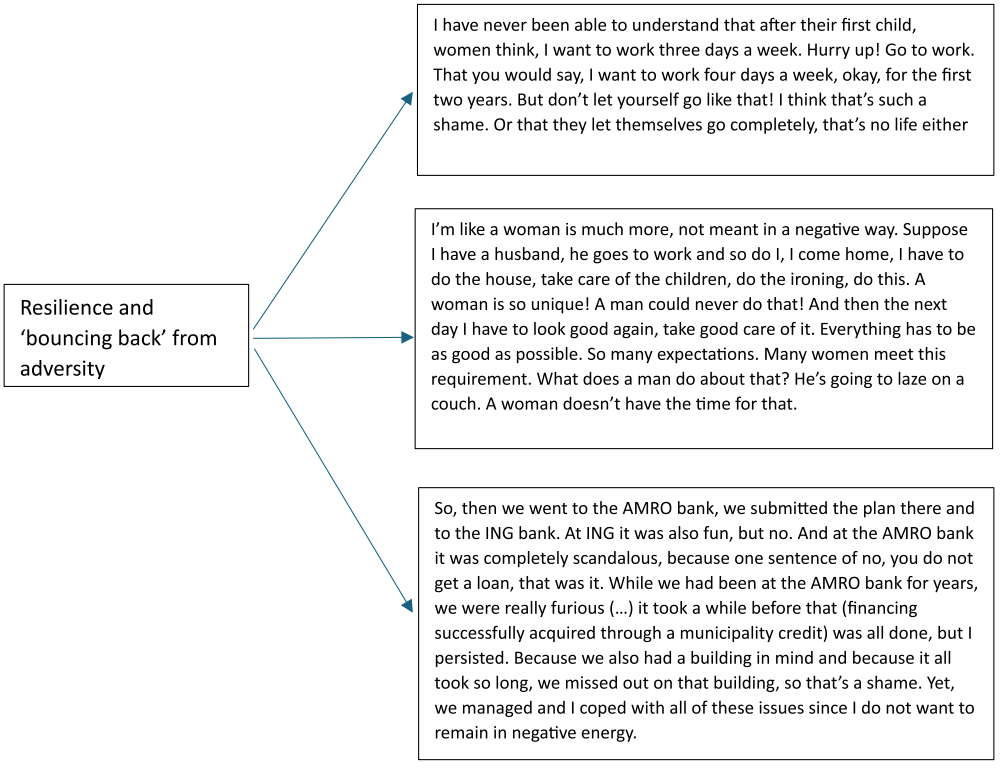


Figure 2. (Continued).

analysis and Figure 2 for some illustrative interview quotations of each of the themes which are additional to those presented in the analysis below. These two figures illustrate how sub-themes (thematic or analytic codes), from which the main postfeminist themes (or pattern codes) emerged, are grounded in interview excerpts from the wider sample, demonstrating the presence of these themes across all participants (Peters and Wester 2007; Pratt 2009).

To illustrate how these women entrepreneurs made sense of postfeminist discourses and use them while constructing their entrepreneurial identities in the Netherlands, we draw on what Pratt (2009) refers to as the most compelling cases arising from the collective analysis. This means that based on the analysis of the 15 interviews, in the results section we focus on the four most comprehensive and articulate stories in an in-depth manner. The selected stories illuminate key tensions, contradictions, and experiences that are analytically rich, while also reflecting broader patterns identified across the full set of 15 interviews. Furthermore, they best illuminate our respondents' engagement with postfeminist discourses (Rockmann and Vough 2023).

The four women we focus on in this article – Noelle, Nadia, Milly, and Samira (pseudonyms) – occupy complex and multifaceted positions as ethnic minority women with Moroccan roots in the Netherlands. While Nadia, Milly, and Samira entered Dutch society as children or young adults, Noelle was born in the Netherlands shortly after her mother's arrival, and her early life was deeply shaped by her mother's unsettled status and outsider position as a migrant. Despite differences in their arrival stories, all four women grew up and lived within ethnic minority, Moroccan communities – spaces shaped by shared histories of displacement and cultural continuity. Simultaneously, they have been deeply entrenched in Dutch majority society through their (continuing) education, work, and everyday lives. Their experiences reflect a dual embeddedness: they are rooted in ethnic minority contexts while simultaneously navigating, responding to, and engaging with dominant Dutch norms and

Table 1. Respondent details.

Name of entrepreneur	Type of company	Years in business	Age	Born in	Marital Status	Children
Noelle	Ethno-marketing company	6	36	NL (her mother was pregnant when she migrated and Noelle was born shortly after her mother's arrival in the Netherlands)	Married	2
Milly	Ethnic minority sports centre	9	31	Morocco – came to the Netherlands at age 16	Married	0
Nadia	Ethnic retail company	4	38	Morocco – came to the Netherlands at age 1	Married	1
Samira	Agency supporting ethnic minorities with outpatient care	8	55	Morocco – came to the Netherlands at age 21	Married	2

institutions. Each has established a business that speaks directly to the needs and aspirations of ethnic minority communities, while also operating within the broader structures and expectations of the Dutch entrepreneurial landscape. They are all married, but Milly has no children. Prior to setting up their businesses all four women worked in employment. Noelle worked for a global logistics US company, Milly was a policy worker and sports consultant, Samira worked for a foundation furthering care amongst migrants, and Nadia had a range of lower paid jobs including as a dancer and shop assistant. Table 1 below provides a general overview of these four interviewees with some of their characteristics.

5. Findings

In alignment with the claims of many 'post' ideologies that inequalities connected to various forms of difference such as race, ethnicity or class have been eliminated, postfeminism is also characterized by the celebration of the achievement of gender equality and the elimination of discriminatory gender practices between men and women. The consequence of such claims is a refusal to explicitly recognize the persistence of discrimination, rendering the experience of unequal outcomes difficult if not impossible to articulate (Gill 2014). This consequence is enforced by postfeminist claims emphasizing individual responsibility to battle inequality. In our interviews, we observe different experiences regarding the persistence of inequality and the ways respondents either adhere to or battle such inequalities.

For instance, Samira, who owns a company supporting people with a minority and refugee background through outpatient care, moved to the Netherlands 23 years ago to join her husband. In setting up and running her business, she has a strong sense that she is taken seriously as she has established a positive reputation and is well-known due to her work with the social council where she lives. Yet, when we read her account through the critical concept of postfeminism, we observe how she contextualizes her experience of persistent unequal treatment to her home situation and also the Duch context as follows:

> Without my husband's support, I would not have achieved what I want to achieve. He is now retired. He's at home. I think it's an achievement; many migrant families I work with the man stays behind, and that's a big problem (…) I recognize that you have to overcome obstacles individually in business, but this is the choice I made, as a freelancer … But as a woman it is still a long way compared to man, you notice that it is still not equal … I am very active in the municipality of XX, and a member of the social council. My network was my advantage. The government now finally has confidence in me, but this required a lot of investment, this didn't happen by itself, to get that equal position as a female migrant is hard work. Because we are immigrants, we are easier prey for things happening, they are afraid we might commit fraud, which is why I make sure I have the reports in order, certifying takes a lot of energy.

Samira seems to experience her situation as different from other Moroccan women, having a rather emancipated husband who supports her entrepreneurship. However, despite her supportive personal context, she utters that in constituting her business, as a woman migrant she continuously has had to work very hard to achieve an equal position in the Dutch cultural context and her Moroccan migrant community. She also highlights how as a woman with migrant roots she frequently experiences disadvantages, combatting structural challenges such as the prejudice concerning committing fraud as immigrants. However, we view a postfeminist individualist element in her coping mechanisms to deal with these, such as her claim that overcoming disadvantage is her own responsibility, saying ''*you have to overcome obstacles individually, but this is the choice I made*''.

Additionally, though Samira expressed some subtle critique of the Dutch context in the interview, she did not articulate it openly or fiercely; rather, she navigates it on an individual level, framing her agency in terms of personal perseverance and self-transcendence to achieve success. From the interview, there is a sense that Samira normalized and accepted the fact that the Dutch government sees Moroccan women business owners like her as different and less trustworthy, stating *'the government now finally has confidence in me'*. The positive influences of postfeminism we observe in her case is that apparently valuing and underlining her own responsibility, by putting forward patience, networking, energy and effort, she seemingly was able to overcome these structural disadvantages. Yet, it also demonstrates the significant individual effort she has to make, without receiving any official support. Dealing with such tensions individually and accepting she has to work twice as hard to get legitimized, is illustrative of the downside of this 'postfeminist' way of dealing with these hardships. Hence, reflecting on her narrative, we suggest that in Samira's case the mainstream postfeminist claim that inequality is a thing of the past certainly does not hold for her, as she is still defined in ethnic, gendered terms which act as an impediment in the Dutch context. While the retired status of Samira's husband and his openness to her education and desire to work is helpful for her and she celebrates this situation, she highlights how in most migrant families, an emphasis on 'natural' sexual difference is still the reality, though less apparent in her case.

Nadia, who runs an ethnic-retail company selling Moroccan/Mediterranean furniture and handmade crafts, reflects on her education in the Netherlands and her work experiences, which led her to start her own business. She attended a liberal school, chosen mainly because it was close to home, where independent learning was emphasized and where she first encountered ideas of autonomy and self-expression that would later shape her entrepreneurial and gender identity. Her parents had little knowledge of the Dutch schooling system; her father worked as a welder at a large Dutch shipyard and her mother had always been a housewife. She says

> At my former school in the place we lived before, we were the only Moroccans and I didn't feel acceptance. In the new school, you had four years' time to do the things. If you were in the third grade you could still finish work from the first. Well, that of course is always fun because you could be totally yourself, and you are obviously not used to that freedom at home. I went through the years, four years long but then without a diploma. My brother obviously didn't have to make tea or do the dishes, but well, that was evident. At one point I did say why doesn't he have to do something? Because I was a girl, I had less freedom to go out. My father was of course always working, but my mom would always say, you cannot do this, because you are a woman Muslim, but as a child I reacted like, well, if just like this? I was a bit rebellious, and I enjoyed singing in a band, dancing in a club unrecognizable which I did in secret. During my career I was first a shop assistant but I could shift to shop manager position. I could do well with responsibility and hire people, but I didn't get this chance. The idea to start a business was there for quite a while.

Within the liberal Dutch school she attended, Nadia said there was more freedom and space to 'let yourself go, totally be yourself' than at home and within her Muslim, migrant community. This contrast made her acutely aware of gendered expectations – particularly the stricter norms placed on girls – and prompted her to question why her brother was exempt from domestic duties and enjoyed greater mobility. While she also experienced limited educational guidance due to her

parents' unfamiliarity with the Dutch system, it was the gendered division of freedom and responsibility that most shaped her sense of inequality.

While Nadia expressed subtle critique of both her family's and society's gender norms, she primarily navigated these through an individualized, agentic stance – emphasizing self-determination and perseverance as routes to empowerment. Having left school without a diploma (though later completing a short retail program), she entered a series of low-paying jobs where she felt her potential was not recognized, explaining: 'I didn't get this chance'. This sense of exclusion was linked less to her ethnic background than to her experiences as a woman whose ambitions were undervalued, both at home and in the workplace.

Nevertheless, she resisted these limitations through forms of self-expression – singing, dancing, and later entrepreneurship – that enabled her to claim independence and redefine femininity in her own terms. Her narrative reflects a postfeminist orientation towards self-responsibility and self-realization, yet her experiences simultaneously expose the persistence of gendered hierarchies and unequal opportunities. Hence, although agentic in coping with these inequalities, Nadia's story highlights how the intersection of gender and ethnicity continues to structure access to freedom and recognition, despite postfeminist claims that such barriers have been overcome.

Hence, we contend that our interviewees do identify gendered, ethnicised experiences of unfairness and a lack of parity, and do recognize the persistence of inequality. However, their response to this is informed by postfeminist norms of individualism, choice and transformation that call on women to adopt a freely chosen, self-reliant and self-optimizing orientation which informs their entrepreneurial identity. Yet, we reflect the latter does not come without tensions or difficulties, as an emphasis placed on individual navigation of structural constraints also seems to be felt as laborious, strenuous, solitary, and unfair.

The experience of inequality is accompanied by a belief in the power of individual achievement to overcome obstacles. This belief is translated into the take-up of an agentic entrepreneurial identity by choosing to set up a business enacted in a postfeminist mode of individualist and self-transformative behaviours. We found that many challenges these women entrepreneurs faced were addressed through work on the self and an agentic orientation to life. This openness to postfeminism seems to be reinforced by their position as ethnic minority women within traditionally gendered communities in the Netherlands, shaped by former Moroccan guest workers and their descendants. Within this context Nadia, Noelle, Samira and Milly did not always fully experience a sense of support from so-called allies, either within their own community or within the wider Dutch society. Instead, they were responsive to the postfeminist call to be self-reliant and agentic as a means to address their gender and ethnic minority disadvantage. Noelle, who owns an ethno-marketing company, strongly expresses a commitment to working hard and being ambitious as follows:

> Well, I'm more of a doer. So … I went to work early, and actually, I rolled into business. I worked for a book company for a long time. I am actually a hard worker. Everywhere I've been I made sure I work hard and you always stand out. (…) I was not an easy child for my parents, I just wanted a lot, very ambitious (…) When I was not an entrepreneur, I always had a heart for the business, but I always mastered the work I knew that trick and I always had so many ideas.

For Noelle, whatever challenges she faces both within her community or the wider Dutch business context, leaning on postfeminism, she addresses these by taking up an autonomous and agentic hard working entrepreneurial identity (claiming she is a 'doer'). Noelle's statement that she 'wanted a lot', is 'very ambitious' and was 'not an easy child for my parents' indicates to us that she draws on a postfeminist subjecthood of self-direction, self-management and being market-focused, presenting herself in postfeminist terms as wanting to be free of societal constraints and pressures. While

recognizing the constraints she has faced and will continue to face, she engages in a turn to interiority, to herself, to address her situation as predominantly her own responsibility.

However, from our analysis, we suggest that our respondents entrepreneurial agency does not only derive from their receptiveness to postfeminism but is also activated by the challenges they experience due to their ethnic minority position. Hence, we argue that this openness is partly linked to the pressure to take control of their professional careers – a dynamic influenced by their ethnic backgrounds. Milly, who runs an ethnic-minority women-only sports centre, states the following:

> My granddad was an entrepreneur. In Morocco it's a different system, you become an entrepreneur, the government doesn't facilitate a lot, so as a citizen you have to make your own living. My granddad had his own restaurant, own café, he also had construction companies, so did my uncles. At the time of starting my company, I did not have any trouble with mixed sporting, I was just doing sport . . . . I had observed that there is a lot of demand for sporting without men. I thought, that's a market niche!

In her account, we notice that Milly draws on her Moroccan roots to demonstrate an inclination towards entrepreneurship, as a lack of governmental support in Morocco apparently forces people to be self-reliant and responsible by engaging in activities such as starting their own company. We think this makes her even more open to a postfeminist call to develop an autonomous, agentic, market-focused, driven, choosing entrepreneurial identity. So we consider her take-up of the position of a self-reliant entrepreneurial woman as not just based on the interpellation of postfeminist discourse but also connected to her ethnic minority origins and her family's experience of self-employment and self-reliance through entrepreneurship in Morocco. Experience of a lack of governmental support in the Moroccan context alongside feeling different from other business owners in the Dutch context are addressed through an investment in a postfeminist entrepreneurial identity, as Milly states here:

> It (the business) has been built up slowly, and I think that is also the strength of the organisation, our success factor. I don't look at the obstacles, but rather at what I have and what I do with it. And in my upbringing, there were hardly any differences between men and women. I brought that thought from Morocco, like, there is no subsidy, there is nothing. So, look at what you've got, make something with what you've got.

Instead of focusing on gendered structural obstacles, and in line with postfeminism, Milly and the other interviewed women approach entrepreneurial possibilities in an agentic manner. They do not accept difficult economic circumstances or inequality which derives from their contextual social positioning. Instead, as an agentic, business-focused individual, Milly is seemingly able to choose an entrepreneurial identity and to overcome any constraints or economic disadvantage she encounters through individual effort. Also deliberately referring to her upbringing in which in her opinion she hardly experienced any difference between men and women (contrary to for instance Nadia), she draws on postfeminist thought emphasizing her self-reliance and independence to address challenges she faces. However, if women – particularly those from ethnic minority backgrounds – rely too heavily on postfeminist behaviours while accepting minimal institutional support, this may place undue pressure on individual women to succeed, thereby obscuring the structural barriers they continue to face.

A key element of the take-up of a postfeminist entrepreneurial identity is that women assume individual responsibility for success or failure as an entrepreneur. Postfeminism has adopted a psychological register emphasizing the need for individuals to cultivate the right kinds of dispositions to take on this responsibility (Gill 2017). As the notion of individual responsibility has taken hold, resilience has been identified as a key character trait whereby the individual can 'recover

rapidly from difficult situations' and have 'the capacity to endure ongoing hardship' (Zembylas 2021, 1966). Additionally, not only is resilience about the ability to 'carry on' but also entails a capacity to learn from challenges and mistakes so that future catastrophes can be avoided or managed. This psychologization of resilience – to cultivate attitudes and abilities to overcome vulnerabilities and 'be successful' (Zembylas 2021) – was articulated by our respondents. As Noelle elaborates

> Entrepreneuring is not an easy business. I had an identity crisis I think when I was in my youth. Why can those Dutch people do whatever they want to and I can't? I think I really felt troubled that I wanted to achieve things all the time. Then I had a couple of meetings with a psychologist, she showed me a couple of things. This is what you want. I want to be an entrepreneur, for me it was always like, I need to do this.

Noelle's desire to take-up an entrepreneurial identity and how this is in tension with her position as a Moroccan woman emerges when she says, 'why can those Dutch people do whatever they want and I can't?' In speaking of her 'identity crisis' connected to her desire to be an entrepreneur, we notice Noelle's recognition of the sheer physical and psychological strength required to 'push through the barriers' associated with being a woman of Moroccan descent, when seeking to take up an entrepreneurial identity. The 'solution' to her situation seemingly emerges from sessions with a psychologist who 'showed her a couple of things'. Through her elaboration of these hardships, we can see that the tension she is experiencing is addressed through postfeminist discourses of individualism, self-optimization, working hard on herself, and agency. Going to a psychologist helped her to realize she wanted to be an entrepreneur. In line with postfeminist logic, her identity construction is characterized by an individualized sense of empowerment so that she can 'push through' any challenges she may face.

The sense of needing to work hard on herself is central to Noelle's narrative and is articulated strongly when she considers how she addresses the tension between caring for her children and running a business. Postfeminist discourses of individualism and engagement in active childcare as a matter of choice and not obligation, constitute an identity which invites women to develop a working life similar to their male colleagues while at the same time retaining responsibility for the domestic realm. This is in line with the postfeminist notion of women running a successful business simultaneously while maintaining a happy family life (Lewis, Rumens, and Simpson 2022; Rugina and Ahl 2024). This 'dual activity' is present across our interviews, as Noelle elaborates

> I was always like I'm not going to end up in a (marital) relationship where I am limited. I would never have accepted that. So, I've always worked really hard for that. I also see a lot of women who don't because they have children. As an entrepreneur you just have to be flexible. You don't have to give up your children, but you do need to have a stable home base. Otherwise, it won't work. I have also sometimes had difficulty with being a mother and being away from home so often. Am I actually doing it right? But Dutch entrepreneurs also have that. I have now also put an end to that, I just really want this. I have made that clear to my children, have shown what mum does. And when I'm free, no housekeeping, but always fun things with them.

Noelle's narrative conveys a sense of overcoming adversity through sheer determination; she acknowledges the barriers she encountered but responded with resilience -a postfeminist psychological orientation- bouncing back to regain control of her situation and thereby facilitating her ambition of being an entrepreneur. While she acknowledges that many women experienced difficulties doing business because of home responsibilities, she does not address her home situation by seeking a balance between business and home, but rather she chooses a partner who will not limit her, makes her children aware of her commitment to her business and when away from work, seeks to have fun with them. This combination of pushing-through ('I've always worked really hard for that'), unwavering commitment to her business, and emphasis on enjoying time with her children is sustained through the mobilization of resilience – expressed as a set of dispositions (e.g. 'you just have to be flexible'), personal qualities, and emotions that enable her to pursue her entrepreneurial ambitions.

However, in articulating her experiences, Samira presents her resilience in a different way:

> Women want children, rights, emancipation . . . but you're still a woman . . . When you come home as a woman, you have that responsibility . . . we were born that way . . ..When men come at home they sit on the couch. How

> can you change that . . . We, women, are caring, helpful . . . It's tough though . . .. You have to change it yourself, or accept it . . . He's at home, but he doesn't cook, when I come home I go to the kitchen, then after dinner, sometimes work behind a laptop until 1.00 am. Although he does some vacuuming during the day, washes clothes (. . . .) I once had coaching, but now I don't feel the need [for coaching] . . ..There are moments that were tough, but I am a powerful woman and despite all those setbacks, I can fall and save, deal with it, start again, I am a go-getter.

Samira clearly emphasizes how -in line with postfeminism- 'natural' sexual difference is still at stake in her relationship, and how this places her as an ethnic minority woman in oppositional roles. She automatically seems to accept the idea that as a woman you need to fulfil all roles ('we were born that way'), a very postfeminist thought, which positions her as a hard working woman entrepreneur in difficult, tiring situations. She literally says 'you have to change it yourself, or accept it', and in her case she apparently has to accept that by choosing to be a Moroccan woman entrepreneur, after work, she has to do the main household chores. The consequence of this is working on her laptop till very late.

This example shows the resilience and individual coping mechanisms of Samira (and we observed this in other interviews too), but also the pride she feels by such self-management as she repetitively emphasizes it was 'tough', she had setbacks but yet she is a very 'powerful woman', a 'go-getter' and will ultimately deal with it and survive. She articulates her resilience clearly and literally, stating: 'I can fall and recover, deal with it, and start again'. Reflecting on this however, we note the ambiguity of this coping mechanism: while it involves accepting perceived 'natural' sexual difference, it fails to bring about structural change in these women's entrepreneurial lives. This not only increases the risk of burnout but also reinforces traditional gender roles and sustains existing inequalities.

From the above we thus see traces of postfeminist resilience emerging from Noelle's and Samira's narratives. They individually take responsibility for adapting to their situation and devise solutions or adopt new courses of action, enabling them to 'bounce back' when things go awry. However, in reflecting on resilience, we also observed subtle indications of collective solidarity – suggesting a shift beyond individual responsibility towards a sense of shared resilience. For instance, Milly states:

> Many women want to start a barber shop, others a massage parlour, so in that sense we may be able to apply for microfinance to help those women in their careers. We can refer women who want to become entrepreneurs to the Chamber of Commerce. Now we mainly focus on the development of women and I think entrepreneurship is part of that.

Here, she expresses a desire to support other Moroccan women in their career and entrepreneurial journeys. This suggests that resilience might not solely occur as an individual strategy in line with postfeminist discourse but may also function as a collective resource aimed at advancing the broader community of ethnic minority women entrepreneurs. As such, resilience can be understood as a collective phenomenon, emerging through shared social connections and mutual support (McDermott 2022). In highlighting how women support each other, Milly's account hints at the possibility of resilience not only being a trait that individuals 'have' or develop, it can also be a psychological orientation that is shared between women.

These sentiments were echoed throughout our interviews, signalling that engagement with postfeminist norms cannot be separated from their specific ethnic context as Moroccan women living in the Netherlands. While our respondents clearly draw on discourses of individualism, choice, self-transformation, and agency to assert their entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial identities, they also extend beyond the postfeminist privileging of individualist behaviours by engaging in collective social action – actively supporting other Moroccan women entrepreneurs (Zembylas 2021).

6. Discussion

In this paper, we mobilized postfeminism as a critical analytic device to understand how Moroccan ethnic minority women entrepreneurs navigate and negotiate their entrepreneurial identities within

and across different cultural contexts in the Netherlands. Using postfeminism as a critical concept has allowed us to explore how elements of postfeminist discourses both enable and constrain the entrepreneurial identity constructions of ethnic minority women.

The novelty of our study is that based on our findings, we demonstrate how postfeminist norms underpin the entrepreneurial identities of Moroccan ethnic minority women in the Netherlands. Analysing how such postfeminist discourses play out for these women, we have responded to Dosekun's (2021) call to challenge the claimed ethnic exclusivity of postfeminism by making visible how Moroccan women entrepreneurs in the Netherlands engage with this cultural phenomenon. We show that postfeminism is not *'for'* Western white middle-class women alone, but also interpellates women from a range of social positions and geographical locations. The interviews presented in this paper have demonstrated our respondents' positive response to postfeminist discourses of individualism, self-optimization and reinvention, as well as the setbacks of such engagement. Highlighting the sometimes contradictory experiences and responses reveals that women's engagement with postfeminist ideals varies according to the situation they are in, where diverse gendered accounts and expectations continue to shape their lives.

As such, our paper yields a number of contributions to the literature on women's entrepreneurship and postfeminism. First, through theme one which concerns recognition of the persistence of inequality in identity construction we demonstrate how women entrepreneurs of Moroccan descent, influenced by experiences of structural and societal inequality, seem to engage with postfeminist discourse as a positive resource to claim their identities as women ethnic minority entrepreneurs. However, their engagement with postfeminism while navigating and negotiating their entrepreneurial identities reveals a complex interplay of both empowering and constraining elements. This is because, on the one hand, they emphasize individual responsibility in responding to and coping with these inequalities, while on the other hand, they also highlight the injustice of the persistently unequal system and the lack of systemic and, in some cases, familial support in their entrepreneurial careers.

It is through the telling of 'hard stories' (Brewis 2014) – of insufficient support, persistent undervaluation, and conflicting identity expectations – that the postfeminist emphasis on individualism, choice, and empowerment becomes apparent, as these women frame such values as pathways to improving their lives and, in turn, construct their identities accordingly. While postfeminism suggests that the 'end' of gender discrimination places the potential for success solely in the hands of the individual, our analysis reveals that the gendered and ethnicised dimensions of inequality within their specific cultural context makes these women particularly susceptible to engaging with postfeminist discourses.

Our second contribution (theme two) pertains to the articulation of postfeminist agency. Within their specific contexts, the women we interviewed had to claim their entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial identities without support from allies – either within their own communities or the broader Dutch society. To accomplish this, they strongly leaned into postfeminist values such as self-reliance, perseverance, and proactivity in order to confront and navigate the intersecting challenges of their ethnic minority and gendered positions. We argue that connected to their engagement with postfeminism, their identities as women within their ethnic minority communities are reinforced, where more pronounced and prescriptive gender norms in these cultural contexts shape not only their opportunities but also the strategies they adopt to assert agency (Bruni, Gherardi, and Poggio 2004; Essers and Benschop 2007). Empirical studies on ethnic minority women entrepreneurs indicate that the combination of gendered and ethnicised expectations and limited structural support often encourages the mobilization of individualistic and self-reliant forms of agency, consistent with postfeminist discourses (Essers et al. 2021; Lewis 2013). Accordingly, we argue that postfeminism is a powerful cultural phenomenon which is drawn on by ethnic minority women as a means to challenge their underprivileged position. Our study demonstrates that postfeminist discourses provide ethnic minority women entrepreneurs with symbolic and practical resources for reshaping their minority status – both within their own communities and in the broader Dutch

context – by framing success, resilience, and ambition as individual achievements. Nevertheless, postfeminism can also function as a depoliticizing force that reduces the need for structural change, shifting responsibility for inequality to the individual rather than addressing broader socio-political or institutional barriers. As such, framing women's entrepreneurial experiences in purely individualistic terms – while overlooking the structural dimensions of gendered inequality – risks fostering a form of entrepreneurship that is precarious and insufficiently valued or rewarded.

This brings us to our third theme of resilience and 'bouncing back' from adversity From a postfeminist perspective, tackling obstructions when taking up an entrepreneurial identity is often addressed through a psychologization, which entails placing emphasis on confidence, positivity and resilience (Chetwynd 2020; Zembylas 2021). However, this implies, as Zembylas (2021, 3) argues, that 'the political is pathologized and rather than investing hope in political struggles to make life better, resilient subjects take it as their own individual responsibility to face up to the dangers and adapt to the new realities'. In the data presented in this paper, we can see clearly that our respondents draw on notions of resilience to explain how they navigate the demands of running a business while also adhering to traditional gender norms around motherhood and domestic responsibilities. Nevertheless, despite the emphasis placed on their own personal determination, the data also revealed a form of resilience characterized by social connection. By examining the experiences of Moroccan women entrepreneurs and the ways in which they negotiate and navigate their entrepreneurial identities within the Netherlands, we can see possibilities for a form of resilience that may not be solely an individual trait, but could also be shaped and supported through relational and community contexts. We suggest that this form of social resilience does not derive from engagement with postfeminism alone but is also influenced by their migrant origins and their experiences as ethnic minority women within the Dutch context. This connection between their ethnic minority positioning and their receptiveness to postfeminist ideals resonates with what McDermott (2022) describes as relational resilience. Accordingly, relational resilience can be understood 'as a social and political process rather than something that people "have" or develop as individuals' (Zembylas 2021, 1971). In making this visible, our analysis reveals a willingness by some women to look beyond their individual needs to engage in relational forms of resilience. However, further empirical evidence is required to understand how the overlap between postfeminist norms and ethnic minority community norms can lead to more collective forms of relational resilience.

Our final contribution is to identify the emergence of the entrepreneurial identity of the Postfeminist Ethnic Minority Woman Entrepreneur. Critical use of postfeminism as an analytic device has made visible the performance of this entrepreneurial identity by our respondents through their engagement with discourses of individualism, self-reliance, self-transformation, 'natural' sexual difference and resilience. Such engagement has 'a socially constructed influence that critically shapes entrepreneurial identity' (Lewis 2014, 1852). It is important to note that we do not present this entrepreneurial identity as a 'type' which exists within the Dutch context ready to be 'chosen' by an ethnic minority woman entrepreneur. Rather, we suggest that this entrepreneurial identity is produced and performed by ethnic minority women as they draw on postfeminist discourses within the Netherlands. As such, this entrepreneurial identity is not a fixed set of bodily or psychological traits and characteristics but rather is better understood as engagement in a range of entrepreneurial performances that will vary by context (Lewis 2014). While the analysis presented here has revealed one form of the Postfeminist Ethnic Minority Woman Entrepreneur with resilience as a key dimension of it, we believe that it is likely that there are alternative modes of this entrepreneurial identity, but further research is required to reveal them.

7. Conclusion

Bringing postfeminism together with the ethnic minority experiences of women entrepreneurs of Moroccan descent in the Netherlands, our analysis has sought to understand how ethnic minority women entrepreneurs engage with postfeminist discourses when navigating

and negotiating their entrepreneurial identities. We would like to highlight that in comprehending the phenomenon of postfeminism, it is crucial to pay attention to women's social, ethnic backgrounds. Only through such an approach is it possible to explore the nuances of postfeminism, emphasizing the importance of examining how it is 'locally inflected' rather than universally applicable or interchangeable across social contexts (Dosekun 2021). By foregrounding the ethnic minority background of our respondents, we have responded to the call to critically contest the claimed ethnic and racial exclusivity of postfeminism (Butler 2013; Dosekun 2015).

While we acknowledge that our study is based on findings from a small sample of respondents, we believe that future research can build on our findings and Dosekun's (2021) call to challenge the notion that postfeminism is solely 'for' Western, white, middle-class women. We firstly recommend that future researchers employ postfeminism as a critical, analytic device to investigate how its elements may simultaneously enable and constrain the entrepreneurial identities of women across a range of social positions and geographical contexts, by promoting internal, individualized solutions to broader social and political issues (Zembylas 2021). It is therefore crucial to contextualize postfeminism in order to make visible the diverse ways in which women interact with it, and to avoid universalizing or homogenizing these processes. While all women entrepreneurs encounter forms of inequality, it is essential to recognize that they are not subordinated in the same ways (Heizmann and Liu 2022; Lewis 2014), nor do they have equal access to the resources necessary to cultivate resilience in addressing individual or structural challenges related to gender, race, age, religion, and social class.

This brings us to our second recommendation. We encourage further research on the Postfeminist Ethnic Minority Woman Entrepreneur – who not only engages with postfeminist discourses of individualism, self-reliance, self-optimization and resilience, but also actively draws upon her ethnic minority background as a resource for navigating and confronting the multiple barriers she encounters. More specifically, the issue of collective, relational resilience where withstanding or overcoming unequal or discriminatory circumstances is achieved through social connection (McDermott 2022), might be an interesting avenue for future research. Thus, future research employing postfeminism as a critical analytic device could explore how engagement with the discourse of resilience might move beyond an individualized focus – where resilience is framed as a personal trait or psychological attribute – towards more relational and contextually grounded understandings.

Such research could investigate the transformative potential of a form of resilience that is relational and collaborative-one that operates through social connections and aims to advance equality for women as a collective. Examining the experiences of diverse groups of ethnic minority women entrepreneurs may reveal important nuances in how collective forms of resilience are expressed and mobilized. Conceptualizing resilience as a collective force not only surfaces alternative modes of coping and resistance but also opens up possibilities for challenging structural barriers, thereby moving beyond the postfeminist emphasis on individualized responses to inequality.

In concluding this article, we argue that postfeminism operates dually for originally Moroccan women entrepreneurs in the Netherlands: on the one hand, it offers a discursive framework through which they can negotiate agency, visibility, and legitimacy – both within Dutch society and their own communities. On the other hand, it risks reinforcing postfeminist neoliberal logics that individualize responsibility and suppress structural critique. From a societal perspective, it is important to recognize that the pressure to embody entrepreneurial confidence and success may lead some ethnic minority women to internalize failure or to downplay the significance of gendered, racialized, and class-based inequalities within their entrepreneurial environments. In this context, postfeminist discourses can obscure the intersectional realities these women face, reducing complex struggles to matters of personal choice, resilience, or effort. Consequently, the adoption of postfeminist ideals

within entrepreneurial settings may result in ethnic minority women interpreting systemic challenges as personal shortcomings – ultimately diverting attention away from the need for broader structural change.

Note

1. the Netherlands ranks 5th in the EU on the Gender Equality Index, despite also some challenges such as unequal pay amongst men and women (https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2025/country/NL.)

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