



Sander Donkers, Harm Ede Botje, Vrij magazine, the Netherlands

‘Discrimination happens. Full stop.’

You are a Moroccan, a Turk or an Antillean and you want a job. You have excellent qualifications and your Dutch is good. A piece of cake, you’d think. But not so in the Netherlands. ‘Just having a foreign name is sometimes enough to be turned down.’ What is the situation with discrimination in the workplace? And how seriously does the government take the problem?

Imad Akalo is twenty-three and his dreams for the future are simple: he would like to be a bookkeeper, or a manager perhaps. In short, to work in an office; wear a tie, sit behind a computer, eat a cheese sandwich at lunchtime. ‘As long as it’s a steady job,’ he says. Then I can consider getting married, having children and maybe buy a house.’ That does not seem much to ask. Imad has a qualification in business administration, speaks Dutch well and has no criminal record. And yet in the meantime it has come to seem like an impossible dream: Imad has been unemployed for three years.

In the beginning, he sat for days at the Centre for Work and Income (CWI – a government organisation that helps the unemployed find jobs). There, he had a personal coach. He took various courses, including one on how to come across better in job applications. He wrote innumerable letters. ‘Definitely about five hundred – in one year, mind you. Mostly you don’t get any response. And if you do, they often just make up some kind of excuse.’ Since then, Imad has given up his daily trips to the job centre. ‘They’ve got a big, thick file on me lying there, full of good references,’ he says. ‘I do everything right. But it’s no use.’

He is sitting in a café in Haarlem with his friends Karim (23) and Abdelkader (26), both also unemployed. It is 8pm, the Ramadan fast has just been broken, and the atmosphere is festive, but not without a bitter undertone. To the three friends there can be no doubt that they have virtually no job prospects because of their Moroccan names. When asked for examples, the stories come thick and fast. Imad: ‘I was well qualified for



a job at a security company in Amsterdam. So I got a letter saying that I live too far away. While I knew that they were advertising all over the region. And besides, I had a car. I could have been there in twenty minutes.’ After that, he saw a white Dutch friend driving around Amsterdam in a security company van. ‘That guy has been caught a few times for driving under the influence. He could never get a declaration of good behaviour from the local authorities, so he isn’t actually allowed to work as a driver. He told me that he just emailed the people and was told that he could start the next day.’

Karim had been working for a roofing business for a year and a half in a temporary position when he applied for a permanent job there. ‘Colleagues said I should go for it. Everyone was happy with me. But I got no response. I still thought, maybe the job has been taken, maybe they don’t need someone anymore. Until I heard shortly afterwards that two Dutch guys that had only been working there for three weeks did qualify for a fixed contract.’

Is this discrimination? It is often difficult to prove. A while ago, Abdelkader – Appie to his friends – phoned in connection with a vacancy at a petrol station in Haarlem. ‘I was enthusiastic; I told them that I had experience. The man promised to phone me back, whether I got the job or not.’ Appie speaks Dutch without an accent. When he heard nothing, he decided to phone again, this time as Robert de Vries, a typical Dutch name. ‘And yes, no problem, I could immediately make an appointment. The following day I phoned again as Abdel and heard, Sorry, the job’s been filled.’

A few days later, the trio repeated the phone experiment on the request of *Vrij Nederland*, a weekly news magazine. On three occasions both Appie and ‘Robert de Vries’ were spoken to friendly, but the fourth time brought results. On phoning an Amsterdam hardware store, the Moroccan was shaken off with, ‘That advertisement is old; you can throw it in the bin’, while Robert de Vries was told that the job had been taken, but that they could still use a driver.

It doesn’t surprise him anymore, says Appie. At the call centre where he worked for three years he was Robert de Vries. ‘Almost all the Moroccans and Turks there go by a



Dutch name. The company does encourage it, but you also soon realise that it works better. You're there to sell. And you try asking someone nowadays, "Hallo, this is Hassan from UPC Netherlands, may I have your bank account number?" You just won't get any further.'

Imad, Karim and Abdelkader are no exceptions. Many, many people of non-European origin are discriminated against. Just open the files of the Equal Treatment Commission (*Commissie Gelijke Behandeling*), and the examples fly off the pages. Each year the Anti-Discrimination Bureaus (ADB's) receive thousands of complaints, from disputes over headscarves and the refusal of trainee positions, to cases of verbal abuse and threats against Muslims. And no wonder. A study done by the University of Rotterdam shows that a quarter of entrepreneurs with middle-sized to small businesses do not hire non-Europeans – or at least only very reluctantly.

At 16 %, unemployment is three times as high amongst people of non-European origin as amongst the native Dutch. This figure is rising, especially amongst Moroccans. In this group unemployment has doubled in four years to reach 22 %. And the situation is the most hopeless for young Moroccans, of whom a quarter is unemployed. They are often already confronted with the problem during their training, as they often cannot get traineeships. A recent study commissioned by GroenLinks (the leftist 'green' party) and including more than three hundred companies showed that young Moroccans are, on average, 30 % less likely to get traineeships. In the building trade that figure is even as high as 63 %.

The fact that this is a potentially explosive situation appeared to have sunk in with Minister of Immigration and Integration, Rita Verdonk. 'Economic participation is and always will be the best integration mechanism,' she said at the beginning of this year in a speech at the New Year's Reception of multicultural research institute Forum. And therefore discrimination against people of non-European origin in the job market should be combated, or at least so she said.



After the party Verdonk sang quite a different tune to a reporter from the daily newspaper *Trouw*, that was more in keeping with her earlier comments on the 'low tolerance level' for Muslims. 'You shouldn't accuse people of discrimination for no good reason,' she said. 'You need to look at the reasons why someone has been turned down. Is it not because he or she can't speak Dutch properly?' Yes, she conceded, she also regularly heard of people being turned down because of their foreign names. But are these stories true? 'Nobody has yet been able to show me case where this has been proven.' In June of this year, Verdonk said something similar in *Vrij Nederland*. 'I made a call for examples a few months ago. And never got any reaction.'

These statements are, to put it mildly, remarkable. Verdonk must have piles of reports on her desk in which it is clear as day that Muslims are regularly discriminated against in the Netherlands. And in April of this year, the government report on ethnic minorities in the job market was added. The report states quite literally that, '(...) having a foreign name is in some cases enough to be turned down.' This document was signed, amongst others, by Verdonk.

The report provides a clear analysis of the situation. Yes, many non-Europeans have difficulties with the language and too little education. But on the other hand, many potential employers display 'risk-avoidance behaviour', preferring to employ people of European origin. The figures speak for themselves: 60 % of dark-skinned people with intermediate vocational training and 54 % with higher vocational training say that they have come up against discrimination when looking for a job. But teenagers and students seldom report cases of discrimination, because they assume that it is pointless. Those cases that have been reported are therefore just the tip of the iceberg.

These are shocking facts that you would think should be causing alarm bells to ring in government. In the report, emphasis is placed on the importance of giving (language) training to non-Europeans and the preventing them from dropping out of school. But employers are handled with kid gloves. Stiffer punishment for discrimination or more aggressive prosecution of employers guilty of disadvantaging dark-skinned employees are not a priority. The National Anti-Racism Bureau (*Landelijke Bureau Racisme – LBR*)



reacted with disappointment. According to this organisation, too much emphasis is placed on what employees lack; the measures proposed in the report are 'not sufficient for actively and effectively addressing discrimination on the side of the employers'. The LBR speaks of there being 'too little obligation' on the part of the employers.

Maya de Jonge: 'I was responsible for recruitment at a large insurance company in the south of the country where the number of non-Europeans employed was slightly higher than the national average. I received instructions from above that there should be no more girls wearing headscarves. Included was the message: if you ever address me on this subject then I never said any of this. I then said that if they wanted to do that kind of screening they should bypass me. Because if I think someone is right for the job, I take them on, regardless of whether they are of non-European origin or not. After 9/11, I heard from another personnel department that they would like to see every candidate with a non-Dutch name before they are employed. I asked a colleague what he would have done with a name like Evyen? That's my son's name; he is half Antillean. She replied: Your son would never be allowed to work here. That hurt me a lot.

'Around that time, a Muslim girl heard that she could come and work at the company permanently. She was ecstatic. A few days later, the offer was suddenly withdrawn. Because she was Muslim, but of course nobody could say it out loud. She knew exactly what was going on, and started asking questions. After that I got into trouble because I had supposedly leaked out the fact that we weren't hiring any more Muslims. That wasn't true. I only made it clear within the company that I didn't agree with the policy. But I also badly needed my own job. I took sick leave and went to look for other work. As soon as I found a new job I resigned and went to the Anti-Discrimination Bureau. I won the case with the Equal Treatment Commission.

Criminologist Frank Bovenkerk has been doing research into discrimination in the job market since the seventies. In 1978 he became famous with his controversial book *Omdat zij anders zijn* (Because they are different). In it, the 'Bovenkerk method' was applied for the first time: Dutch people and non-Europeans with equal qualifications responded to the same advertisements. The results of the research were noted down in



dialogue form and the result did some serious damage to the self-esteem of the 'tolerant' Dutch. Radio and television personalities Kees van Kooten and Wim de Bie acted out some of the more shocking dialogues on radio. Thousands of copies of the book were sold. Bovenkerk repeated the experiment in the eighties and nineties – with more or less the same result. Bovenkerk's method was imitated in many other European countries.

In the light of Verdonk's comments in *Trouw*, the criminologist was asked to visit The Hague last spring to share his insights with the minister. 'I explained that I had three times done a controlled experiment which indicated that racism exists,' says Bovenkerk from his office in Amsterdam. 'Verdonk promised me that she would study the reports. But after the conversation she said that she will not be put out by "old research". She continued to insist that there was no racism, and that she would only take action when she gets concrete evidence to the contrary.' He sighs. 'I've become a little soft. I'm not going to do this kind of study on my own initiative again. But why doesn't Verdonk ask for it?'

Actually Bovenkerk does know the answer. 'The subject is no longer fashionable. The new saying goes that the minorities should stop whining. They use that Paul Scheffer-type language: the victim mentality should come to an end now. That may be so, but the problem of discrimination is still there. It has been there for a very long time, and it seems to me that the situation hasn't improved for Muslims since 9/11 and the Theo van Gogh murder.'

One of the people who participated in Bovenkerk's study in the eighties was the Dutch-Moluccan Rocky Tuhuteru, who was later to become a famous TV and radio presenter. Today he heads the company Tuhuteru & Associates, that advises companies like Shell, TPG Post and DaimlerChrysler on 'multicultural HR policy'. Tuhuteru is concerned about the increasingly large group of unemployed non-Europeans. 'The situation is serious. Young people with basic vocational training approached me with the question as to how they should apply for jobs. They kept running into a wall because they had a Moroccan or Turkish surname. Discrimination happens. Full stop. The danger is that young men who don't find work will withdraw into their neighbourhoods. That also happened in the



seventies after the Moluccan hijackings. None of my friends and acquaintances could find work. They got involved in crime, got into fights. I'm seeing the same thing happening again now – not to mention the dangers of Islamic fundamentalism.'

Ideally Tuhuteru would like to enforce an American-style quota system in companies. If 10 % of the population in a town or province consists of non-Europeans, then 10 % of jobs in industry and in government should be held by this group. 'Over time, the problem amongst the Moluccan youth was solved by the government launching a thousand-job plan. Those guys were placed somewhere. They got a crash course and got down to work. That worked, and we need similar measures now. Because I'm seeing a lot of guys cracking up.'

Frank (36): 'I work at a reintegration bureau in [the province of] North Holland. We try to help difficult cases amongst the unemployed to get back to work. Amongst them are many non-Europeans. My colleagues and I regularly speak to employers on the telephone who refuse to consider Turkish or Moroccan applicants. If I say something about it, the HR people just say: I can't do anything about it; I have orders from my boss. And if I threaten to lodge a complaint, they say: Then we will deny that we ever had this conversation. It's especially production companies and the building industry. At the end of the day I also want to stay friends. You should still be able to place other people at these companies. But it's not nice.'

The drastic measures advocated by Rocky Tuhuteru are not in line with the thinking of Prime Minister Balkenende's cabinet. In fact the only two instruments by which employers could in any way have been held accountable on their HR policies have quietly disappeared during the past few years.

In 2003, the fifty posts in the so-called 'Bedrijfs Adviseurs Minderheden' (advisors to business on the question of minorities) - or 'Bammers' for short – were dissolved. They were supposed to see to it that businesses employ more non-Europeans. 'We would have been able to do good work nowadays,' says Stanley Ramkhlawan, the former national co-ordinator for the Bammers. 'Because statistics show that it's going absolutely



c***. I don't deny that the non-Europeans are sometimes responsible for their disadvantaged position. There is a language problem, there is a lot of criminality. But I feel that too little attention is being paid to the other side. I have always been amazed at how politicians can know exactly how many Moroccans are in jail, but can have no idea how many successful non-European men and women there are and which positions they have.'

Ramkhlawan has a significant ally in MP Frans Weekers from the VVD (People's Party for Freedom and Democracy - conservatives). In his opinion, the Bammers produced 'tailor-made work' by means of which 'part of the backlog' could be done away with. 'Now a lot of knowledge about mediation of non-Europeans has been lost,' the MP said in parliament.

Along with the Bammers, the 1998 law on the Stimulation of Labour Participation (called 'Samen') was done away with. This law forced companies to report how many of their employees were from ethnic minorities. The employers screamed blue murder. They felt that the government interference went too far, mentioned the 'excessive paperwork' and largely ignored these rules. In 2004 the law was scrapped. A crying shame, according to Professor Han Entzinger, professor in migration and the brain behind the law. 'A little pressure can't do any harm, in my opinion,' he says. 'It was a good tool: policy-makers could see how the labour market was developing. To measure is to know. Now we are groping around in the dark - and very little effective policy has come in its place.'

Previous minister of Home Affairs, Hans Dijkstal was one of those who proposed the Samen law. He too expresses regret at its disappearance. 'People are using very strong terms in Dutch politics at the moment. In order to combat criminality amongst the "little Moroccans", the government says that they will address the issues tho-rough-ly. Integration too will be addressed tho-rough-ly. But we forget that work is one of the most important means of integration. Of course you have to put more pressure on immigrants to force them to learn Dutch and to get a professional qualification. But you also need to put more pressure on employers. And that's something I simply haven't really seen yet.'



Khadija (30): 'I had a great job at a call centre, with really nice colleagues. I never had any problems with discrimination. OK, every now and then people would laugh at little films on the internet that made fun of Muslims. But you should be able to deal with that, I think. But after the Theo van Gogh murder the atmosphere in the company changed. The negative comments about Moroccans became harder. Suddenly my colleagues were talking about "the foreigners" in my hearing. Worst of all was our manager, who openly talked about "dirty Moroccans" (*kut-Marokanen*).

'At one point a Moroccan colleague was dismissed. It was justified too; he didn't do his job properly. In his place, someone was employed whose initials were E.T.A.. The manager said, "We've just got rid of one terrorist, and the next one is already here." Joke... But I couldn't laugh about it anymore. I asked him how he could say something like that. Surely as a manager he was supposed to set an example? From then on it became worse. He watched me especially carefully; I was constantly snapped at. I went to complain to management, and he was told to apologise to me. But it didn't help much. At my next performance evaluation I was torn to shreds and not much later dismissed, while there was nothing wrong with my work. I lodged a complaint at the Anti-Discrimination Bureau. Later another five colleagues of non-European origin were dismissed. Nobody said a word against it. People were afraid for their own jobs in these uncertain times. But I was born here, I feel Dutch. I want justice.'

State Secretary of Social Affairs and Employment, Henk Van Hoof doesn't share the grim conclusions of his fellow party-member Dijkstal. In his opinion it is not necessary to put pressure on employers. He believes in 'bringing together all concerned' and 'developing a popular support base'. The state secretary talks enthusiastically about the '*Dag van de Binding*' (Day of Bonding) in January this year. Gathered together in the Knights' Hall in The Hague were all the leaders of multicultural Netherlands for a discussion with just eight members of government. The people at my table were saying, "Heavens, this is the first time that we are talking to each other about this." And a whole lot of very good initiatives came about.' Van Hoof starts reciting a long list: companies that adopt young people for traineeships, a job offensive for refugees, unions that organise talks in the workplace between non-Europeans and their native Dutch



colleagues. But Van Hoof doesn't want to know anything about hard-and-fast agreements, such as a job plan for minorities. 'You get nowhere with force,' he says. 'We need to generate popular support. It's far more effective than forcing people to do things that they don't really want to do.'

The organisation that is supposed to create that popular support base on behalf of the government and with employers, employment agencies and minority groups, is Div Management, a showpiece of Van Hoof's. They are supposed to bring parties together, organise information meetings and ensure that 'best practices' are adhered to. 'Div Management monitors the progress of all the initiatives,' promises Van Hoof. 'And as soon as initial good intentions start to flag I'll make sure that those concerned hear from me.'

From a telephone call to Div Management we learn that the organisation consists of no more than five people, and is in a state of chaos after the resignation of a co-ordinator. And that on the eve of one of the first big congress that they are organising. Project worker Ditter Blom has serious doubts about the success of his own organisation. 'We can't develop any big initiatives with just this handful of people. You can only do so much.' He finds it a pity that parliament did away with the Bammers. 'We could really have done with those people.' Ditter calls it 'a crying shame' that the government is not investing more money in the initiative. 'You would have expected more from a government that claims to consider integration so important.'

Rachida (22): 'I started wearing a headscarf a few months ago. Just before that, I registered with an employment agency. They phoned me up for a job as a receptionist at an advertising agency. There they looked at me a bit strangely, but I was put to work. After half an hour, they asked me to phone the employment agency. So I heard over the phone that they didn't like the headscarf at that office, it wasn't representative. I refused to take it off, and shortly afterwards I found myself on the doorstep again. It really came as a blow. I thought: I get a higher vocational qualification, but who can guarantee that I will get a job?'



'After that, I applied for a job at Top Ticketlijn, a call centre for Joop van den Ende Productions. The employment agency still said that I had a very good chance of getting it, because I also had an intermediate vocational qualification in secretarial work and management, which the other candidates didn't have. The interview went very well, and they said they would phone me back that afternoon. But I heard nothing, not that day or the next. Eventually I heard via the employment agency that I hadn't been taken because company policy stated that no headscarves were allowed. I can understand that some people might find a headscarf in reception not very representative, but on the telephone, where nobody can hear from your voice where you come from – that's not right. That's why I went to the Anti-Discrimination Bureau. The employment agency offered its apologies; it wasn't allowed to mediate for that kind of company. According to Top Ticketlijn it wasn't their policy at all to keep out headscarves. They invited me for another job interview, but I didn't feel like it anymore. I did, however, make use of the two tickets to the musical that they sent me.'

Amsterdam city councillor Ahmed Aboutaleb expected more from State Secretary of Social Affairs and Employment Van Hoof. Div Management? 'Never heard of it.' The Day of Bonding? 'I wasn't sure that I would go to it at all. It's great if leading figures in society can get together and talk seriously. But then it must lead to concrete results.'

And concrete results are precisely what Aboutaleb is not seeing. 'This government just pushes aside the fact that unemployment amongst non-Europeans is increasing rapidly. During the annual budget speech it was barely mentioned. The government comes forward with hundreds of millions of Euros to fight terror, but Verdonk gets no more than a few million for promoting social cohesion. That is a lot less than the amount that we in Amsterdam put forward for this subject. Don't get me wrong, I'm not against stricter laws and fighting terror. But it is much more difficult to make 120 000 Muslims in Amsterdam feel that they belong. It's just not very high on this government's agenda.'

And so, Aboutaleb says firmly, we do it ourselves. 'I'm not going to sit about waiting.' Along with Ferry Houteman, the chairman of the Middle-sized and Small business Association in Amsterdam, the councillor has created hundreds of internships and



traineeship positions which will largely go to non-European students. 'We are co-operating well with big companies like [banks] ING, ABN and Rabobank, as well as [supermarket chain] Albert Heijn. And new traineeship positions are being opened at the offices of local authorities every day. In the long term I would like one in every twenty-five officials to be a trainee. I'm evaluating the performance of my directors based on this.'

Besides criticism of job opportunity policy, Aboutaleb also finds that the government should speak out much more strongly against discrimination. 'It is really atrocious that – as was found in the study commissioned by Social Affairs and Employment – discrimination occurs openly. You would have to go over to prosecution. It is important to show Turkish and Moroccan Dutch citizens who encounter this that something is being done about it.'

Because of his Moroccan background, Aboutaleb is sometimes confronted with discrimination firsthand. His son has been stopped on several occasions by the police and asked for proof of identity. 'Simply because there were little black curls peeping out from under his helmet,' the councillor suspects. Aboutaleb's daughter and headscarf-wearing aunt were refused entrance to the Lounge Café in The Hague, infamous for its refusal of religious Muslim women. 'That café should have been closed down long ago!' says Aboutaleb. 'This government speaks out strongly on the subject of fundamentalist mosques, and justifiably so. But in the case of discrimination they need to do it in connection with this sort of business too. The government should lead the way.'

Glenn (44): 'I come from the Antilles, but I've been living here for eighteen years and feel one hundred percent Dutch. In The Hague I worked with much enjoyment at a copy shop. Until I got a new boss – a racist if every there was one. If something unpleasant had to be done, he would say to clients, "That is a good job for our nigger." One morning there was a sticker with a caricature of me with a red cross through it stuck on the door that led to the toilet. Under it was written 'No niggers'. I had to walk all the way round and go inside via a back door in order to go to the toilet! That was the final straw. I laid a complaint with the Anti-Discrimination Bureau. The man who had insulted me like that



quickly left. The owner wanted to make up for it, but I had no inclination to carry on working there. We fought out our dispute in front of a magistrate, and I got some compensation. I may have won the battle, though, but I've lost the war: I've been sitting at home, unemployed, for more than a year now.'

It seldom happens that a company is charged with discrimination. In Haarlem a case against the Zaans insurance office EPB Advies will soon be heard. In January 2002, this company put in a request with an employment agency for a telemarketer. A Turkish applicant heard that he was not eligible for the job. Subsequently, it came out that there was a note in the employment agency's computer saying that EPB Advies wanted 'no Turks, Moroccans or headscarves' for that particular position. The Turkish temp pressed charges. The employment agency offered its apologies and broke its ties with the company.

But the public prosecution service (PPS) allowed the case against EPB to languish. A policeman who was supposed to question employees from the employment agency was sick on the appointed day; the Crown Counsel ('Officier van Justitie') handling the case was away for a long time. After six months the PPS decided to dismiss the case. The Zaans Anti-Discrimination Bureau didn't leave it at that, though and, via a special procedure, requested prosecution all the same. In a rare move by the PPS, the request was granted. According to the Amsterdam court, the director of EPB 'deliberately made a distinction according to race by not wanting to employ any staff of non-European origin'. The court ruled that 'in the best interests of society' the case should indeed still be tried before a judge.

Great, says PvdA (Labour Party) MP Jet Bussemaker. In a remarkable one-two with VVD MP Frans Weekers, they asked State Secretary Van Hoof to introduce 'an active policy for prosecution of discrimination against ethnic minorities'. The state secretary replied that in his opinion the current legislation is sufficient. 'Extremely disappointing,' says Bussemaker. Moreover, Van Hoof assured parliament that the PPS will 'vigorously get to work' after a charge of discrimination has been laid.



After Verdonk's statements, Labour Party MP Bussemaker asked Minister Aart Jan de Geus and State Secretary Van Hoof whether they might 'fill in' the minister of immigration on the problem of discrimination in the labour market. 'They slyly replied that they would do it,' says Bussemaker. 'Because they did know better. If Verdonk opens her mouth she should actually know what she's talking about.'

Bussemaker feels like 'a voice in the desert' in parliament – not only when it comes to the combating of discrimination, but also in the debate about unemployment amongst people of non-European origin. 'I had to tug and pull for three years to get the plan for helping 2 500 refugees to find jobs through parliament,' she says. 'If we hadn't done anything, this number would have been halved.' According to the Labour Party MP, the government is hesitant to set itself hard and fast objectives. 'They are scared that they won't manage to meet these objectives. The measures to bring down unemployment amongst minorities are hopelessly insufficient.'

Michael Struik (40): 'I was a personal trainer in the Westvliet Wellness and Racket Club in The Hague. Last summer I was told during a consultation that I wasn't doing my job well. My direct boss said to me: you look grey with your dark eyes and dark skin. This makes you not very approachable. I couldn't believe my ears! Yes, I am of Surinamese descent, but what about it... I had never had complaints during the six months that I had been working there. Just after that conversation, I went straight to the boss, but he did nothing. I was so disappointed. Where was I working? I asked myself. I resigned and my advocate wants to summon the company before a judge.'

Imad, Karim and Abdelkader would never take a complaint to an Anti-Discrimination Bureau. But for them it's all part of a pattern. On the street they are looked on as potential thieves, they are turned away from nightclubs, and if they apply for a job it is often just a waste of time. But hey, see if you can prove that it's just an excuse. A few years ago they were still optimistic about their futures. They did intermediate vocational training, and had no trouble at all finding a traineeship position. They were determined to do better than their fathers. But that was before the recession and, more especially, before the attacks of 9/11 and the Theo van Gogh murder. When you could simply get



into nightclubs. When you could still talk to Dutch girls without seeing them think: is this an assailant or a terrorist? When you weren't pushed up against a wall by a policeman in plain-clothes thinking that you are a pickpocket. 'I really liked it in the Netherlands,' says Karim.

Sometimes they wish that they had lived in the time that their fathers were young. 'At that time Moroccans were always hired,' says Imad. 'They were often even given preference over the Dutch because bosses found that they worked harder.' Chuckling, he tells how his father used to board with an old lady of seventy. 'Ha ha, you should try that nowadays, phoning up a little old lady like that. Before you can ask whether she has a room free she's already phoned 112.'

On the other hand, they are not like their fathers. 'When he came here he couldn't speak a word of Dutch. He was glad of every Gilder he could get. But you won't help me much by giving me a job in a factory or a warehouse. I studied for years, did courses, invested a lot. If I had known before that the only thing I could do is become a garbage collector I wouldn't have gone to all that trouble. I would have just stayed at home.'

Now staying at home has become a punishment. 'I get up in the morning, do my hair, make myself look good. And then I go out.' And if you hang around on the street for long enough, says Imad, you get shady types approaching you without even trying. 'Those guys say, You haven't got anything to do anyway, and I've got a little job for you that can earn you lots of money quickly. I must honestly say that it's tempting. But I just wouldn't be able to face my parents.'

Imad sighs. 'You start feeling inferior.'

'Ach, it will all be OK in the end,' Abdelkader ventures.

'No it won't,' says Karim. 'It will only get worse.'