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## Social Mobility and Identity Formation

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# Upward Mobility and Questions of Belonging in Migrant Families

by JENS SCHNEIDER (University of Osnabrück),  
MAURICE CRUL (Erasmus University Rotterdam) and  
LORE VAN PRAAG (Ghent University, Belgium)

Social Mobility belongs to the “archetypical-terms” of Sociology because it links up with a series of key concepts and phenomena in the study of society: family, generation, social class and its reproduction over generations, the distribution of wealth and welfare, the formation of elites, and the openness and accessibility of social institutions to individual talent, merit, and effort – to name just the most obvious. The term ‘social mobility’ as such is open in many directions: it can look at mobile individuals, but also at entire groups; it is mostly associated with upward mobility in terms of social status and material conditions, but obviously downward mobility is also part of the possibilities. Moreover, social mobility may apply to the change of profession within the same social stratum (horizontal mobility) and to migrating persons or groups (territorial mobility). The term ‘mobility’ implies movement, and that is always *in relation to* – e.g. a place or class of origin, other ethnic or social groups in society or over time. These different kinds of social mobility do not only occur simultaneously, but they also interact with each other: the study of *individual* social climbers, for example, can unveil the general openness of certain social classes for individuals from different social strata; but these individuals may also be part of socially upwardly mobile *groups* that have a potential for structurally changing the social landscape as a whole. The study of social mobility represents an interesting starting point to examine how society works and which barriers and opportunities it provides.

The study of social mobility among the descendants of immigrants offers an interesting

additional dimension because it allows analysing the extent to which new groups can find their ways into the upper layers of society. A growing group of children of labour migrants in Europe are climbing up the social ladder, even though they grew up in working class neighbourhoods and their parents were poorly educated and worked in low-skilled jobs. The fact that their parents were mobile and ambitious enough to migrate already distinguishes them from their local and school peers from non-immigrant families. They are, moreover, perceived and discursively presented by mainstream appreciations as ‘outsiders’ or, at least, newcomers to the established social order. The social positions these newcomers are expected to occupy in the social structure can lie in two directions. While some expect them to form a new ‘sublayer’ underneath the lowest social stratum, others emphasise that they are socially mobile and invest more to ‘bypass’ certain barriers because the drive in immigrant families to succeed is stronger than in native born working class families.

Children of immigrants are frequently evaluated both in individual and group terms, over various generations, but they are also compared to their ethnic majority peers. Irrespective of their social and educational background, their parents often migrated to provide a better future for their children and can thus be characterised by upward mobility aspirations – an aspect that is frequently rather neglected by a public discourse which disproportionally focuses on deficits and problems. Again, this can be looked at in two ways: on one hand, the native-born children of especially labour migrants frequently far

exceed the educational level and occupational status of their parents. On the other hand, this remarkable intergenerational success may still mean little in comparison to the average levels of education in non-migrant families. Turkish and Moroccan labour migrants in Western Europe, for example, were mostly recruited among the poorest and lowest educated in both countries, with the fathers hardly more than a few years of primary and lower secondary education and not few of the mothers even illiterate. This type of educational deficit is practically unmatched among people of native origin of the same generation or age group than the migrant parents. Obtaining a middle educational diploma and completing a vocational training degree thus means a huge step forward in relation to the parents, but it is still not equivalent to more than a lower middle-class social status in most countries – a status that parents may have also gained in terms of ‘economic capital’ through hard work and long working hours.

However, in all countries there is a smaller group – varying in size depending on the country (cf. Crul, Schneider and Lelie 2012) – that achieves a much steeper social mobility by moving up into professional positions and social strata to which even the average person in the non-immigrant population does not accede. Because of the generally small size of that group, these success stories are often either not acknowledged at all or only seen as ‘the exception that proves the rule’. Yet, attention to this group is important for three main reasons: Firstly, the success of these individuals bypasses the generalised overemphasis on failure and demonstrates an immense potential; secondly, their success can be important for the emancipation of the whole group; and lastly, but maybe most important from a scholarly and policy perspective, the successful cases can tell us a lot about how structural conditions of inequality can be overcome by individual success.

Like social mobility, success is a relative concept which depends on the measurements and the comparison groups or benchmarks. For instance, in relation to education, not only the

achieved degrees, but also the trajectories followed (e.g. years repeated, tracks/courses followed, school/university attended) are used to critically assess the achievement results of immigrant children. The frequently more ‘unorthodox’ or ‘loopy’ pathways to educational success that children of immigrants follow can, for example, indicate the existence of structural barriers and discriminating practices, but they could also be interpreted as an indication that they still lag behind and/or lack the resources or conditions to take a more straightforward path into academia and professional life.

Moreover, the standard measures of upward social mobility, such as income or education, are also not always sufficient to also be *regarded* as successful in society. People with an immigrant background are often additionally evaluated in terms of their ‘cultural adaptation’ and their willingness and capacity to ‘immerse’ themselves into the dominant group (notwithstanding the question about the openness of that dominant group to accept full membership from such a person). Again, this is not only about individuals: also entire ‘ethnic or minority groups’ are located into the scheme by identifying some groups as supposedly ‘more difficult to integrate’ and juxtaposing them to so-called ‘model minorities’. Paradoxically, both forms of stereotyping particular ‘groups’ attribute success and failure to *individual* merit and cultural orientation; they neglect the central role of structural factors, such as the institutional logic of education and the relevance of ‘race’ and class and similar boundary-defining categories. One important effect of this is that ‘lower achieving immigrant groups’ can effectively be blamed themselves for their supposed failure.

While the ‘model minority’-discussion describes processes that distinguish *between* ‘ethnic groups’, similar tensions between structure and agency can be found *within* these ‘groups’. This special issue is also interested in the question of when and where at all ‘ethnicity comes in’, or in other words: how much of the social interaction and the possibilities of career

development are actually influenced by attributions of cultural and religious backgrounds. We know that in our late modern societies – with their strong social stratifications the change of material conditions and the access to educational levels and professional fields not typically associated with a given social status in a family also have socio-cultural implications as regards social networks and the cultural preferences of individuals, families or even entire groups. The social and material position of an individual affects the concept and the definition of the Self – be it in Marxian terms as ‘class consciousness’ or, following Bourdieu, as ‘habitus’.

Especially the interpersonal relations with members of the new social class one enters may be crucial for the ways in which social mobility is experienced and, by extension, how it may constitute a part of one’s identity. Scholarly work in that area has generally presupposed that the change of social class (and milieu) goes hand in hand with particular identity challenges for the upwardly mobile individual. This is nothing particular for offspring from immigrant families: Already in the late 1950s, Peter Blau argued that since social climbers fall between two groups, they have problems of acculturation and feelings of insecurity. Only when the new social class accepts the socially mobile individual as a full member and allows the individual to merge into his or her new class, the upward mobility process loses its importance (1956). The case of children of immigrants, however, demonstrates that social mobility as a movement between different categories of belonging should be conceived in less simplistic or static terms. The empirical evidence provided by the articles in this special issue represents a comparative framework that allows broadening the scope and questioning some of these almost taken-for-granted presumptions in much of the social mobility literature. One aspect is that in most of the high-status professions and milieus into which social climbers from immigrant families move, there are very few other (children of) immigrants and/or ethnic minority members. They are thus most frequently con-

fronted with a lack of specific role models, on one hand, and an increased likelihood of experiences of discrimination and stereotyping on the other. But, these challenges can also trigger creative processes of ‘social negotiation’ in which *new* individual and collective identities are being constructed. In more general terms, this is about the intersectionality of alleged ethnic, religious, (trans-)national or local identities with categories, such as class, gender and/or ‘social milieu’ – a combination that has received relatively little attention so far in the research on social mobility and children of immigrants.

In their article, Jennifer Lee and Min Zhou discuss the so-called “Asian American exceptionalism”-construct. It shows how volatile the public perception of specific immigrant groups can be: within less than a century, Asian Americans moved from being described as illiterate, undesirable, and unassimilable to becoming *the* ‘model immigrants’, profiting from ‘*stereotype promise*’ (i.e. the reverse to what has been described in the literature as ‘*stereotype threat*’). In this way, the notion of ‘Asian American exceptionalism’ becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy; teachers perpetuate these stereotypes which, in turn, give Asian Americans a much higher chance to be tracked into academically oriented classes, regardless of actual performance.

Kris Noam also looks at the Chinese second generation and how they reproduce certain educational values that are labelled as ‘typically Asian’ or ‘typically Chinese’. Her comparison between ‘tiger parents’ in the U.S. and the Netherlands, however, shows that the support strategies for their children differ fundamentally across the two countries and seem to be much more a reflection of rational responses to the necessities posed by the respective educational system than of any kind of essentialised ‘ethnoculture’.

The structural conditions are also a central topic in the article by Dirk Eisema, Tara Fiorito and Martha Montero-Sieburth on activists in the student movement for the legalisation of undocumented 1.5 generation in California. They examine how the student movement func-

tions as a vehicle for upward social mobility for undocumented 1.5 generation migrants. Many of them only find out about their precarious status as they are finishing their secondary education and wanting to access university and/or the labour market. On the basis of interviews and ethnographic fieldwork with nine activists in the greater Los Angeles area, the article shows how the political activism of these youths can help them to better manage the odds of being undocumented and providing the emotional and material means for becoming upwardly mobile.

Also in the article by Marieke Slotman is the issue of how to transform a kind of 'stigma' – in this case being the child of low-educated Turkish or Moroccan labour migrants in the Netherlands – into a source of self-assertion in the process of upward social mobility. Following the notion of a 'Minority Culture of Mobility' (see Neckerman, Carter and Lee, 1999), Slotman describes this as a dynamic process and identifies three recurrent elements in relation of social climbers to their ethnic origins: a moment of distancing in their youth, the effects of being able to share the moments of 'unsettledness' in the mobility process with other social climbers of similar ethnic backgrounds, and the re-discovery of one's 'ethnic origins' at a later stage in the career path – mostly when they have already climbed relatively high on the social ladder, but are still experiencing discrimination and being 'othered'.

Ismintha Waldring, Maurice Crul, and Halleh Ghorashi focus particularly on the necessary and developing capacity among successful members of the Turkish and Moroccan second generation in the Netherlands to deal with boundaries in Dutch society and in the labour market that, despite their high-end professional careers, continue to be relevant and cut across professional relations. Social climbers from immigrant families mostly emphasise 'sameness' in professional and work relations, while trying to relegate their 'difference' to where it actually matters, e.g. in social relations outside of the professional context. This 'sensitivity' for boundaries in place allows them to develop of a professional identity

without abandoning – from a seemingly contradicting mainstream point of view – their 'ethnic' identifications.

Jens Schneider and Christine Lang are interested in the transformations of individual social relations and lifestyles caused by social mobility processes, as well. Their point of departure is the Bourdieuan concept of 'habitus' that also fuels large parts of the theory building in social mobility literature. However, in its mainstream usage, different habitus appear as static separated spheres with clear-cut boundaries that social climbers have to cross – leaving one habitus behind in order to enter another. By contrast, and on the basis of interviews with social climbers of Turkish background in different parts of Germany, the authors identify *habitus diversification* as the predominant pattern: respondents employ different kinds of 'bridging strategies' in order to stay connected to the 'world' of their families, while – at the same time – becoming part of a very different and to them previously unknown 'world'.

Finally, Ali Konyali also analyses the narratives employed by business professionals of Turkish background in Frankfurt, Paris and Stockholm to 'make sense' of their rather exceptional achievements. In these narratives, personal achievement and turning the 'disadvantage of origin' (ethnic and social) into an asset in the competitive context of the corporate business sector are strongly emphasised. This feature, common to the narratives of respondents in all three cities, is different than their colleagues from non-immigrant family origin, as well as to other descendants of Turkish migrants in lower level jobs.

All articles in this special issue contribute one way or another to our understanding of how successful children of immigrants negotiate and make sense of their position in a new social class. They themselves develop a narrative of their success and their position as social climbers, but also the narratives of the people in the world around them matter for the ways success should be read and interpreted. The articles tackle this issue from very different perspectives. Lee and



Zhou show how the combination of a middle and higher social class background, together with the adaptation to the U.S. educational system, creates a positive narrative around an entire 'racial category' that becomes self-perpetuating. Noam's article shows how, in a different national and institutional context, the adaptation to the functioning mechanisms of the Dutch school system leads to a different educational narrative (even though the label 'tiger parents' may remain). It also shows that the (historical) context in which social climbers negotiate and develop their narrative of success is very important, because the success narrative comes with (mental) costs in the second generation – and this experience again will have an influence on what they transmit to their children, the third generation. Konyali's article demonstrates the importance of the context in another way by looking at success in a particular sector, namely the corporate business sector. The narratives of social climbers in this sector blend in a creative way with the individual success narratives that characterize the business sector as such. Social climbers of Turkish background position themselves positively against the backdrop of the dominant negative narratives about their group: they made it, they thus stand out and are special – and become the above-mentioned 'exceptions that prove the rule'. Here no alteration to the dominant perception and discursive connection between 'Turkishness' and low SES can be expected.

Another major question around social climbers is who they become when they enter another social class and world. Three articles in this special issue show that there is no 'zero sum'-result. Social climbers do not exchange one life for another, as the social mobility literature has long presumed. As both Schneider & Lang and Slootman analyse, social climbers often had to work hard mentally (and often still continue to do so) to find a position that feels comfortable for them

and helps them to achieve their full intellectual potential, but also to stay true to themselves, as the article by Waldring, Crul and Ghorashi shows. Being part of the second generation, one could say that they have practiced for this for their entire lives. Nevertheless, as described in all three articles, social climbers use specific mechanisms to negotiate and reach their position. Slootman demonstrates the importance or recognition by co-ethnics and co-educational peers as an important resource to reinvent their own identity and social position. Schneider and Lang show the importance of keeping the links between their lives as social climbers and their roles as daughters or sons in their families. Waldring et al. examine the strategies employed to deal with situations of discrimination and prejudice in their professional life. They use their awareness of the rules of engagement in different social worlds to control the situation, find allies and – most of all – not accept to be victimized. The three articles describe different life phases and contexts, but together they portray the fascinating ambiguities in the pathways of social climbers.

To conclude, this special issue analyses the question of the effects of processes of inter-generational upward social mobility in a thematic context which, at the same time, adds and highlights certain dimensions in both aspects of social mobility: (a) the specific structural barriers and conditions for immigrants and their children to insert themselves into the given social structure of the 'receiving' society; and (b) the implications of moving up the educational and/or professional ladder in relation to their parents – and mostly also the majority of their peers from school and neighbourhood – for subjective feelings of belonging and being 'admitted' to social spheres whose codes do not correspond to those learned in childhood and youth, but that have also frequently not been particularly characterised so far by cultural and/or ethnic diversity.

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# From Unassimilable to Exceptional: the Rise of Asian Americans and “Stereotype Promise”

by JENNIFER LEE (University of California, Irvine) and  
MIN ZHOU (Nanyang Technological University, Singapore)\*

## Abstract

Less than a century ago, Asian Americans were described as illiterate, undesirable, and unassimilable immigrants, yet today, they have the highest educational outcomes, highest rates of intermarriage, and lowest rates of residential segregation. Some scholars and pundits have attributed the dramatic change in their status to Asian culture and values. Focusing on the educational attainment of 1.5- and second-generation Chinese and Vietnamese, we argue that there is nothing essential about Asian culture or values that promote exceptional outcomes, but, rather, a circular process unique to contemporary Asian immigrants in the United States. Contemporary Asian immigrants are, on average, highly-educated and highly-selected—what we refer to as “*hyper-selectivity*.” Because of their hyper-selectivity, Asian immigrants import class-specific cultural institutions and practices from their countries of origin, including a sophisticated system of supplementary education, which they recreate in the United States. Consequently, stereotypes about Asian Americans are positive, and become a form of symbolic capital, which result in “*stereotype promise*”—the promise of being viewed through the lens of a positive stereotype, which, in turn, can enhance the performance of Asian American students. This generates a self-fulfilling prophecy of “Asian American exceptionalism”, and reproduces inequalities at the high end of the educational distribution, giving Asian American students a distinct advantage in the domain of education.

**Keywords:** Asian Americans, second generation, education, stereotypes, stereotype promise

## Introduction

Asian Americans are the fastest growing group in the United States, and account for 5.5% of the U.S. population, up from 0.7% in 1965. Fueling

the growth is immigration; in 2012, the number of Asian immigrants surpassed the number of Latino immigrants in the United States. Nowhere is this more evident than in California, where Asians account for 13% of the state’s population. In 2001, 37% of the California’s immigrants were from Asia and 42% from Latin America, but in 2011, 57% of the state’s immigrants were from Asia, and only 22% from Latin America. However, state-wide percentages pale in comparison to the percentage of Asian Americans in California’s elite public universities such as the University of California (UC). At the flagship campus,

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UC Berkeley, Asian Americans constitute 43% of the student population, and at UC Irvine and UCLA, where we teach, respectively, they comprise 54% and 40% of the student body.<sup>1</sup>

Recent admissions figures to the country's most competitive magnet high schools and elite private universities point to the same trend. Among the students offered admission to New York City's famed Stuyvesant High School in the fall of 2013, 9 were Black, 24 Latino, 177 White, and 620 Asian.<sup>2</sup> These trends have continued, and the number of Asian students admitted for fall 2014 increased, while the number of Black and Latino students admitted dropped to 7 and 21, respectively.<sup>3</sup> At Ivy League universities like Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, Asian Americans typically comprise about one-fifth of the student body. At 5.5% of the U.S. population and 13% of California's population, Asian Americans are an undeniable presence in the country's top educational institutions.

Given their overrepresentation at elite high schools and universities, pundits and scholars have touted Asian Americans as "model minorities," whose success is attributed to their exceptional cultural values. *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof (2006) and scholars like Charles Murray (2012) and the "Tiger Mother" Amy Chua and her husband Jed Rubenfeld (2013) have argued that Asian Americans have the right package of cultural traits and values: they are entrepreneurial, industrious, family-oriented, self-reliant, delay gratification, and persevere in the face of obstacles, which lead to success in school and the workplace.

While the cultural values associated with Asian Americans today are positive, it is worth remembering that less than a century ago, Asians were

described as illiterate, undesirable, and unassimilable immigrants, full of "filth and disease." As "marginal members of the human race," they were denied the right to naturalize, denied the right to intermarry, and were residentially segregated in crowded ethnic enclaves (Okimoto 1994; Takaki 1979). Despite decades of institutional discrimination and racial prejudice, the status of Asian Americans has risen dramatically in less than a century. Today, Asian Americans are the most highly-educated group in the country, have the highest median household incomes, the highest rates of intermarriage, and the lowest rates of residential segregation (Hsin and Xie 2014; Jiménez and Horowitz 2013; Kao 1995; Lee and Bean 2010; Massey and Denton 1993; Pew Research Center 2012; Sakamoto, Goyette and Kim 2009; Zhou and Bankston 1998).

So how did the status of Asian Americans change from unassimilable to exceptional in less than a century? Focusing on the educational outcomes of 1.5- and second-generation Chinese and Vietnamese, we explain the change in status by identifying the mechanisms that support the "Asian American exceptionalism" construct. Bridging research in immigration, race, and social psychology in a novel way, we debunk the argument that there is something unique about Asian culture or values that promote exceptional outcomes. We argue that Asian American exceptionalism is a result of a four-part circular process unique to contemporary Asian immigrants in the United States.

First, contemporary Asian immigrants to the United States are highly educated and highly-selected from their countries of origin. Those who immigrate are more highly-educated than their coethnics who stayed behind, and are also more highly educated than the U.S. average. The combination of these two types of positive selectivity is what we refer to as "hyper-selectivity."

Second, because of their hyper-selectivity, Asian immigrants import middle-class cultural institutions and practices from their countries of origin—including a sophisticated system of supplementary education—and recreate those that

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.nbcnews.com/id/30393117/ns/us\\_news-life/t/asian-americans-blast-uc-admissions-policy/#.UzGMytNOWM9](http://www.nbcnews.com/id/30393117/ns/us_news-life/t/asian-americans-blast-uc-admissions-policy/#.UzGMytNOWM9)

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.schoolbook.org/2013/03/15/high-school-admissions>

<sup>3</sup> See [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/12/nyregion/status-quo-at-elite-new-york-schools-few-blacks-and-hispanics.html?ref=nyregion&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/12/nyregion/status-quo-at-elite-new-york-schools-few-blacks-and-hispanics.html?ref=nyregion&_r=0)

best suit their new host society. This system of supplementary education squarely fits into the U.S. context, which touts educational achievement as the surefire route to success (Zhou and Cho 2010).

Third, as a result of their hyper-selectivity and the transmission of class-specific cultural institutions and practices, stereotypes about Asian Americans are positive, and become a form of symbolic capital—capital that accrues benefits based reputation and legitimacy (Bourdieu 1987; Wacquant 2013). The positive stereotypes and symbolic capital result in “*stereotype promise*”—the promise of being viewed through the lens of a positive stereotype, which, in turn, can enhance the performance of Asian American students (Lee 2014).

Fourth, when Asian American students succeed, teachers can point to individual successes as evidence that they were correct all along in their initial assessment about Asian American exceptionalism. This leads them to favour a new cohort of Asian American students based on their experience with a prior cohort, thereby generating a new cycle of Asian American exceptionalism. All the while, both teachers and students are unmindful of their roles in creating a self-fulfilling prophecy (Merton 1948; Rist 1970). This circular process is consequential because it occurs in “gateway institutions” such as schools, where rewards and penalties are distributed, thereby reproducing group-based inequalities (Ridgeway and Fisk 2012).

### Data and Methods

The data include 82 face-to-face, life-history interviews with 1.5- and second-generation Chinese and Vietnamese randomly drawn from the Immigration and Intergenerational Mobility in Metropolitan Los Angeles survey (IIMMLA). IIMMLA is a multi-investigator study that examines patterns of intra- and intergenerational mobility among the adult children of immigrants in the greater Los Angeles metropolitan area. It includes a telephone survey of 4,800 randomly selected respondents in five counties of metro-

politan Los Angeles (Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino, Riverside and Ventura), targeting 1.5 and second-generation adults between the ages of 20 and 40. Because IIMMLA includes respondents from five counties, the respondents are drawn from socioeconomically and racially/ethnically diverse neighbourhoods in the greater LA metropolitan area.

Lasting between one and a half and two hours, the in-depth interviews were structured, but most questions were open-ended; this allowed the respondents to speak at length about their answers, and also provided the interviewers free reign to ask unanticipated follow-up questions. The interviews were tape-recorded and conducted by trained graduate research assistants, who wrote five to eight single-spaced pages of detailed field notes immediately following each interview, which helped us to identify thematic patterns before the formal coding process began. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, coded by question and by theme using ATLAS.ti software, and then analysed and re-analysed for notable and consistent patterns.

Taking advantage of the in-depth interview method, the interview schedule was designed to focus on the contexts under which the respondents made choices about their educational and occupational trajectories; such data are unavailable from the IIMMLA survey. The interviews covered a wide scope of topics related to intergenerational mobility: educational and employment decisions; high school and college experiences with teachers and peers; supplementary education; familial resources and obligations; neighbourhood and community resources; role models and reference groups; and in-group and out-group perceptions and relationships.

### *Chinese and Vietnamese in the United States: Divergent Immigrant Origins and Convergent Second-Generation Outcomes*

Los Angeles is a strategic research site to study the 1.5 and second generation because 62% of its residents are immigrants or the children of immigrants. It is also home to the largest Chi-

nese and Vietnamese American populations in the United States, accounting for 15% and 20% of U.S. Chinese and Vietnamese, respectively. While the Chinese and Vietnamese share a similar racial status in the United States, they differ with respect to migration histories and socioeconomic backgrounds.

At 23% of the Asian population in the United States, the Chinese are the largest Asian ethnic group in the country, with a population that has grown from 237,000 in 1960 to 4 million in 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau 2012). The Chinese are also the largest Asian ethnic group in the Los Angeles region. Unlike newer Asian ethnic groups who did not arrive until the passage of the 1965 Hart-Cellar Act, the Chinese have a migration history that dates back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century when they immigrated during the peak of the Gold Rush in the late 1840s. The 19<sup>th</sup> century arrivals were lowly-selected, low-skilled, uneducated, and illiterate men from the rural Canton region of South China (Zhou 1992).

The post-1965 wave of Chinese immigrants differs from their 19<sup>th</sup> century predecessors in two critical ways. First, contemporary Chinese immigrants hail from diverse national origins and regions, including China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Second, they also hail from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, and include low-skilled urban workers and uneducated rural peasants, as well as highly-educated professionals whose human and economic capital surpasses that of native-born Whites (Zhou 1992). Chinese immigrants in Los Angeles reflect the broader diversity of Chinese immigrants in the United States (even among those who hail from mainland China alone).

Unlike the long history of Chinese immigration to the United States, Vietnamese immigration is of a much more recent vintage. And unlike their Chinese immigrant counterparts, the Vietnamese first entered the country as refugees after the fall of Saigon in 1975 (Bloemraad 2006; Zhou and Bankston 1998). The largest non-European refugee group in the United States, the Vietnamese have grown exponentially in four decades,

from a near negligible size in the early 1970s to 615,000 in 1990. Since 1990, the Vietnamese population nearly tripled to 1.74 million in 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau 2012).

Most distinctive about Vietnamese migration is the circumstances under which they exited their home country and the context of reception they received in United States as political refugees. Fleeing a war-torn country under extremely adverse conditions, they left without preparation and without control over their final destination. The initial wave of refugees who fled Vietnam to the United States included members of the elite and middle-class whose evacuation was orchestrated by the U.S. military or through personal means. With the exception of this elite group who evacuated before the fall of Saigon, most refugees had low levels of human and financial capital; they had minimal formal education, few marketable skills, little English-language proficiency, and scant knowledge of the norms of an advanced Western society.

Compounding their class disadvantage was their emotional distress, anxiety, and trauma experienced during their precarious exit from their home country, which was exacerbated by their often uncertain, lengthy stays in refugee camps (Rumbaut 2005). Moreover, lacking a pre-existing ethnic community that could assist their incorporation, the Vietnamese relied exclusively on the U.S. government and individual or institutional sponsors who determined where they would settle and the resources they would receive (Zhou and Bankston 1998).

Despite the stark differences in the political, educational, and socioeconomic backgrounds of Vietnamese refugees and Chinese immigrants, their children converge in their educational outcomes—a pattern that we refer to as “*second-generation convergence*.” Even more remarkable is that within one generation, the educational outcomes of 1.5- and second-generation Vietnamese surpass those of native-born Whites and Blacks, and move closer to the 1.5- and second-generation Chinese. Unable to explain the pattern of “*second generation convergence*,” some

**Table 1: Selected Characteristics of Los Angeles' New Second Generation**

Characteristics	1.5 & 2 <sup>nd</sup> Generation		3 <sup>rd</sup> -Plus Generation	
	Chinese	Vietnamese	Black	White
<i>Female</i>	43.5	49.9	53.7	50.6
<i>Median age</i>	27.0	25.0	31.0	30.0
<i>Citizenship status</i>				
Citizen by birth	45.3	29.4	100.0	100.0
Citizen through naturalization	49.8	64.3	--	--
Permanent resident	4.4	6.1	--	--
Undocumented status	0.5	0.2	--	--
<i>Parental SES</i>				
Father with no English proficiency	7.0	7.9	--	--
Mother with no English proficiency	7.8	12.0	--	--
Father with no high school diploma	7.5	15.6	10.9	3.5
Mother with no high school diploma	12.2	30.5	9.0	4.4
Father with a bachelor's degree or more	61.3	31.9	35.0	46.5
Mother with a bachelor's degree or more	42.3	16.1	28.0	36.3
Parent ever been undocumented	1.0	0.6	--	--
Parent owning a home	86.5	58.8	67.5	89.2
<i>Family Situation</i>				
Both parents married	85.5	83.6	43.3	51.9
Grew up living with both parents	85.6	83.1	45.4	64.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>401</b>	<b>401</b>	<b>402</b>

Source: IIMMLA.

scholars and pundits point to Asian culture, and advance an argument about "Asian American exceptionalism." Below, we unveil the mechanisms that support the "Asian American exceptionalism" construct by highlighting the circular process unique to contemporary Asian immigrants in the United States.

### The Hyper-Selectivity of U.S. Asian Immigration

One of the most distinctive features of contemporary Asian immigrants is its *hyper-selectivity*, which is reflected in two ways. First, Asian immigrants are more highly educated than those who stayed behind; this reflects high selectivity among those who chose to immigrate. For exam-

ple, 51% of Chinese immigrants and 26% of Vietnamese immigrants in the United States have a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to only 5% of adults in China and Vietnam.<sup>4</sup> Rather than comparing average years of education between immigrants and non-migrants (Feliciano 2005), we compare the percentage with a bachelor's degree or higher since a college degree has become the minimum requirement for a professional occupation in advanced economies like that of the United States. While nearly all

<sup>4</sup> UNFPA. 2012. Factsheet - Education in Vietnam: Evidence from the 2009 Census. [http://www.unfpa.org/webdav/site/vietnam/shared/Factsheet/FINAL\\_Factsheet\\_Education\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.unfpa.org/webdav/site/vietnam/shared/Factsheet/FINAL_Factsheet_Education_ENG.pdf)

**Table 2: Divergent Outcomes of Los Angeles' New Second Generation**

Outcomes	1.5 & 2 <sup>nd</sup> Generation		3rd-Plus Generation	
	Chinese	Vietnamese	Black	White
<i>Education</i>				
No high school diploma	0.0	1.0	6.7	3.7
High school diploma	4.5	6.7	24.2	17.7
Some college	32.4	44.1	45.1	32.5
Bachelor's degree	41.5	37.7	18.8	31.8
Graduate degrees	21.6	10.5	5.2	14.3
<i>Labor market status*</i>				
Professional occupations	17.9	14.0	4.6	9.6
Earnings				
\$20,000 or less	43.6	53.3	73.7	60.2
\$20,001 to \$50,000	48.4	39.0	24.7	33.9
Over \$50,000	8.0	7.7	1.7	5.9
<i>Family situation</i>				
Married	26.0	24.4	25.9	44.6
Mean age when 1st child was born	30.2	27.5	22.3	25.4
Having children at teen age	0.0	2.2	12.0	2.9
<i>Incarceration</i>				
	1.8	3.2	19.3	10.6
Total	400	401	401	402

Source: IIMMLA.

immigrants to the United States are more highly educated than their counterparts who have not immigrated, Asian immigrants are the most highly selected.

Second, some Asian immigrants—including contemporary Chinese immigrants—are more highly educated than the U.S. national average (28% of Americans have a college degree or more). Chinese immigrants in Los Angeles are even more hyper-selected than Chinese immigrants in the United States; 61% of Chinese immigrant fathers and 42% of Chinese immigrant mothers have a BA degree or higher.

The children of Chinese immigrants (the 1.5- and second-generation) benefit from high parental human capital, and attain high levels of education. Nearly two-thirds of the 1.5- and sec-

ond-generation Chinese (63%) have graduated from college, and, of this group, 22% have also attained a graduated degree—figures that far surpass the levels of educational attainment for native-born Blacks and Whites. Also notable is that none of the 1.5- and second-generation Chinese students in the IIMMLA survey has dropped out of high school. While the educational attainment of the 1.5- and second-generation Chinese may appear exceptional, it is consistent with the status attainment model, in which children's educational outcomes reflect the intergenerational advantages they accrue from their highly educated parents (Blau and Duncan 1967).

While Chinese immigrants in Los Angeles are highly educated, and pass on these intergenerational advantages to their children, this is



not the case for all Asian immigrant groups. For example, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian, and Hmong immigrants have *lower* levels of educational attainment than the national average for U.S.-born Americans (Ngo and Lee 2007; Ramakrishnan and Ahmad 2014). The IIMMLA survey data reveal that 15.6% of Vietnamese immigrant fathers and 30.5% of Vietnamese immigrant mothers have not graduated from high school—placing them below native-born Whites and Blacks (see Table 1).

Yet despite the relatively low level of educational attainment among first-generation Vietnamese (especially Vietnamese mothers), their children attain levels of education that defy that which would be predicted by the status attainment model. Nearly half (48%) of 1.5- and second-generation Vietnamese has attained a college degree or more, and only 1% has failed to complete high school (see Table 2). Even more remarkable is that within one generation, the educational attainment of the 1.5- and second-generation Vietnamese surpasses both native-born Blacks and Whites, and converges more closely to their highly-educated Chinese counterparts.

While both Chinese and Vietnamese immigrants to the United States are highly-selected from their countries of origin, only the Chinese are hyper-selected, that is, Chinese immigrants arrive with more education than the U.S. average. However, Vietnamese immigrants are a bifurcated group with respect to educational attainment. While many have not completed high school, nearly one-third of Vietnamese immigrant fathers (31.9%) and 16.1% of Vietnamese immigrant mothers have attained a BA degree or more. Hence, while Vietnamese immigrants exhibit lower college attainment rates, on average, than the U.S. mean, a significant portion are highly-educated. These are the elite and middle-class refugees who fled Vietnam before the fall of Saigon. This point deserves mention because the high-selectivity of both the U.S. Chinese and Vietnamese immigrant populations determines which cultural institutions and practices will be

transferred from their countries of origin, and recreated in the host society context.

### **The Hyper-Selectivity of Cultural Institutions and Practices**

Immigrants from more highly-selected backgrounds transport more highly-selected institutions and practices from their countries of origin, and recreate those that best suit their host society. In the case of Chinese and Vietnamese immigrants, one of the most consequential institutions that they have transported and recreated in the United States is a sophisticated ethnic system of supplemental education (Skrentny 2008; Zhou and Cho 2010). This system is created by middle-class members of the first generation, and helps the second generation improve their academic outcomes, even in spite of low parental human capital and poor socioeconomic status in two ways.

First, immigrants and their children (especially those who hail from poor and working-class backgrounds) benefit from *tangible resources* that the middle-class coethnics create. For example, the first generation benefits from jobs, housing, and opportunities for self-employment in the ethnic economy, while the second-generation children benefit from after-school tutoring, college preparation classes, summer school, and enrichment programs (Lee 2002; Lee and Zhou 2013, 2014; Lu 2013; Zhou 1992, 2009).

Second, coethnics also benefit from *intangible resources* that they acquire through ethnic networks. Through these networks, ethnic group members gain relevant information about high school rankings, neighbourhoods with strong school districts, after-school programs and tutors, and the college admissions process. The information circulates formally through ethnic newspapers and ethnic television media, and also informally through kin and coethnic friendship circles. Most critically, tangible and intangible ethnic resources cut across class lines, thereby making once class-specific practices and institutions from countries of origin available to coethnics across class in the host society. In this

way, class resources become ethnic resources and ethnic capital, thereby becoming available to 1.5- and second-generation Chinese and Vietnamese from working-class backgrounds. In turn, working-class coethnics benefit from “cross-class learning” (Lareau and Calarco 2012), which help them override their class disadvantage, and expand their opportunity horizon in ways that defy the status attainment model (Borjas 2006; Kasinitz et al. 2009; Lee and Zhou 2013, 2014).

### *Supplementary Education*

To illustrate how tangible and intangible ethnic resources enhance the educational outcomes of the children of Chinese and Vietnamese immigrants from working-class backgrounds, we provide a portrait of Jason. Jason is a 25 year-old second-generation Chinese male who grew up in a working-class neighbourhood in Long Beach with parents who did not graduate from high school. Jason went to elementary school in a neighbourhood that he described as “the bad area” in Long Beach. But as soon as his parents could afford it, they moved to a modest home in Cerritos because they learned from the *“Chinese Yellow Book”* that Cerritos High School “ranks in the teens” for academics. The *Chinese Yellow Book* is a 3½ inch thick, 2,500-page directory that provides a list of the area’s ethnic businesses, as well as the rankings of southern California’s public high schools and the country’s best universities. Unable to speak English, Jason’s Chinese parents relied on ethnic resources that they could understand and trust when deciding which neighbourhood to buy a home, with the foremost criteria being the strength of the school district.

When Jason first moved from Long Beach to Cerritos in seventh grade, he was unprepared for the rigorous academic culture of Cerritos. While he was at the top of his class in his elementary school in Long Beach, Jason was placed in the “regular” academic track in Cerritos, as a result of his average test scores. He explained, “I came out of elementary school in Long Beach, and I was below the expectation level of Cerritos. I couldn’t get in to the Honors classes.”

Concerned by Jason’s test results, his parents immediately enrolled him in an after-school Chinese academy, which he attended for three hours every day after school. When Jason took the exam for high school, his scores boosted him into the Advanced Placement (AP) track, which prepares students for university. Jason’s supplementary education did not stop there; it also included a Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) preparatory course in ninth grade, and then another in tenth grade so that he would be well-prepared to take the SAT exam in eleventh grade. The SAT is a standardized test that is required for university admission in the United States, which most students take in their eleventh grade (the year before their final year of high school). Because the *“Chinese Yellow Book”* contains numerous advertisements about SAT prep courses and tutoring services, and because Jason’s parents saw that their friends were sending their children to SAT prep, his parents followed suit and enrolled Jason in the same programs.

His parents’ investment in supplemental education, along with Jason’s hard work paid off; Jason graduated in the top 10% of his class with a grade point average (GPA) of 3.6 on a 4.0 scale, and later graduated from a top University of California school. Jason is now in his third year of law school, and along with his Juris Doctor (JD), he is working toward his Master’s in Business Administration (MBA) and Master’s in Law, which he will receive in the following year. Recognizing the competitiveness of the legal job market, Jason decided to earn “extra degrees” in order to maximize his chances of securing a job with a top corporate law firm in Los Angeles. When asked about the salary he would like to earn, he nonchalantly replied that he expects to earn “a nice salary of 200k or so”—a figure that far exceeds his parents’ combined earnings.

What is remarkable about Jason’s educational attainment and occupational aspirations is that his parents did not graduate from high school, and had little understanding of the American educational system. As poorly educated Chinese immigrants, they could not help their son with

his schoolwork, nor could they help with his college or graduate school applications. Yet in spite of Jason's parents' poor human and economic capital, they were able to tap into tangible and intangible ethnic resources to provide Jason with a tool kit of resources; they enrolled Jason in the after-school Chinese academy and SAT prep courses, and they also bought a home in Cerritos because of its strong public school—information they acquired from the Chinese Yellow Book. As working-class immigrants who held high aspirations for their son, Jason's parents relied on tangible and intangible ethnic resources to help him override his class disadvantage, buttress his academic performance, and widen his opportunity horizon of what he could achieve (Böhme 2012).

Jason's parents were not alone in insisting upon supplemental education; supplemental education was such an integral part of the Chinese and Vietnamese respondents' adolescence that they hardly characterized it as "supplemental." Most had engaged in some form of supplemental education such as after-school academies, taking classes ahead of schedule, summer school, tutoring, and SAT prep classes. For example, Hannah, a 25-year-old, second-generation Vietnamese woman who graduated third in her class with a 4.2 GPA (which exceeds the 4.0 scale because AP classes are given extra weight) explained that her summers were scheduled with summer school and tutoring:

*Summertime, besides going to summer school every single year, we also did tutoring classes to get ahead. Like in junior high and stuff, we were taking a class ahead, like math classes. If we were going to take geometry, then we were doing it in the summertime, or algebra in the summertime, the summer before. In the Asian community, I think everyone does tutoring.*

By taking a class the summer before having to take it during the academic year, students repeat the subject during the following school year, thereby providing an insurance policy that they will receive excellent grades and remain a step ahead of their peers.

### *Supplemental Education from a Global, Comparative Perspective*

To understand why Chinese and Vietnamese immigrant parents insist on providing supplemental education for their children, it is useful to adopt a global, comparative perspective, and consider the institutions and practices in immigrants' countries of origin (Skrentny 2008). In both China and Vietnam, high school students prepare for years to take a nationwide, comprehensive, standardized exam, which is the sole basis of university admission. Because one's career is closely tied to one's educational background, the stakes and rewards of doing well on the exam are extremely high, which are heightened by the low odds of being accepted into a university. In China, only three in five high school students who take the test make the cut. The odds of making into a Vietnamese college are worse: only one in six. Given the high stakes and poor odds of university admission, Chinese and Vietnamese parents who can afford to do so enroll their children in supplementary education classes as early as elementary school.

Supplementary education is not exclusive to China and Vietnam; it is also the norm in middle-class households in South Korea, Japan, and India (Skrentny 2008; Stigler, Lee and Stevenson 1987). The impending examinations and the consequences of one's performance on the exam for one's career trajectory strongly influence the educational practices of students beginning in elementary school. This means that in addition to their regular school day, students can spend as many as seven hours in after-school academies. For example, in South Korea—where after-school academies (called *hagwons*) are reputed to be the most rigorous in Asia—a typical high school student's academic schedule begins at 8:00 in the morning, and ends sometime between 10:00 p.m. and 1:00 a.m. (Ramstad 2011).

Immigrating from countries in which supplementary education is the norm for middle-class families, the 1.5-generation respondents who came to the United States in their pre-teen years recollected the long hours of studying and the

stress that this fiercely competitive educational system induced. For example, recalling her gruelling schedule in Taiwan, Vivian (a 25 year-old 1.5-generation Chinese woman) described how each hour of her day was devoted to education, and the resultant toll that it took on her physical and emotional health:

Vivian: *I would wake up at like 6:00 every morning and then go to school until 6:00 at night. And then, I would eat dinner, like, every day in the car because my Dad would buy me something in the car to eat. And then after like an hour or so, I would go to another like school, like an after school thing for whatever subject, like English, Math, or Physics, or whatever you can imagine. I didn't leave after school until 11:00.*

Interviewer: *So from 6:00 in the morning until 11:00 at night?*

Vivian: *Every day. I was thirty pounds lighter than what I am. I was like a bone skinny person, just totally not healthy.*

Interviewer: *Did your friends do that too?*

Vivian: *Yeah everybody did that, starting in middle school, so it was a nightmare.*

Comparing the U.S. system of education to that of East Asian countries, the Chinese and Vietnamese immigrants and their children adopt a "dual frame of reference" (Portes and Bach 1985). The 1.5- and second generation are aware of the rigorous supplementary education system in their parents' countries of origin, and recognize that the after-school, weekend, and summer school supplementary classes in the United States pale in rigor by comparison.

The comparison of supplementary education systems in Asia and the United States also underscores three points about the relationship between culture and achievement. First, supplementary education classes (or after-school academies) exist in the United States, in part, because they are "transported cultural and institutional arrangements from sending states" (Skrentny

2008: 72). Asian immigrants transfer cultural institutions and practices from their countries of origin, and reconfigure them to fit their host society. That the United States touts education as the surefire path to achievement and mobility leads Asian immigrants to recreate, invest in, and insist upon supplemental education programs for their U.S.-born children.

Second, because of the high-selectivity of East Asian immigrants to the United States, the cultural institutions and practices that these immigrants transfer and recreate are not just ethnic-specific practices, but also class-specific practices. That a more highly-educated, middle-class stream of contemporary Asian immigrants comes to the United States means that the practices that they import them will be middle-class practices. In addition, their high immigrant selectivity means that Asian immigrants have the requisite human and economic capital to recreate these institutional arrangements in their host society (Borjas 2006; Zhou and Cho 2010).

Third, while supplemental education in East Asian countries is limited to the middle-class, it is more widely available across the class spectrum in the United States because after-school programs and SAT prep courses are offered in ethnic communities. Some of programs are freely available or available at a low cost through ethnic churches and community organizations. This places supplementary education programs within reach of working-class Chinese and Vietnamese students, thereby providing a means to help override their parents' low human capital. In these ways, class-specific practices become widely available ethnic capital for coethnics, regardless of class.

### **The Racialization of Asians and Stereotypes of Asian Americans**

Because of the racialization that occurs in the United States, Asian ethnic groups tend to be homogenized into the broad racial label of Asian American, thereby eliding differences in ethnicity, class, generational status, and migration history.

One of the consequences of the racialization is that Asian immigrant groups with relatively low levels of education (such as the Vietnamese) benefit from the positive stereotypes associated with Asian immigrant groups with higher levels of education (such as the Chinese). The process of racialization leads to positive stereotypes of Asian Americans as a group, becoming a form of symbolic capital that benefits Asian American students in institutional contexts such as schools. For example, teachers favour Asian American students because they perceive them as bright, hard-working, better-prepared, and more willing to put in effort into their schoolwork (Hsin and Xie 2014; Jiménez and Horowitz 2013). The positive perceptions on the part of teachers become a form of symbolic capital for Asian American students.

#### *Positive Stereotypes and Symbolic Capital*

Stereotypes—both positive and negative—have consequences. Teachers' perceptions of Asian Americans affected the grades that the Chinese and Vietnamese students received, the extra help they were offered with their coursework and college applications, and their likelihood of being placed into academic programs like GATE (Gifted and Talented Education) and into competitive academic tracks like Advanced Placement (AP) and Honors. For example, Robert is a 36 year-old male who was born in Taiwan, migrated to the United States at the age of 7, and entered the second grade without speaking a word of English. However, by the third grade, he was placed into GATE. Initially sceptical about Robert's recollection, we inquired how this happened:

Interviewer: *How did you get into GATE? I mean, you came here in second grade and knew no English.*

Robert: *They tested me, and at first they put me in ESL (English as a Second Language), and I was like, "Why am I in ESL?" Then somebody tested me again, and they said, "Well, he's really smart." I didn't know what they were talking about.*

Interviewer: *Do you think your teachers made assumptions about your academic ability based on your ethnic background?*

Robert: *A lot of them thought because I was Asian – because I was one of the few Asians in my classes and stuff – they would think, "Oh well, he's Asian, he must be smart," or something like that. In elementary school, I was the only Asian in my class. In my whole school I think there were only two or three Asians.*

What is remarkable about Robert's placement into GATE is that he admitted that after the results of his initial test, the teachers placed him into the ESL (English as a Second Language) track, but upon his mother's insistence, Robert was re-tested and then placed into GATE. Furthermore, Robert admitted that teachers made positive assumptions about his academic ability, not only because he is Asian, but also because he was one of only two or three Asians in a predominantly Latino school.

Robert's story, while remarkable, is not unique. During the interviews with the 1.5- and second-generation Chinese and Vietnamese respondents, we learned that many were placed in the AP (Advanced Placement) track in high school. While some of the Chinese and Vietnamese respondents recalled that they successfully tested into these competitive tracks, others did not remember taking an AP exam in junior high or high school, and still others admitted that their junior high school grades were mediocre, yet they were tracked in high school AP courses nevertheless.

For example, Nam—a 24 year-old second-generation Vietnamese woman—was placed into the AP track in high school even though she admitted that she was an average junior high student. She recalls having received A's, B's, and C's in her classes. Despite her mediocre junior high school performance, she was placed into the Honor's track for high school. Even more surprising is that Nam does not recall having taken an exam for this, and has no idea how she was



placed in Honors classes. However, once Nam was placed into the Honors track, she began taking her schoolwork more seriously, and spent more time doing her homework and studying for tests in order to keep up with her high-achieving peers. Nam graduated with a GPA above 4.0, and was admitted to all the University of California schools to which she applied.

Perhaps one of the most egregious cases of the symbolic capital afforded to Asian American students is that of Ophelia, a 23 year-old second-generation Vietnamese woman who described herself as “not very intelligent” and recalls nearly failing the second grade because of her poor academic performance. By her account, “I wasn’t an exceptional student; I was a straight C student, whereas my other siblings, they were quicker than I was, and they were straight A students.” Despite her lacklustre grades in elementary and junior high schools, Ophelia took the AP exam at the end of junior high school, and failed.

Although she failed the AP exam, Ophelia was placed into the AP track in her predominantly white high school, nevertheless. Once there, something “just clicked,” and Ophelia began to excel in her classes. When we asked her to explain what she meant something “just clicked,” she explained, “I wanted to work hard and prove I was a good student.” She also added, “I think the competition kind of increases your want to do better.” She graduated from high school with a GPA of 4.2, and was admitted into a highly competitive pharmacy program.

Social psychologists have shown that individuals have powerful, largely unconscious tendencies to remember people, events, and experiences that confirm their prior expectations (Fiske, Lin and Neuberg 1999). So strong is this tendency that individuals often fail to see disconfirming evidence, or, if they do see it, they often reinterpret it in stereotypic-confirming ways, ignore it, or dismiss it altogether as the exception (Ridgeway 2011). Teachers are more likely to notice Asian American students who excel, and overlook or ignore those who do not. So even when teachers come into contact with average-performing

Asian American students, they tend to reinterpret the evidence in stereotypic-confirming ways, as Nam and Ophelia’s cases illustrate.

#### *A Self-fulfilling Prophecy*

While Nam and Ophelia admitted that they worked harder in the more competitive academic track, what is missing in their explanation is an understanding of the social psychological processes that enhanced their performance. Turning to Merton’s (1948) classic concept of the “self-fulfilling prophecy” and the literature in social psychology on stereotypes provide greater insight. A self-fulfilling prophecy begins with a false definition of the situation, evoking a new behaviour, which makes the original false conception come true.

In Nam and Ophelia’s cases, self-fulfilling prophecies are at work in the precise sense of the term, that is, that the prophecy under consideration (that all Asians are high-achieving) is *not* correct, but only becomes so when students learn of their teachers’ and peers’ high expectations, resulting in a change in the students’ behaviour, and ultimately, a change in their academic outcomes. Neither student believed at the outset that she was academically exceptional or deserving of being in the AP track. However, once anointed as exceptional and deserving by their teachers, the students changed their behaviour; they took school more seriously, put more time and effort into their homework, and changed the reference group by which they measured their performance. These actions resulted in straight A’s in high school and admission to top universities.

#### *Stereotype Threat and Stereotype Promise*

The consequences of stereotypes are relevant here. Steele and Aronson (1995) found evidence of “*stereotype threat*” in test-taking situations—the threat or the fear of performing in a certain way that would inadvertently confirm a negative stereotype of one’s group, which, in turn, decreases performance. Researchers have shown that stereotype threat depresses the



performance of high-achieving African American students on difficult verbal tests, as well as accomplished female math students on difficult math tests when these tests are presented as a measure of ability (Deaux et al. 2007; Massey and Fischer 2005; Spencer, Steele and Quinn 1999).

Building on the work of stereotype threat, Shih, Pittinsky and Ambady (1999) found that Asian American females who are strong in math performed better on a math test when experimenters cued their ethnic identity, but performed worse when they cued their gender than the control group who received neither cue. They concluded that test performance is both malleable and susceptible to implicit cues—what they refer to as “*stereotype susceptibility*.” By subtly cueing their ethnic identities, social psychologists found that Asian American women experienced a “*stereotype boost*” in their performance (Cheryan and Bodenhausen 2000; Shih et al. 2002).

Building on this literature, we found evidence of “*stereotype promise*”—the promise of being viewed through the lens of a positive stereotype that leads one to perform in such a way that confirms the positive stereotype, thereby enhancing academic performance (Lee 2014). When placed in a context where Asian American students are anointed as high-achieving—where teachers’ and peers’ expectations are elevated—Asian American students put more effort into their schoolwork in order to meet those expectations. And because of their increased effort, their academic performance increases. Critical to add is that because the students’ outcomes matched their teachers’ expectations, the teachers can point to these students’ stellar academic achievement as proof of their initial assessment about all Asian American students—that they are smart, hard-working, high-achieving, and deserving of being placed into the most competitive academic tracks—all the while unmindful of their role in generating a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Teachers’ positive stereotypes of Asian American students become a form of symbolic capital. Because symbolic capital yields rewards in insti-

tutional contexts such as schools, it reproduces group based inequalities, as do other forms of capital, including economic, cultural, and social (Bourdieu 1984; Carter 2005; Ridgeway 2011; Small 2004). The symbolic capital afforded to Asian American students gives them a distinct group-based advantage, supports claims about Asian American exceptionalism, and results in the reproduction of inequalities at the high end of the educational spectrum.

### Discussion and Conclusions

Unable to explain the overrepresentation of Asian Americans in elite high schools and universities, scholars and pundits have pointed to Asian culture and Asian American exceptionalism—Asians are more hard-working, more disciplined, more focused, and value education. Even the majority of our 1.5- and second-generation Chinese and Vietnamese respondents attributed their academic outcomes to their Asian cultural values, claiming that “Asians value education more than other groups.”

However, a mere glance at the academic aspirations and outcomes of the second-generation Asians in other countries illustrates the flaws in the cultural values argument. For example, unlike Chinese immigrants to the United States, Chinese immigrants to Spain are not hyper-selected. And unlike the second-generation Chinese in the United States, their counterparts in Spain exhibit *the lowest* educational aspirations and expectations of all second-generation groups, including Ecuadorians, Central Americans, Dominicans, and Moroccans. Nearly 40% of second-generation Chinese expect to complete only basic secondary school—roughly the equivalent of tenth grade in the United States (Yiu 2013).

Given the perception of a closed opportunity structure in Spain—especially for visible minorities—Chinese immigrants have no faith that a post-secondary education or a university degree will lead to a professional job, so they have turned to entrepreneurship as the route to upward mobility, and encouraged their children to do the same. Hence, Spain’s Chinese

immigrants adopt an entirely different “success frame,” in which entrepreneurship—rather than education—is the mobility strategy (Lee and Zhou 2014). In addition, Noam (2014) finds that second-generation Chinese parents in the Netherlands have *lower* educational expectations of their third-generation children compared to their second-generation counterparts in the United States, which she attributes to differences in welfare states.

These counterfactuals illustrate that it is not something essential about Chinese or Asian culture that promotes exceptional educational outcomes, but a circular process unique to Asian immigrants in the United States: Asian immigrants to the U.S. are hyper-selected, which results in the transmission and recreation of hyper-selected cultural institutions and practices, including an ethnic system of supplementary education for the second generation, which improves academic performance. Consequently, stereotypes of Asian American students are positive, resulting in symbolic capital in schools, and leading to “stereotype promise.” Positive stereotypes, however, have a host of unintended negative consequences (Lee and Zhou 2014).

Just like inequalities at the low end of the educational spectrum—where some students are assumed to be low-achievers, are tracked into remedial classes, and then “prove” their low achievement—inequalities are reproduced at the high end of the educational distribution where students perceived to be high-achievers (regardless of actual performance) are tracked into high-level classes and rise to the occasion, thus “proving” the initial presumption of their ability. So what begins as a false definition of the situation evokes a new behaviour which makes the original false conception come true. Self-fulfilling prophecies can operate to reproduce inequalities at the high end of the educational distribution, just as they do on the low end.

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# Beating the Odds: the Undocumented Youth Movement of Latinos as a Vehicle for Upward Social Mobility

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## Abstract

Drawing upon ethnographic research of in-depth interviews, life histories, attendance at rallies, festivities, and informal conversations with over 150 undocumented Latino youth activists in Los Angeles, we argue in this paper that the political and civic engagement of marginalized and stigmatized undocumented youth enables them to have social mobility prospects. Contrary to the U.S. literature on undocumented Latino 1.5 generation, which tends to focus on their socio-economic and educational disadvantages and overlooks the ways in which undocumented youth movements in the US enhance their social mobility through higher education, our findings indicate that Latino youth from low income neighborhoods embrace their undocumented identity, to become individually and collectively de-stigmatized and empowered. Re-appropriating education to their advantage, they develop professional activist dispositions that fuel their self-confidence, and overcome fear of governmental authorities. Moreover, they also use the movement's networks for jobs, internships and funding, which in turn enhances their collective action towards beating the odds and climbing the ladder of social mobility.

**Keywords:** undocumented youth, the DREAMers, social mobility, social movements, educational advancement

## Introduction

Undocumented Latino youth activists, commonly known as DREAMers, have become a powerful political entity in the United States. They have developed a strong voice within the public sphere through their mobilization against the deportation policies of the Obama administration and through their struggle to create a pathway to citizenship by mobilizing for the DREAM Act. The federal Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act is an immigration reform bill that provides undocumented youth the opportunity to seek citizenship status. The Migration Policy Institute (2010) estimates that roughly 825,000 of the 2.1 million DREAM eligible youths within the US will actually be able to obtain permanent legal status under the pro-

posed bill. Yet even though the DREAM Act was proposed in 2001 and has been reintroduced many times, it has not yet been passed.

Much of the literature on this generational cohort, described as the 1.5 generation (Rumbaut 2012), focuses on the socio-economic and educational disadvantages these undocumented Latino youths face (Chavez 1998; Portes and Hao 2004; Solorzano, Villalplando and Oseguera 2005; Arbona and Nora 2007; Abrego 2008; Portes, Fernández-Kelly and Haller 2009; Abrego and Gonzales 2010; Perlmann 2011; Portes and Rivas 2011). Research shows that public schools in deprived neighbourhoods are underfunded, have limited resources, are overcrowded, and have high numbers of students with poorly



educated parents (Solórzano, Villalplando and Oseguera 2005; Arbona and Nora 2007). Only between 5 and 10 percent of the undocumented 1.5 generation goes on to college or the university (Gonzales 2007; Frum 2007).

This literature also provides insights into why some undocumented youth in the United States are able to present themselves openly in the public sphere. Research shows that many undocumented Latino youth grew up with a sense of belonging in the USA because they were socialized in the receiving country rather than in the country of origin (Rumbaut 2012; Abrego and Gonzales 2010; Abrego 2011; Gonzales 2011; Gleeson and Gonzales 2012). In contrast to their undocumented parents, who migrated to the US as adults, many of these youths came to the United States at an early age, participated in the US educational system and only realized they were undocumented during adolescence, as higher education became a possible prospect.

More importantly, research demonstrates how access to higher education can provide opportunities for *some* of these highly marginalized and stigmatized undocumented Latino youth to transcend the subjective life-worlds and educational and occupational prospects of their parents (Pérez 2010; Stanton-Salazar 2011).

While some scholars of the undocumented Latino 1.5 generation have shown how access to higher education can improve the prospects of undocumented youth, the research on the 1.5 undocumented generations has overlooked the importance of social movement organizing for upward social mobility.

Through our ethnographic research on undocumented Latino youth activists in Los Angeles, we describe how the political and civic engagement of highly marginalized groups can enhance the social mobility prospects of such groups. In this case study, we claim that the undocumented Latino youth movement has given rise and benefited the social mobility of such youth, providing them access into higher education. We examine the role of social movement organizing for the prospects of undocumented Latino youth in the

US and combine the literature on the 1.5 generation with recent developments in the literature on social mobility.

### Literature Review

#### *The Undocumented Latino 1.5 Generation*

Much has been written on the undocumented Latino 1.5 generation in the United States and many of these studies predominantly address the difficulties these youths face. On multiple levels, undocumented Latino 1.5 generation youth in the United States are disadvantaged (Chavez 1998; Portes, Fernández-Kelly and Haller 2009; Abrego and Gonzales 2010; Perlmann 2011; Portes and Rivas 2011). Undocumented parents and their children live in segregated neighbourhoods with low socio-economic status, experience poor quality schools, and have high crime, incarceration and unemployment rates (Ibid.). Both Abrego (2006) and Gonzales and Chavez (2012) note how this undocumented status keeps individuals from legally being incorporated into the receiving country, since they are blocked from basic amenities such as obtaining a drivers' license, a bank account, medical insurance, and cannot be hired within legal occupations. They also are not able to travel outside the United States and have to deal with the possibility and the fear of detention and deportation (Abrego 2011). Nonetheless, even though these youths were brought up to fear authorities and remain silent about their immigration status, they knowingly risk possible detention and deportation and to remain by publicly presenting themselves as "undocumented and unafraid".

Undocumented Latino youth also face educational disadvantages. Not only are public schools in these deprived neighbourhoods underfunded and overcrowded (Solórzano, Villalplando and Oseguera 2005; Arbona and Nora 2007), but these youths are raised by parents with low educational levels which significantly contributes to not having the embodied cultural capital that helps them advance at school (Willis 1977; Bourdieu 1986; Fernández-Kelly 2008). Often, working-class parents have limited knowledge of how



education functions and how their children can navigate the public educational system. In addition, their children may also behave in ways that their middle-class teachers consider inappropriate. The working-class habitus of these children clashes with the middle-class habitus of their teachers (Ibid).

Research shows that youth from ethnic minorities experience subtle negative prejudices and discrimination towards their cultures and languages that are very hard to counteract. Over time, these prejudices become cumulative, thereby leading to subsequent differences in the educational attainment of ethnic minorities and non-minorities (Montero-Sieburth 1996, 2000; Gandara et al. 2003; Cohen et al. 2009). Portes and Hao (2004) show that among Latinos, "...Mexican immigrants ...have the lowest average levels of education and occupational skills of any sizable immigrant group in the United States and ... experience, in addition, a negative reception by the host society and government (2004: 11927).

Despite the socio-economic and educational disadvantages, some undocumented Latino youth nevertheless find ways to attain a higher education. In the Plyler versus Doe case in 1982, the Supreme Court ruled that under the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution, no state is to discriminate between documented and undocumented residents living under their jurisdiction. Therefore, all children in each state gain unrestricted access to free public education at the elementary, middle and high school levels (Olivas 2005; Frum 2007).

However, for many undocumented Latino children, their educational trajectories begin without feeling differences between themselves and their documented peers. Scholars signal the importance of this sense of belonging for undocumented Latino children at the beginning of their lives (Abrego and Gonzales 2010; Abrego 2011; Gonzales 2011; Gleeson and Gonzales 2012). Yet, while most undocumented parents continuously fear US authorities, their children start their lives in relatively safe educational institutions.

Nevertheless, it is when such youth transition from high school to higher education that they find out they are undocumented and become aware what this means for them within mainstream society. Undocumented Latino youth who were previously unaware of the significance of their migration status find out that they are undocumented when they want to apply for financial aid for college or when they want to obtain a drivers' license. This "awakening to a nightmare" (Gonzales and Chavez 2012), or moment of "shattered dreams" (Wong et al. 2012), signifies a phase in life in which they have to learn what being undocumented really entails. They learn to deal with the insecurity of not being able to legally work travel outside the US, and fear detention and deportation (Gonzales 2011).

While in many ways the legal and political context in the US is highly restrictive for undocumented Latino youth, it can also be enabling. Essentially, states are not allowed to decide on migration issues, but they are permitted to make their own choices on educational access. One of the enabling legislative opportunities that allow undocumented students in California to access higher education concerns California Assembly Bill 540 (AB540). This law allows undocumented youth, who have gone to a Californian high school for at least three years before graduation, to pay in-state tuition fees at community colleges and public universities. Since 2001, twelve states have signed similar laws, allowing undocumented students under certain requirements to pay in-state tuition (Abrego 2008). For many undocumented youth, AB540 is much more than just a bureaucratic category allowing them financial access to higher education. Being an AB540 student has become a de-stigmatizing and empowering identity that provides undocumented 1.5 generation youth the legislative backing to continue with their educational trajectories. Because of AB540, undocumented youth are considered to be California residents and are encouraged to go to college or university. As such, this law grants to them a socially accept-

able identity and fuels their sense of belonging (Seif 2004; Abrego 2008).

In addition to the importance of this piece of state legislation, Pérez (2010) notes that community colleges allow undocumented youth to transition into higher education after graduating from high school, serving as a bridge into university, since their moderate tuition rates make them more accessible for youth from underprivileged positions. Undocumented Latino students who enrol in a community college often describe their experiences at community college as an eye-opener, as they start learning about the world beyond their deprived neighbourhoods, poor quality schools and working-class communities.

Some undocumented students become passionate about a particular subject or profession due to the influence of community college experiences or because certain college teachers energize them through a particular topic or profession or simply because they develop a sense of self-confidence at being good at something.

Researchers also note the importance of the relationships between undocumented Latino youth and relative outsiders to the community and the neighbourhood (Abrego 2006; Gonzales 2010; Stanton-Salazar 2011). Establishing trustworthy relations with college or university teachers and administrators does not only aid undocumented Latino students in getting access to important knowledge and resources, but it also helps them feel comfortable with and able to relate to adults who are relative outsiders to the community (Abrego and Gonzales 2010; Gonzales 2010). Stanton-Salazar (2011) calls these teachers and administrators “institutional agents”, as they function as institutional brokers that make the transition into higher education possible and relatively smooth through their being of high-status, non-family members, and occupying key positions that provide institutional and social support. These brokers’ interventions empower marginalized youth and broadens their horizon. Institutional agents often motivate certain undocumented Latino youth to pursue

higher education by inciting confidence in them. As Stanton-Salazar points out: “When low-status youth do overcome the odds, it is usually through interventions that embed them in a network of institutional agents connected to services, organizations, and resources oriented toward their empowerment” (2011: 1097).

Such a process becomes a stepping-stone in the greater moving up process of the social mobility ladder. It is a time when such youth realize that they are worthwhile and capable of achieving things, or as Suarez-Orozco (1987) states, “being somebody”. Needless to say, with such an evolving process through education, the sense of empowerment and gaining of self-confidence contributes to their having a place in US society and in being able to beat the odds.

While many researchers tend to focus on the mechanisms that help undocumented marginalized youth obtain a higher educational degree, they are less focused on how activism expands upon the benefits of higher education. It is through educational spaces that undocumented youth come together in a collective that advocates against their precarious situations. By continuing with political activism after community college or university, stigmatized and marginalized undocumented Latino youth build upon the foundations of their higher education trajectories to become empowered and self-confident professional and politicized activists. In stressing the subjective transformation and empowerment of these youth through the social movement, we seek to go beyond traditional conceptualizations of social mobility.

#### *A Qualitative Approach to Social Mobility*

Often, social mobility scholars use quantitative approaches to explain social mobility and predominantly conceptualize it as educational attainment and occupational prestige (Miller 1998; Ganzeboom 2010). However, in recent years, qualitative researchers have sought to move out of this narrowly defined explanation of social mobility by exploring the subjective and symbolic definitions of social mobility that

their respondents propose themselves (Bertaux and Thompson 1997; Zhou et al. 2008; van den Berg 2011). While we regard it relevant to measure social mobility through educational qualifications and occupational status, we argue that social mobility can be a subjective experience that deals with how persons give meaning to the world. The educational qualifications of politically active undocumented youth often far exceed those of their parents, and their political engagement strengthens the benefits of their educational trajectories.

By conceptualizing upward social mobility of undocumented Latino youth through a qualitative ethnographic study, we delineate four elements of social mobility that distinguishes these undocumented youths from their undocumented parents. Through their political and civic engagement in the undocumented youth movement, undocumented and educated youth 1) overcome their fear of migration authorities and feel empowered; 2) enhance their collective status by transforming highly stigmatized youth into successful and legitimate political subjects; 3) acquire a professional activist disposition; and 4) gain access to a large and open network that offers them job-, internships- and funding opportunities.

Firstly, for many educated undocumented Latino youth that are active in the movement, the undocumented youth movement functions as an important safety net. If they are detained in order to be deported, they are assured by the collective that they can call upon their social, political, legal, and emotional support needed to help get them out of the deportation proceedings. This aids them in overcoming their fear of migration authorities and supports them in coming out of the shadows as “undocumented and unafraid” (Wong et. al. 2012). By presenting themselves as confident, educated and eloquent political activists, and by sharing their stories with other important political actors, they develop further feelings of self-confidence. These educated and politicized youths feel empowered because they are recognized as worthy human beings by their

fellow activists and by the broader public. Additionally, the interactions within the movement generate solidarity, collective effervescence and emotional energy for the member activists, which add to feelings of empowerment and transformation (Collins 2001).

Secondly, because politically active and educated undocumented Latino youth are recognized as legitimate political subjects within the media and the larger public sphere (Nicholls 2013), undocumented youth have been able to redefine the image of a particular group of undocumented immigrants; these educated, undocumented youths are known as DREAMers. Within the larger immigrant rights movement, these youths have been put forward as the poster children of the immigrant rights movement, because they resonate with the larger general public as “deserving”, assimilated and contributing immigrants (Ibid.). While the media often depicts undocumented immigrant groups as “illegals”, “occupiers” and “criminals” (Portes and Hao 2004; Cohen et. al. 2009), DREAMers are considered powerful political actors. Through their organized and disciplined public performances, undocumented educated youth move from being marginalized and stigmatized immigrants to powerful political actors, thereby “turning shame into pride” (Jasper 2011). Through this process, the collective identity and status of undocumented youth is enhanced.

Thirdly, by participating in the movement, individuals acquire the necessary skills and mentality of professional activists. Through the movement, they operate in a professional environment and learn from each other how to talk to the media and how to organize a political campaign. By organizing campaigns, writing media advisories and participating in professional meetings, and through their protest actions and media trainings, undocumented Latino youth learn how to behave as professional political activists. By gaining this knowledge on how politics work and how to behave within these professional, political spaces, they acquire the professional activist disposition. In this process, they also receive

information on immigration laws and -history. By learning that their precarious situation came into existence through the power-play of politics, they become irreversibly politicized.

Fourthly, the movement also informs undocumented Latino youth about job, internships and funding opportunities. Following the literature on social capital and networking processes, it is evident that politically active undocumented youth strongly benefit from the strength of weak ties (Granovetter 1973) and from the vast amount of social capital (Bourdieu 1986; Lin 2001) that is embedded within the movement. The participants are embedded within a very large and open network of immigrant rights-, human rights- and labour organizations, legal representatives, local politicians and media organizations. Through these large networks, participants benefit from the flow of information, resources and contacts that are embedded within these networks. Through these networks, undocumented Latino youth have access to job-, internship- and funding opportunities that create higher chances of attaining better statuses and occupations. On 15 June 2012, President Obama used his executive power to grant DREAM eligible youth temporary relief from deportation and temporary work permits. This Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) has allowed undocumented, educated youth to make use of their educational qualifications, political activist dispositions and the job opportunities provided by the networks of the movement.

### Methods

The empirical findings presented in this article stem from six months of intensive ethnographic research of the undocumented Latino student movement in Los Angeles, during September 2011 to March 2012, helped by Walter Nicholls, who had been studying the DREAMers for several years (Nicholls 2013). The researchers spent time establishing rapport and gaining the trust of these youths by participating and volunteering their skills, time and energy. By collaborating with the third researcher, a Latin American

scholar seasoned in studying Latinos and Mexicans within the US educational system, the constituted team was able to further contextualize the research experiences and findings.

Los Angeles is an appropriate locality for studying undocumented youth, because Southern California has the largest number of undocumented youth. Moreover, the DREAM movement is highly active and well developed in the city of Los Angeles. Dream Team Los Angeles (DTLA) is one of the most influential and active Dream Teams in the country, functioning as a major hub of activity in regard to the undocumented student movement and the larger immigrant rights movement.

The fieldwork centered on “deep hanging-out” (Bryman 2004), mobilizing, conversing, celebrating, eating and living with undocumented Latino youth who are members of prominent Californian Dream Teams, such as Dream Team Los Angeles (DTLA), San Gabriel Valley Dream Team (SGVDT), San Fernando Valley Dream Team (SFVDT) and Orange County Dream Team (OCDT). As the DREAM movement is a national movement with Dream Teams all across the country, DREAMers in Los Angeles are strongly connected to DREAM organizations on a federal and state level, such as, United We Dream (UWD) and the California Dream Network.

Engagement in the activities of close to 150 DREAMers within the wider Los Angeles area and following a core group of 60 DREAMers made up our ethnographic study. Most of the DREAMers were born in Mexico, or in other Latin or Central American countries, and are between the ages of 18 to 30.

In the six months of ethnographic fieldwork, the first two researchers conducted participant observations of 82 different events, ranging from formal meetings, protests and press conferences to informal meetings such as Christmas, wedding and birthday celebrations. They also conducted nine life-history interviews with DREAMers, with a focus on life trajectories in terms of border-crossings, childhood experiences, and educational involvement in the movement -linking their personal lives to the movement.

In addition, the research team filmed and photographed many DREAMer events and collected the movement's documents that were distributed or circulated digitally. The analysis of data was based on fieldwork reports and notes, interview transcripts, photographs and documents supported by using Atlas.TI, a qualitative data analysis program. Since the field research became the basis for a Masters' thesis supervised by the third researcher, she suggested and added key literature on Latino educational issues and highlighted issues confronted by Mexican students, which were consolidated into this article.

Although this is an ethnographic case study of DREAMers in Los Angeles, the similarities, collaborations and exchanges between the different Dream Teams that make up the structure of the national movement suggest that the findings within the LA context may be representative of those experienced by DREAMers in other states and cities across the US. While the researchers participated in particular actions in Los Angeles, DREAMers in other parts of the country were also doing similar actions with the same political agenda, framing strategies and organizational structure.

### **Beating the Odds through Higher Education**

Schooling is not only critical in providing undocumented youth with a sense of belonging, but it also allows some undocumented Latino students to establish important relationships with institutional agents at high school or community college. A case in point is provided by Nadia, Raj, Grace and Jorge, who all started with English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, but were noticed by a teacher who recognized their talent and placed them in the so-called Advancement Placement (AP) classes. Such extra attention by a teacher boosted their self-esteem and taught them that they could achieve something in life by doing well in school. For these students, this was the start of a successful educational career; they began getting good grades and believing that they were capable of fulfilling the American meritocratic dream.

My teacher placed me in the gifted classes. (...) So I was labelled a gifted student, right. (...) Me knowing that I was smart, that I could do a lot of things that just pumped me up and made me very excited about my education; always seeing myself with a brighter future (Grace).

Many DREAMers did not even know that it was possible for undocumented youth to go to college. In poor, working-class neighbourhoods, some community members and parents may view education as a luxury; people are more focused on trying to get a job to make ends meet than on ensuring that they get into college. Alejandro: "I grew up in a neighbourhood where it was the same mentality. People were just scared to get detained and deported. They didn't worry about having to go to school, because like: no, I don't need to go to school, I need to go to work." For these adolescents, having an outsider as a role model is important in encouraging them into higher education. Ernesto sheds light on this:

And honestly, it wasn't until three years after high school of doing the street vendor thing and just like doing side things here and there, that I met somebody. His name was David (...) He just brought this completely different energy and like environment of like that supportive, male role model. (...) And it wasn't till 2005 that his daughter just graduated from high school and was going into college. (...) And then he asks me: "Hey, why don't you apply?" I was: "Ooh I don't know, like, I don't have papers", blablabla, excuse, excuse, excuse. And then it came to the point of: "Why don't you just try?" (...) and the next thing I knew I was a student at East LA college (Ernesto).

Although being encouraged by an institutional agent is an important factor in determining whether undocumented youth transition into higher education, getting access to higher education through AB540 is essential. Raj: "If it wasn't for the AB540, I don't think I would have been able to make it through my undergraduate". Through AB540 and funding opportunities for AB540 students, undocumented youth are able to go to community college, which often motivates them to transfer to university and continue on their path of upward social mobility. Nadia:



“community college was where I became like the crazy nerd, like, getting the good grades”. As such, community colleges serve as an eye-opener to the larger world outside of the poor working-class world that most undocumented students know.

I started taking classes and I started to get exposed to things that I didn't even know. I remember taking a psychology class, which I didn't really know what it was, but I was like, I'll take this psychology. And taking philosophy, which I didn't know what it was (laughs). It just opened my mind to a lot of things, right. College really changed my mind, my life, I guess (Jorge).

College gives them the feeling and self-esteem that they can also become part of this larger world. Julio states: “That [enrolling in college] moment in history marks where I left the neighbourhood that I knew of, as just inner-city, dysfunctional schools, bad neighbourhoods, into wealth. This is what the world looks like: I want to see more of it! Yeah”. At community college, Ernesto realized that he was a good writer and started writing for the college newspaper. “That was my first time around in any kind of environment where I was like having a really good time. I was like really proud of myself: like, wow, I got something published in the school newspaper”. Additionally, undocumented youth often become members of campus based immigrant rights organizations, which teach them the power of social movement organizing.

There was a group on campus that was about to be formed that advocates for undocumented students. So I joined that club and that's when I started learning a lot more about AB540, the federal DREAM act, the California DREAM act. So I started learning about all that stuff. I started learning more about politics and how it works. I started understanding politics and politicians. (...) I started understanding the importance of me sharing my experience, my stories. So I started doing a lot of different interviews, I started speaking in public a lot. (Alejandro)

### **Beating the Odds through the Undocumented Youth Movement**

#### *Empowerment and Overcoming Fear*

Through political activism, undocumented youth learn how to defend themselves against anti-immigrant sentiments and how their story can be used as a tool for lobbying and as a means of pulling resources. This process of publicly coming out as undocumented and collectively calling attention to their precarious limbo situation is an important step towards overcoming the fear and stigma that comes along with being undocumented. Being able to come to this point is derived from the growing self-confidence and motivation that comes through their educational success. At this stage, their educational capital and self-confidence are extended by their active involvement in the undocumented student movement, which is then leveraged into individual empowerment and the embracing of a collective undocumented identity.

The big moment for me was at UCLA IDEAS and becoming undocumented and unafraid. Really embracing what it means to be undocumented. (...) When you can stand up and say, I'm undocumented and this is my story, and this being a powerful tool. I embraced it and I became like a full on organizer. (Nadia)

Clearly, Nadia made the transition from *just* being an undocumented student to becoming an undocumented student *and* a political activist who is not only okay with her undocumented status, but she embraces it fully. This is similar to what many other undocumented students experience when they join the undocumented youth movement. The campus based undocumented students movement serves as a springboard for becoming a full political activist beyond the campus walls. After they graduate, undocumented youth continue their organizing and advocacy work for undocumented youth by joining a Dream Team. Dream Teams, such as Dream Team Los Angeles, provide a platform through which they can continue their upward social mobility path.

The importance of individual feelings of empowerment that are generated by the col-



Figure 1: Alejandro could not stop smiling while getting arrested.  
Source: The Authors © The Authors.

lective actions of the undocumented student movement cannot be underestimated. Many DREAMers see it as the key aspect of their active involvement in the movement. Esperanza echoes this clearly: “So that’s another thing, again that empowerment, right. I’ve been able to be okay, be more than okay, be proud of being undocumented”. These now self-confident and educated youths come together to create a space in which they can empower each other through the collective of the movement. The connections and resources within the movement’s networks make it possible for DREAMers to overcome the fears that their parents endure on a daily basis. While their parents often stay in the shadows, these undocumented youths are publicly presenting themselves as undocumented, showing their faces and names in actions and interviews recorded by the media.

This process of overcoming the fear of the authorities is especially enlightening in terms of the movement’s organization of civil disobedience to raise awareness to their precarious situation of legal limbo. During the fieldwork, DTLA undertook a civil disobedience action for the administrative relief campaign. In this action,

five DREAMers got themselves arrested by doing a sit-in in the office of the chief prosecutor of Immigration and Custom Enforcement (ICE). Maria, Alejandro and Nadia were the DTLA members who were arrested in this action. The fact that these youths dare to face their worst fears head-on by performing such an action shows that they feel safe, self-confident and empowered enough to place themselves at such risk (see picture below). Alejandro explains that, despite the fact that he was facing possible deportation by being arrested, he felt really powerful during the action of civil disobedience because he could feel the energy and support of the movement behind him.

So, 8 floors beneath us we could hear the crowd downstairs cheering, chanting and it was just a very beautiful moment. And then as we walked outside the offices and everyone was just there and it was. As soon as I saw everybody, I just started smiling because it was just so beautiful, like: Wow, this is amazing. I just could not stop smiling. I just had to smile, because it was just all the energy that was in the air. It was just beautiful. (...) It gave me a boost of energy and it gave me a confirmation that what I was doing was the right thing to do. (Alejandro: see figure 1)

Some DTLA members call these civil disobedience actions “sacred acts”. They function as key moments in the transformative process from being fearful and “closeted” to becoming fully empowered and liberated from their fear of the authorities. In other words, it is the complete “embracing of the undocumented identity” that causes them to feel stronger than ever. Maria explains how she felt after she participated in this action of civil disobedience:

I was building for it, I knew it was going to happen and so when it finally did, I felt liberated. (...) So, it was multiple levels: at a personal level I felt really liberated, ehm, I was worried about my mom, mostly because she was really sad and worried, but she was also very proud (...) So, I was very happy to be in there [ICE office], very proud.

*Collective Status Enhancement:  
De-Stigmatization*

The individual process of empowerment and overcoming fear that DREAMers go through leads to an enhancement of the status of the collective. Because the individuals present themselves as powerful and capable personas in the

public sphere, the collective identity and status of the DREAMer is enhanced. The persona of the DREAMer becomes synonymous with educated, powerful, assertive and capable human beings. They are no longer un-worthy “illegals”, but a powerful and legitimate political group.

Through their public performances in the media and at protests and rallies, they are publicly asked about their opinions on particular political issues. Not only are they asked to give their opinions on particular migration issues, but they are also asked to give their positions on more general political issues. Their voice and political position as a legitimate political group becomes valuable for the general public. During one of the DTLA meetings, the group was asked whether DTLA could send two representatives to attend a press-conference in which the local LA union, the LA County Fed, would publicly announce their support for President Obama and comprehensive immigration reform. Two DREAMers went to the press-conference and presented their personal stories (see figure 2).

The DREAMers have become such a powerful political group that they have many contacts



Figure 2: Two DREAMers (on the left) are asked to share their personal story and to take a political position. Source: The Authors © The Authors.





Figure 3: Dream Team Los Angeles (DTLA) receives the Community Leaders Award for their notable advocacy. Source: The Authors © The Authors.

among significant Los Angeles politicians. Even the mayor of Los Angeles came and visited DTLA at the UCLA Downtown Labor Center for the celebration of the passing of the California DREAM Act. During this celebration, DTLA was presented with the Community Leaders Award, granted by the California Immigrant Policy Center (see figure 3).

As a result of the national administrative relief campaign described earlier, a small group of DREAMers from all over the nation, including DTLA member Nadia, was invited to come to the White House to discuss the demands of the campaign with Cecilia Muñoz (Director of the White House Domestic Policy Council). DREAMers have become such a powerful political collective that they are even on the cover of TIME magazine<sup>1</sup>.

#### *Acquiring a Professional Activist Disposition*

That's when I became the media person. (...) So that's when I developed my first press-release and that's when I started calling media up and starting developing those relationships. (Nadia)

By participating in the movement, individuals learn the skills and mentality to acquire a professional activist disposition. Through the DREAM movement, undocumented students learn how to behave and perform as political activists and start to speak the social movement language. Words such as “educating”, “messaging”, “framing”, doing “outreach” and “advocacy work” have become a normal part of their vocabulary.

I was advocacy chair, before I was co-chair, so I think at that first march, that first rally, the student of colour conference; I just really liked that feeling of being able to share my story in front of such a huge crowd. And so I kinda just kept going with that. I was involved with the external vice-president's office and so that also exposed me to a lot of different issues, just in case of like, educational accessibility and budget cuts everywhere right. So, I think that showed me what a movement was. From there it just grew. I mean you go to retreats, you go to like meetings, you just kinda get in it, that's the only way to really learn about it is to immerse yourself in it and I did just that (Esperanza).

DREAMers operate in a highly professional environment. Because DTLA is located at the UCLA Downtown Labor Center, their weekly meetings are held in a professional office space with all the necessary facilities. This professional atmo-

<sup>1</sup> <http://content.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,20120625,00.html>

sphere and DTLA's connections to the university and professional activist organizations, connects undocumented youth to the world outside their deprived neighbourhoods. Dream Teams function as highly professional organizations. At Dream Team Los Angeles, weekly Monday meetings are very important to keep track of ongoing business. Every week, they discuss what is happening the upcoming week, who is doing what, which protests are on the agenda, what DTLA's stance is on upcoming political issues, and how the national campaigns are going. DTLA's activities are organized in different committees: the legal committee, the community education and outreach committee, the development committee, the media committee, the policy committee, the self-care and healing committee, and the arts committee.

These committees all have their say through committee chairs. These chairs "report back" to DTLA during the weekly meetings, so the other DTLA members know what is going on and how their activities are proceeding. Through their active involvement in the movement, undocumented students learn about legal issues, immigration policies and how politics work in general. Maria: "So we had to do so much educating of ourselves, from like these three branches, how does the executive branch work? Who has the power? Do all these legal research on it".

In this process of becoming more aware of the policies and legal issues surrounding their political causes and campaigns, undocumented youth become politicized. Through this politicization process, undocumented students become aware that their problematic position is not given by nature, but is created through more restrictive immigration laws and policies and the tightening of the border. This political awareness is important, because it encourages undocumented youth to fully immerse themselves in the world of political organizing. This process of politicization enables them to feel confident and secure in speaking to politicians.

### *Job-, Internship- and Funding Opportunities*

The way that I got into Good Jobs LA was via an internship during this summer. The UCLA Labor Center and United We Dream were able to collaborate and put the Summer Internship together which hosted about 104 individuals across the country. I was one of the fortunate ones who were admitted into the program. We were placed with Good Jobs LA and we were doing a youth project. The project went really well and they ended up calling us back and told us that they wanted us to work on their campaign and since then I've been working with them. (Julio)

As Julio's quote illustrates, the movement also informs undocumented students about job-, internships- and funding opportunities. Having a professional activist disposition helps them gain entry into jobs and internships within social justice organizations. As Ernesto states; "We are creating roads into other paths like working with unions, working with non-profits. (...) Like creating and building those resources and expanding those support networks that we work so hard to build up". Through these large networks, individual participants of the movement can benefit from the flow of information, resources and contacts that are embedded within these networks. Through these networks, undocumented youth within the movement have access to job-, internship- and funding opportunities that create higher chances of attaining better statuses and occupations. The internships themselves are also important ways of acquiring the professional activist disposition. The website of the UCLA Downtown Labor Center details what the internship entails.

Dream summer is a ten-week, full-time internship program that places undocumented student leaders with social justice, labour and queer/LGBTQ organizations. This internship experience provides leadership development and training for undocumented leaders and strengthens multigenerational social-justice movements. Each participant will receive a \$5,000 award to support her or his educational goals. (Website UCLA Labor Center)<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Website UCLA Labor Center: <http://labor.ucla.edu/>, website visited on 4 June 2013.



Jorge, Nadia, Esperanza, Maria, Julio and Ernesto all participated in this Dream Summer internship. Through these experiences, they were able to get new positions at other activist organizations. In many ways, the UCLA Downtown Labor Center helps DTLA members build their resume by offering jobs or internships. During the fieldwork, Nadia and Esperanza were interns there and Jorge worked as a paid staff member.

Since DREAMers have recently been granted temporary work permits, they have actually been able to use the skills, internships and job opportunities they acquired through the networks of the movement. They can now legally use both their educational qualifications, as well as the resume-building work they have done within the movement in professional jobs within professional activists' organizations.

So I currently work at the UCLA Labor Center (...) In October I was able to start to work there as a staff person (...) because I knew the project director and the director of the Labor Center. They had been supporters of the DREAM Act and the DREAM movement, so I had known them and done work with them before and they were able to offer me, or like accept me as an intern at the UCLA Labor Center and now I work there, I am regular staff. I run, or I coordinate, the DREAM Resource Center project, which is a project that focuses on issues affecting undocumented students. (Jorge)

The DREAM movement itself also creates many career building possibilities that offer undocumented students that are active in the movement opportunities to expand their skills and knowledge within a professional environment. Esperanza:

I'm a board member for United We Dream, I was recently elected, which is really a big privilege. I gave a speech in Congress and I was elected into that position end of last year. And so I'm gonna be focusing more on the organizational aspect of organizing. (...) You know, being a board member of UWD, which has become such a huge organization in such a small period of time, I think is a very unique role that I have never taken on before. I'm excited to learn and continue growing as a person and as an activist.

Actively participating in the movement, thus, offers undocumented youth the possibility of upward social mobility. As their dispositions and life possibilities have changed so much, doing the jobs their parents do is no longer an option. Ernesto reflects on this: "If they want me to become a supermarket manager, if they think that is being a success, well that's their problem." Often, their parents do not really understand what their lives as professional activists entail. Nadia states: "My mom does not understand what I do, so she just tells people I'm a secretary."

### Conclusion and Discussion

In this paper, we have shown how the undocumented Latino youth movement functions as vehicle for upward social mobility for the educated and undocumented members of the movement. We have argued that the political engagement of these undocumented youths builds upon and amplifies the benefits of their successful educational trajectories. By conceptualizing upward social mobility of undocumented youth through a qualitative ethnographic study, we delineate four elements of social mobility that distinguishes these undocumented youths from their undocumented parents. Through their participation in this movement, they move up on the ladder of social mobility through four specific elements of social mobility generated by the collective actions of the movement: 1) They become empowered and overcome their fear of migration authorities; 2) They achieve and enhance their collective status by transforming highly stigmatized youth into successful and legitimate political subjects; 3) They acquire a professional activist disposition; and 4) They gain access to a large and open network that offers them job-, internships- and funding opportunities.

The subjective experiences of these youths through the movement differ significantly from those of their parents. This is a major practical, mental and symbolic step on the ladder of social mobility. Moreover, the social advancements within the lives of these youths can also be considered elements of upward social mobil-

ity in the classic sense of occupational or educational social mobility. The described processes, in which stigmatized and marginalized undocumented youth become empowered and self-confident professional and politicized activists, give these youths the know-how and mentality to transfer these acquired skills and dispositions into other domains of social life. Due to the acquisition of embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986), undocumented migrants can leverage their educational capital in the social movement, which allows for them to transfer these skills into occupational spheres and other social movement settings, thus allowing for upward mobility.

The insights presented in this study can be used for future research to study whether other social movements also function as vehicles for creating upward social mobility for highly stigmatized groups. Moreover, while the researchers suggest that these findings may be generalizable to DREAMers in other cities and states in the US, the question to what extent similarities or differences may exist between DREAMers – especially contrasting LA and California to more repressive states and cities in the US – is worth exploring. Although ethnographies usually do not make grand sweeping statements about other localities and groups, the researchers see clear connections between DREAMers in California and DREAMers in Arizona. When DREAMers in Arizona are threatened by more repressive immigration laws, DREAMers from all across the US protest and mobilize. Additionally, this research could compare these findings on the experiences of social mobility with other segments of this highly stigmatized group, such as the parents of these undocumented youths and undocumented youths not part of this movement.

Moreover, whether DREAMers will be able to transfer some of their political skills and successes to their communities, which they are bent on doing, remains to be seen, as will what happens to these empowered youths and their parents and communities in the future. Neverthe-

less, this study speaks to their current ability to beat the odds.

The protest actions of the DREAMers mentioned in this article have definitely helped them to change their prospects for the better. The civil disobedience action already described for Alejandro, Nadia and Maria – the DREAMers who were arrested for this action – as well as other undocumented Latino youth has had important consequences. After their release from prison, a few hours after being arrested, they continued to fight for administrative relief which led to President Obama's granting DREAM eligible youth temporary relief from detention and deportation, as well as temporary work permits (DACA). Alejandro, Nadia and Maria are still quite active with Dream Team Los Angeles. Alejandro recently completed his Bachelors in Deaf Studies, and will continue with a Masters' degree while Nadia and Maria are now legally working as paid staff for an activist organization within the greater Los Angeles area.

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# How National Context Influences the Childrearing Practices of Second-Generation Chinese Tiger Parents

by KRIS R. NOAM (University of California, Irvine)\*

## Abstract

Amy Chua's 2011 memoir evoked heated debate on the childrearing practices of Chinese 'Tiger Mothers' and on how some Chinese ethnocultural values can push children toward academic success. To date, little scholarly attention has been paid to the childrearing practices of second-generation Chinese or to how they may influence this part of their children's assimilation. I conducted in-depth interviews with second-generation Chinese parents in the United States and the Netherlands in order to examine specific ethnocultural socialization techniques that could boost children's academic outcomes. Findings show that national context—focusing on different school systems and social security safety nets—can act as an intervening variable by affecting the intergenerational transmission of ethnocultural values regarding educational expectations and academic outcomes. U.S.-born Chinese parents continue to channel their offspring towards high educational achievement, while their peers born in the Netherlands instead emphasize the importance of their children's free choice and their happiness.

**Keywords:** second-generation, assimilation, childrearing, cultural transmission, cross-national

## Introduction

During the last few decades, the size the 'second-generation' population has been growing in both the United States and Europe. The majority of these children of immigrants were socialized with the rich ethnic culture of their parents' country of origin. In this paper, the focus lies on second-generation Chinese and on a selection of their rich ethnic culture: their values regarding their children's academic achievement, which is operationalized as the educational expectations that parents have for their children, and the way they utilize elements from their own upbringing

to motivate their children to realize these goals. I isolate this specific component from their larger set of cultural beliefs, practices, and customs. Chinese ethnoculture includes many components, such as: language, traditional beliefs, dietary habits, ancestor worship, and medicinal customs. Some may be transferred intergenerationally and some may not. While these other ethnocultural elements are not any more or any less important to take into account as second-generation Chinese raise their children, they are not within the scope of the current study.

When the second-generation Chinese grew up, their ethnoculture was prominently present in their lives; most spoke their parents' language,

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ate Chinese food, and were raised with numerous ethnocultural values (Geense and Pels 1998; Chao 2001, 1996). For many first-generation Chinese parents, one important ethnocultural value was to stress their children's materialistic success; they wanted their children to obtain high education and succeed academically. They engaged in three distinct mechanisms to enforce this outcome, they: instilled ethnocultural principles of filial piety, collectivism, and zeal; invested in their education; and moved to academically stimulating environments (Chao 1996; Hao and Bonstead-Bruns 1998; Zhou 2009b; Geense and Pels 1998). Their efforts paid off and, on average, second-generation Chinese are more successful than their peers: they are less likely to drop out of high school, have higher GPAs, and are more likely to attend top universities (Lee 2012; Vogels 2011; Louie 2004).

But, the literature shows that second-generation may no longer agree with the specific childrearing strategies with which their parents pushed them toward academic success (Hao and Bonstead-Bruns 1998; Lee and Zhou 2013). However, in her 2011 memoir, Amy Chua claimed that compared to American parents, first *and* second-generation Chinese parents (continue to have) higher academic expectations of their children and enforce these with particular Chinese ethnocultural childrearing strategies. Chua's account sparked a lively discussion on the link between these specific aspects of ethnocultural childrearing and academic success. But, since this account was merely the narrative of one parent, I set out to examine this question more systematically. It is important to scientifically analyse to what extent educational expectations remain important to second-generation Chinese parents because it may impact aspects of the assimilation and socioeconomic outcomes of their children, the third-generation. This study places the childrearing of second-generation Chinese in a cross-national perspective to reveal that certain aspects of their ethnocultural childrearing practices appear to be not only influenced by time, but also by space. Specifically, national con-

text—focusing on school systems, approaches towards education, and social security safety nets—impact these specific elements.

### **Literature Overview: Childrearing of First-Generation Chinese and the Adaptation of Second-Generation Chinese**

The extent to what parents with an immigrant background hold onto their ethnoculture often impacts how their children assimilate into the mainstream. Parents can use their ethnoculture to distance their children from certain populations. Early Chinese immigrants in the Mississippi Delta, for example, dissociated themselves from the black population to emphasize their similarity with the white mainstream (Loewen 1988) and recent first-generation Chinese parents use their ethnoculture to redefine their children's position in the ethnoracial hierarchy by motivating their offspring to outperform their native-born white peers (Jiménez and Horowitz 2013).

#### *The Childrearing Practices of First-Generation Chinese Parents Include Three Mechanisms*

Chinese ethnocultural childrearing is complex and includes a range of values, beliefs, practices, and tactics. When it comes to instilling values regarding education and academic achievement, scholars have pointed to three main mechanisms that first-generation Chinese parents include in their larger arsenal of childrearing practices to promote exceptional academic outcomes of their second-generation children. While parents of other ethnic groups might also include one, two, or all three of them, they are most commonly incorporated in the childrearing scheme of Asian (especially Chinese) immigrant parents (Chao 2000; Zhou 2009a). First, Chinese immigrant-parents use specific elements of their ethnoculture to generate academic success. For example, parents raise their children in an 'authoritarian' (Baumrind 1971) fashion; Chinese immigrant-parents reinforce strict rules (Chao 2000; Geense and Pels 1998) and are more likely to yell and use corporal punishment, compared to Americans (Kelley and Tseng 1992). Many of

these authoritarian values are rooted in Confucian ideology. Parent-child hierarchy, parental discipline (*guan*), and respect for parents are collectivistic values that are described as 'filial piety' (Chao 2000; Geense and Pels 1998). Following this principle, children should obey to their parents, including their parents' academic expectations, because their (academic) performance reflects on the family as a whole. In fact, parents use their children's achievements as a measure of their own parental success. The second ethnocultural mechanism that parents employ when raising their children, focuses on parents' investments. Sun (1998) shows that compared to other ethnic groups, Chinese (as well as Japanese and Korean) parents devote more financial, cultural, and human capital, as well as within-family social resources to their children's education (see also: Chao 1996). They are also more aggressive in using these strategies to secure their successful outcomes (Sun 1998). The third tactic through which first-generation Chinese parents in the U.S. increase their children's academic potential is by relocating to a particularly high-ranking school district or an ethnocultural community. This strategy is similar to Lareau's (2003) notion of concerted cultivation because parents take an active role in exposing their children to stimulating environments. Moving to highly-rated school districts improves the quality of children's education and thus their academic potential. It also enables Chinese parents to reside among co-ethnics who share their ethnocultural values, and to live in an area with venues to promote their children's achievement, such as after-school activities, SAT preparation programs, and homework support groups (Lee 2012; Zhou 2009a; Louie 2004).

#### *Upward Assimilation and the Interaction between Ethnoculture and National Context*

Like other immigrant parents, first-generation Chinese are socioeconomically diverse and want their children to do better than they did, or in American terms, to realize the American dream (Goyette 2008). First-generation parents' socio-

economic background, a dose of immigrant optimism, and a selection of their ethnocultural values pushed their children toward academic success and professional development (Geense and Pels 1998; Zhou 2009b; Lee and Zhou 2014). The second-generation, as well as their parents, created a new frame and narrative of what it means to be successful (Lee and Zhou 2014). But, the way in which they adjust to their host country is not only determined by their parents, but also by the opportunities, constraints, and institutions of their national context (Crul and Vermeulen 2003; Crul and Schneider 2009; Kasinitz et al. 2008). By growing up in the receiving country, the second-generation became familiar with the mainstream values and culture of their native-born peers (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Kasinitz et al. 2008; Crul and Vermeulen 2003). While their adjustment to the mainstream enabled them to become successful, it also made them critical of their own upbringing. Consequently, second-generation Chinese may no longer agree with (all) their parents' childrearing styles (Hao and Bonstead-Bruns 1998) or subscribe to their parents' standards of success (Lee and Zhou 2013). In other words, the assimilation process could alter their perspective of their own upbringing and their current childrearing practices.

To date, there are no studies that examine how, and if, second-generation Chinese adults continue any of the ethnocultural practices as they raise their own children. This study examines a select set, focusing on educational expectations and the childrearing mechanisms parents employ to promote their children's academic outcomes. The dynamics described above suggest an interaction between the context in which second-generation Chinese live and this specific subset of their childrearing practices. In different countries, second-generation Chinese are raised with similar (ethnocultural) approaches. However, when they raise their own children, they may have different attitudes and adjust the elements of their ethnoculture that pertains to the academic expectations and success of their

third-generation children to specific elements in their national context.

While Chinese ethnoculture is distinct, many of the ethnoculture values under study here are actually very similar to American ideals. For example, both American and Chinese cultures place high value on (academic) achievement and success. The Chinese ethnocultural emphasis on education and achievement has Confucian roots (Zhou 2009b) but match the U.S. setting, the American Creed and its deeply rooted notions of the American Dream (Lipset 1996; Hochschild 1995). Taking these values into consideration, American and Chinese values are actually more similar than they appear at first blush. Moreover, these aspects of the Chinese ethnoculture are beneficial because in the liberal U.S. welfare state, educational achievement and materialistic success are applauded (Esping-Andersen 1996). Similarities of these entrenched values make contexts for child-rearing very similar which makes it easier for the second-generation Chinese parents to maintain them. This is especially the case when compared to the Netherlands, a nation with a distinct lack of emphasis on material success, especially compared to American and Chinese ethnocultures.

In the Netherlands, the need for higher education and occupational prestige is reduced by a school system that promotes mediocrity and an extensive social security safety net. Although academic achievement does increase socioeconomic wellbeing also here, it is less crucial to a sustainable lifestyle. Hence, the elements of the Chinese ethnoculture that stress academic excellence are less suitable to the mainstream compared to the American mainstream, because they have little added value in a society that places less emphasis on material possessions and status. Past research has demonstrated that when the cultures of origin and receiving context differ greatly, cultural dissonance between parents and children can occur (Zhou 2009b; Geense and Pels 1998; Zhou 2009a) and may lead to the second-generation opposing their parents' focus on performance and success (Zhou 2009b). Second-

generation Chinese may reduce the elements of their ethnoculture that stress education when they raise their own children and consequently adopt more mainstream ethnoculture.

The divergent processes in the United States and the Netherlands suggest that national context interacts with the way that second-generation Chinese conceptualize of parts of their parents' ethnocultural upbringing and the way they transmit these specific elements intergenerationally; parents either accept or oppose the aspects of their ethnoculture that stress their offspring's educational achievement. Although seemingly counterintuitive, these dynamics lead second-generation Chinese in both the U.S. and the Netherlands to choose childrearing practices that promote this element of the assimilation of their third-generation children.

## Research Settings and Methods

### *Data Origins*

Data are based on semi-structured, in-depth interviews with second-generation Chinese mothers and fathers in the United States and the Netherlands. Because this study includes both spouses as respondents, the total of interviewees in the Netherlands is 21 (11 couples, one partner was not present at the interview) and 41 in the United States (21 couples, one partner who was first-generation was excluded). Interviews with both spouses results in an equal gender distribution (all couples were heterosexual). Interviewing both partners at the same time provides dynamic narratives regarding parenting practices, experiences, and aspirations.

To recruit respondents, I posted ads, contacted Chinese organizations, visited day-care centres, joined 'mommy and me' groups, and utilised a snowball sampling technique. Only native-born respondents with foreign-born Chinese parents (China, Hong Kong, Taiwan) and with young children were selected. In the U.S., I focused on the greater LA region, California's largest metropolitan area, which contains more than 10 percent of the Chinese population. In the Netherlands, I conducted interviews in the 'Randstad', the



nation's main urban region which contains twice as many Chinese as elsewhere. Interviews lasted around two hours and took place at a location chosen by the respondents (e.g. their home or a local coffee shop). During the interviews, I took an inductive approach by addressing a same set of topics (through questions, comments, and probes) in both countries. The topics included the respondents' own childhood (e.g. birthplace, siblings, parents' approach towards education): the way they raise their children (e.g. leisure time activities, division of labour, disciplining/rewarding methods), and their educational expectations (e.g. academic prospects, extracurricular activities, choice of school). During the conversations (which took place in either English or Dutch) the 'Tiger Mother Debate' came up frequently. Because the debate was such a 'Hot Topic' during the time of the interviews, this usually happened naturally. I always focused on the respondents' opinion about the book and never on my own.

Throughout the study I utilised Grounded Theory, implying I intersected data collection, analysis, and hypothesis testing. This approach helped me to examine common concepts across countries and to synthesise shared notions. All interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analysed with AtlasTi. After re-reading all the interviews, I coded them based on general topics and then recoded each topic in more detail to dissect specific themes.

#### *Settings and the Cross-National Comparison as a Quasi-Experiment*

Cross-national research can be approached as a quasi-experiment (Bloemraad 2006; Noam 2013). Keeping factors constant between national contexts and research populations creates a pseudo-experimental design. This design allows me to analyse the effect of the 'treatment' (national context) on the variable of interest (childrearing practices) within my research population (second-generation Chinese). To increase the validity of the findings, it is important to hold variables in the countries and the Chinese populations constant. The United States and the Netherlands are

modern developed nations. The U.S. has a larger population than the Netherlands (315 and 17 million respectively), but both have a white majority, and similar age and gender distributions (United Nations 2013; CBS 2013). The Chinese populations in both countries are analogous too: they are about a half percent of the total populations, have similar histories and experiences, and are the largest and fastest-growing Asian groups in their respective countries (CBS 2013; Linder et al. 2011; PewResearchCenter 2013).

This study focuses on two differences between the United States and the Netherlands: their school systems and their (interrelated) social safety net. In the U.S., which is typically described as a 'liberal welfare state', society is stratified, almost bifurcated, and education offers a potential ticket to upward mobility (Esping-Andersen 1996). The education system is untracked and—at least in most public schools—students ostensibly receive the same basic curriculum. One consequence of this system is that it rewards only those who graduate (e.g. acceptance to college, increased chance of merit-based grants, access to better jobs) and penalizes those who do not (low-skill and low-pay jobs that provide limited benefits). Consequently, students aim to outperform their peers, making the U.S. academic system competitive. Moreover, there is a strong belief in personal responsibility and social benefits are only allotted to those in absolute need. Compared to the Netherlands, the U.S. has a higher percentage of the population living in poverty, but the public spending on social welfare as a share of GDP is lower (Dewan and Ettliger 2009). The Netherlands, where social benefits are more abundant, is a typical social-democratic country (Esping-Andersen 1996). The Dutch government provides more social security through income subsidies or other assistance. But, more importantly in light of this study, it also has different education systems and approach towards educational performance (see Holdaway, Crul and Roberts 2009 for an overview). The Dutch education system is tracked from seventh grade. Based on a national test and teacher's recom-

mendations, students are channelled into educational trajectories. Most pupils take the test without preparation because parents and educators consider the scores to represent their innate abilities and potential (Van Tubergen and Van de Werfhorst 2007). Children's tracks determine their subsequent level of high school: lower (*VMBO*), middle (*HAVO*), or higher (*VWO*), and continue after high school into either lower vocational, professional, or academic training. Children of immigrants usually follow the lower track (Crul and Schneider 2009), except second-generation Chinese (Vogels 2011). A tracked education system reduces competition. Since the majority of universities are public and accepts most graduates from academic track (*VWO*) high schools, students have little reason to outperform their peers. Furthermore, the Dutch government provides students with monthly stipends and affordable loans, which reduces the incentive to compete for merit-based fellowships (Van Tubergen and Van de Werfhorst 2007).

### Findings

The divergence in the extent to what the second-generation Chinese in the United States and the Netherlands transmit their ethnoculture reflects how parents and their children adjust to their national context. Before addressing differences in regard to the educational expectations they have of their children and the specific ethnocultural mechanisms they transmit to promote their children's academic outcomes, it is essential to stress the similarities between the second-generation Chinese parents in the U.S. and the Netherlands. Keeping variables constant strengthens the validity in pseudo-experiments (Bloemraad 2006; Noam 2013) and suggests that differences between the two countries are not caused by individual factors, but related to national context.

#### *Similar Socioeconomic Standing and Ethnocultural Background*

Table 1 compares the samples of this study. In both countries, respondents are in their thirties and have young children. (This is in part

because I only selected respondents with pre-teen children and in part because the population second-generation Chinese is still young (Linder et al. 2011; Kasinitz et al. 2008)). In both countries, parents identify with being Chinese; nearly all respondents identify as either only Chinese or as American- or Dutch-Chinese. Parents' ethnoracial identity can impact the way they socialize their children in ethnoracial terms (Hughes et al. 2006). The socioeconomic status (SES) of the second-generation Chinese is similar too. Parents have high levels of education and highly skilled jobs, which reflects the overall populations (Vogels 2011; Louie 2004). SES is related to social and cultural capital and can influence parents' childrearing approach; parents of higher SES have usually higher educational expectations of their children and may ascribe to different cultures (Lareau 2003).

One difference between the parents in each country is their labour-force participation: the average number of working hours each week is higher for parents in the Netherlands than for parents in the U.S., as is the number of respondents with a full-time job (not stay-at-home-parents or students). This is remarkable because the opposite is the case for overall populations in both countries (OECD 2012). Another difference is the sector in which the second-generation Chinese are employed. In the Dutch sample, respondents were more likely to own a (family) business, while respondents in the U.S. were more employed in highly skilled occupations (e.g. architect or physician).

Perhaps second-generation Chinese on both sides of the Atlantic express such resemblance because they were raised similarly. Their accounts on their upbringing include strict rules, limited socialization with native-born peers, and a strong emphasis on education. Their parents' approaches towards their education reflect the childrearing theories on which this study draws (e.g. Chao 2000; Geense and Pels 1998; Zhou 2009b). Respondents repeatedly mention that their first-generation parents had expected them to excel. For instance, parents, such as those

**Table 1: Characteristics of the sample, by country**

Characteristic	The United States		The Netherlands	
	Mean	St. dev.	Mean	St. dev.
<i>Demographics</i>				
Age	39.4	4.79	35.9	3.86
Number of children	1.7	0.71	1.7	0.63
Age of first child	6.2	2.91	4.6	3.17
<i>Ethnic self-identification (%)</i>				
Chinese	47.5		47.5	
American/Dutch Chinese	45		47.6	
American/Dutch	7.5		4.8	
<i>Socioeconomic</i>				
Weekly hours work	38.4	13.13	43.7	13.92
Years of education	18.5	2.50	17.2	1.84
Stay at home parents (%)	20.0		4.5	
Number of respondents	41		21	

of U.S.-born Maria (all names are pseudonyms) were “making sure that we got straight A’s.” First-generation parents also expected their children to obtain at least a college degree, and, as Fen explains “the decision that I was going to college was made not by me.”

Second-generation Chinese perceive their parents’ pressure for high achievements as essential to their ethnoculture. Bao, a mother in the Netherlands, explains that she and her siblings “had to get the highest degree possible, and my parents emphasized this strongly!” She stresses that this was common among her Chinese peers: “the Chinese of my generation, at least the ones we know, were all pushed pretty hard.” The question is, how do second-generation parents in both countries conceptualize these experiences and how do they influence some of their own childrearing practices? As discussed below, analysis of the interviews reveals differences in two domains: expectations of their children’s educational path and their reasons to emphasise education.

### **The Educational Path: Parents’ Expectations vs. Children’s Freedom of Choice**

When second-generation Chinese grew up, their parents accentuated the importance of educa-

tion and academic achievement. Most respondents were at the top of their class, attended university, and even obtained graduate degrees. Their education placed them in the upper-middle class of society, providing plenty of opportunities. Despite their similarities, second-generation Chinese parents in the U.S. and the Netherlands now differ in how they view this element of their upbringing and their intergenerational transmission of these elements of their ethnoculture. In the U.S., parents expect their children to obtain a graduate degree, and parents in the Netherlands are satisfied if their children complete the highest-level high school (VWO). In the former, second-generation Chinese accept their ethnocultural emphasis on education and employ some of their parents’ specific childrearing mechanisms that focus on their children’s academic outcomes. In the latter, parents oppose the emphasis on academic achievement and stress that their children can choose their own educational path, as long as they finish high school.

*U.S. Second-Generation Chinese: “She needs to have at least a graduate degree”*

Second-generation Chinese parents in the United States still see ambition and achieve-

ment as imperative and ascribe their disposition for hard work, zeal, and determination to their ethnoculture. They experienced how beneficial these traits are in their competitive society and how it provided access to the upper-middle class. Because they want the same for their own children, they continue to pass on these ethnocultural values. Most second-generation Chinese parents in the U.S. expect graduate degrees from their children. While parents of most ethnic groups hope that their children will finish university (Goyette 2008), second-generation Chinese aim higher: "I think we would probably expect them to get graduate degrees, you know, go on to a graduate school of some sort" Lydia says of her daughter (8) and son (6). This expectation is similar to the expectations their parents had of them. Parents do not want their children to do worse than they did. Mark explains that because he has a graduate degree he tells his daughter to obtain the same: "at minimum, or else. I mean, I kind of make fun of it, but I said, 'if you don't achieve it, then you fail as a person'."

Parents take their educational demands for granted and do not take their children's wishes into account. They set a minimum level of education for their children from the moment (or before) they are born and focus on these goals rather than looking at their children's capacities. For example, when I ask Karen if she has any educational desires for her toddler and six month-old, she passionately answers: "college, definitely!" Having expectations for children at such an early age emphasises that their children may not have much input, stressing the importance of filial piety. Ruby explains that her two children "know that college is expected. It is not going to be a 'should I go to college?' kind of thing." While it may be that the children of the second-generation Chinese in the United States will rebel against their parents demands at an older age (Lee and Zhou 2013), parents make it seem that they will not allow their children to choose their own educational path.

Parents say that their educational expectations are not unreasonable because they deem

their children smarter than the average. They believe that their children do not need to be pushed that much because, as Fen puts it: "a lot of that stuff comes very naturally." This taken-for-grantedness is a common aspect of culture (Small, Harding and Lamont 2010). It appears that the second-generation accepts the elements of their parents' ethnoculture that focus on education. Parents in the United States are also able to take these for granted because they do not clash with the (educational) values of their surroundings. The American principle that one can create a better life through education and hard work is deeply rooted (Lipset 1996; Hochschild 1995). These mainstream values reinforce parents' dispositions. Still, parents ascribe it to their own ethnoculture as well. They see it as typically Chinese or Asian to stress academic achievements, which accentuate the acceptance of their ethnoculture further. Scott explains why for him ethnoculture and educational achievement are linked:

Education. Education, of course. Gosh, education is... you know, for Asians...Asians just have a thing where we like to criticise and harshly criticise. Like, if you get like an A-minus you must be stupid, or retarded. You must have done something disrespectful to your teacher, that's why you got an A-minus.

This positive stereotyping of their ethnoculture and culturalisation of educational expectations—especially when it is reinforced by teachers—can boost actual academic outcomes (Lee and Zhou 2013). Another indicator that the second-generation Chinese in the U.S. accept their ethnocultural emphasis on education is their effort to promote their children's academic outcomes through mechanisms similar to those of their parents, such as investing in their children's education. Traditionally, Chinese parents support their children's education as part of a 'social contract'; parents invest in their children's schooling and children provide for their parents once they become old and frail (Zhou 2009a). While second-generation Chinese no longer expect their children's assistance in the future, they do continue to invest in their academic path; they

either become a stay-at-home-parent, or as Fen explains “put in the money, or the environment, or whatever we need to help [our daughter] along [in her education].”

Parents also increase the academic outcomes of their children by choosing specific schools. Some send their offspring to private schools, such as Sandra. Sandra explains that she chose a private school to increase the chance that her children will continue to college: “I assume they’ll go to college. I am not paying for private school for them not to go to college.” Other parents move to neighbourhoods within particularly high-rated school districts. Sometimes, as Betty explains, even before their children are born:

When we were looking at this home that was definitely one of the first things we checked out, even though we didn’t have kids at the time. We looked at the school system, the school district here, and the school that we would be sending our kids to.

*Second-Generation Chinese Parents in the Netherlands: “I want her to obtain certain basics, get a foundation”*

Similar to their U.S. peers, second-generation Chinese parents in the Netherlands grew up with parents who had high academic hopes for them. This immigrant generation typically worked long hours in restaurants with minimal compensation. They did not want the same for their children and saw education as the way out. Based on the ethnocultural values of filial piety, second-generation Chinese were required to meet their parents’ expectations (Geense and Pels 1998). But, as the second-generation got older and compared their efforts and outcomes to those of their native-born peers, they became aware of alternatives. They realised that there is more to life than educational accomplishments, and that fulfilment is not an outcome of academic success per se. The second-generation Chinese find themselves with academic competencies or in high-skilled professional jobs to please their parents, not because they chose this path themselves.

Second-generation Chinese explain that they do not want their children to have the same experience and take a different approach. They

disagree with their parents’ ethnocultural emphasis on educational achievement and no longer stress education to the same extent. Contrary to their parents and U.S. peers, they do not instruct their children to obtain (at least) a college degree. Instead, they stress their children’s free choice in deciding whether or not to continue their education and in determining their specific direction. They expect their children to complete the highest level high school (*VWO*) and obtain an educational foundation. A *VWO* diploma, parents argue, provides their children with a solid base and opportunities to choose either a professional or academic career. Marcel says that: “for me it is important that [my son] will attend *HAVO* or *VWO* high school. I don’t care if he will continue to the professional or academic track afterwards.” Marcel’s wife explains that because they both grew up with the pressure from their parents, they do not want to push their children, which, she adds, is very common among her peers: “I also see it among our generation who we meet at church; the younger generation doesn’t want to [push their children].” Yunru and her husband Ruben illustrate this point too. When I ask them about the importance of education for their daughters (4 and 8) Yunru answers that it is “very important. But they are free to choose to study what they want to study, *if* they want to study.” Ruben adds that it is not about the level of schooling but that “the basics are the most important: language, mathematics, and those types of things.” Rather than focusing on their children’s educational endpoint, parents stress their children’s choice in determining their educational path and the importance of basic education. Qing explains: “I don’t think that the education by itself—university or a Ph.D.—is the most important. It is important that the child chooses something that feels good. But, you do have to have a certain base.”

#### **Reasons to Stress Education: Financial Security vs. Personal Happiness**

Second-generation Chinese parents in the United States and the Netherlands give their children



different levels of freedom to make decisions regarding their education. These differences are influenced by the country's school systems and the opportunities after completing education. Parents in the U.S. argue that a graduate degree is the minimum requirement to find a job with financial security. Parents in the Netherlands do not talk about financial wellbeing but stress that their children need a basic education to achieve personal happiness. This discrepancy highlights that parents adjust their expectations to constraints and opportunities in their national contexts.

*In the U.S., High Education Provides More Job Opportunities*

In the United States, second-generation Chinese parents feel they have no choice but to stress education when raising their children. The U.S. society is unforgiving and competitive, parents explain, and education is fundamental to success. Parents insist that a graduate degree can increase their children's potential job security and financial well-being. Sarah explains: "If you want a job, a good job, you have to at least get a Masters (...) you need to do more education to be more valued." Like most second-generation Chinese parents, Sarah believes that children need more education these days. Contemporary employers are looking for workers with at least a college degree. Economists at the Bureau for Labour Statistics (2013) explain that this so-called 'degree inflation' implies that higher levels of education are required for lower skilled jobs and that college degrees are the minimum to get hired for entry level positions. In the U.S., the unemployment rate for people with a college degree is almost half (4.5%) of those with only a high school diploma (8.2%). Since parents motivate their expectations with their children's occupational opportunities and financial wellbeing, it is not surprising that they adjust their outlooks to this degree inflation and prefer graduate degrees. Karen says that she "want(s) them to do well and have opportunities", and realises that a college degree might not be enough. "There's no

guarantee, with a college degree it's still hard to find jobs."

Parents also ascribe the need to create occupational opportunities to their ethnoculture. Karen's husband Steven says: "it is definitely the Asian or Chinese belief that the more...the higher educated you are, or the better school you go to, it opens up greater doors." The association between schooling and future opportunities is a recurring theme among second-generation Chinese in the United States. For example, Lydia, says that "we want to give our kids the best opportunity to make an even better life, at least equivalent or better, so that they can be comfortable and have a good quality of life." Given that it is similar to their parents' expectations, it is safe to assume that they accept this element of their ethnoculture and implement it in their own childrearing. The interactive process stresses the association between context, expectations, and these childrearing practices.

*In the Netherlands, Parents Emphasise their Children's Happiness*

Contrary to their U.S. counterparts, second-generation Chinese in the Netherlands do not see academic success as prerequisite to (financial) wellbeing. They talk negatively about prestige and high income, and object to this element of their ethnoculture. Instead, parents stress their children's happiness. By letting their children choose their own (educational) careers, parents express that their opinion is not more valuable than their children's, which suggests that they oppose their ethnocultural values of filial piety.

Their exposure to alternative approaches of education and academic achievement enabled second-generation Chinese to question their own upbringing. They believe that there are innate limitations to the educational abilities of their children and that having expectations their children cannot meet can result in frustration. While this process has also been documented in the United States (Lee 2012; Hao and Bonstead-Bruns 1998), it only lowered the expectations of parents in the Netherlands. Here, parents feel

that financial wellbeing is not crucial to achieve happiness. Parents do not talk about financial incentives to push their children towards academic achievement. Cheng explains that his children's level of education "depends on their abilities. There is no point in pushing children if it turns out that they do not have the abilities to do more. This will only make them very unhappy." Cheng's argument demonstrates how the childrearing practices of second-generation Chinese in the Netherlands differ from the ones they were brought up with. It stresses also how the conceptualization of their ethnoculture is altered by the dominant notion of education and performance.

Second-generation Chinese in the Netherlands reduce their ethnocultural emphasis on education as a response to their own upbringing and are able to do so as a reaction to the society in which they live. Parents express no concern about their children's (future) financial situation. Growing up in the Dutch society made them realise that education, prestige, and income do not imply a much higher living-standard. Yunru explains how this realisation changed her and her husband's lives and the socialization of their children:

We made very conscious decisions to change our careers so that we could do something we enjoy, and this awareness of 'what is enjoyable and what is important' is something we would like to teach our children too. We don't want them to first think about making money and only then see what they enjoy.

### Discussion and Conclusion

In this paper, I demonstrated that national context interacts with the transmission of specific elements of Chinese ethnoculture. Comparing second-generation Chinese in the United States and the Netherlands shows that parents can adjust their childrearing practices to their context. In the former, second-generation Chinese parents accept the ethnocultural values of high educational achievement; in the latter they oppose them.

U.S.-born Chinese parents continue to have high educational expectations of their children. The Chinese ethnocultural values regarding hard work, zeal, and academic achievement fit well within the American context (Lipset 1996; Hochschild 1995), and allows parents to take these elements of their ethnoculture for granted. Parents want their children to succeed and they continue to display the three ethnocultural mechanisms that promote their children's accomplishments: they raise them with high academic expectations and ethnocultural values such as filial piety and collectivism; they help them succeed by investing in their education, for instance by staying home to care for their children; and they select reputable schools and neighbourhoods. But while second-generation Chinese in the U.S. accept these segments of their parents' ethnoculture, they no longer instil them as punitively as the first-generation parents described in the literature or as austere as the 'Tiger Mothers' depicted in the popular media.

Second-generation Chinese parents in the Netherlands have lower expectations of their children's educational outcomes and (only) require them to finish the highest level high school (VWO). After obtaining the basics, parents leave it to their offspring to decide: continue to university, follow a professional track, or start working. Parents oppose the ethnocultural values regarding education, with which they were raised, and do not want to put their children under the same parental pressure. Happiness, they stress, is their main childrearing goal. Consequently, parents no longer raise their children with these strict ethnocultural values, do not invest in their children's academic outcomes as much, and do not move to specific neighbourhoods. This is not to say that other elements of their ethnoculture—such as diet, holidays, and values—are not important, they might be. But they lie beyond the scope of this study.

Second-generation Chinese parents in the Netherlands are able to reduce the specific elements of their ethnocultural that emphasizes education because the national educa-

tional system offers schooling alternatives and the state provides a social security safety net (Esping-Andersen 1996). Second-generation Chinese parents explain that they do not worry about their children's academic outcomes because they realize that obtaining a VWO high school diploma might be enough to succeed. Indeed, most VWO graduates continue to university and (children of) immigrants are even more likely to do so (Van der Aart 2002). Another reason for second-generation Chinese parents in the Netherlands to only stress this basic education and object their ethnocultural values of academic success may be the accessibility of college. Dutch universities are nearly all public and usually accept VWO graduates from the right specialisation. Moreover, the need for external merit based fellowships is reduced because they have relatively low tuition fees. This Dutch school system is in stark contrast with competitive U.S. school system. In the U.S., only successful high-school graduates can continue to good colleges and/or obtain merit based funding. Thus, here parents have an incentive to stress those elements of their ethnoculture that promote academic achievement.

Another difference between the second-generation Chinese parents in both countries is the money or time that parents invest in their children's education. In the Netherlands, parents are less concerned about school rankings; rarely move to different neighbourhoods, and do not invest in their children's education in any direct way. This is in stark contrast with their peers in the U.S., where, for example, parents are more likely to stay-at-home, suggesting the investment of both time and money in their children. The differences can be partially explained by their respective school systems. In the Netherlands, nearly all primary schools are public and under the same governmental supervision. Hence, they all implement the same core curriculum and are of comparable quality. In the United States, there is a large discrepancy in the quality of schools and school districts; parents can improve the potential academic outcome of their children by selecting a highly-rated school (district) (Zhou 2009b).

The last reason why second-generation Chinese parents in the Netherlands may raise their children with fewer elements of the ethnoculture regarding education could be because there are fewer severe penalties of having lower academic achievements. The Netherlands has a social-democratic welfare system which provides a social security safety net. The U.S. is a liberal welfare state where education provides this security (Esping-Andersen 1996).

The analysis of the findings shows that to what extent second-generation Chinese parents intergenerationally transmit the specific elements of ethnoculture, and the manner in which they do, is influenced by an interaction between their conceptualisation of their own upbringing and their national context. This conclusion should, however, be taken with some caution since findings are drawn on relatively small and select samples. Future research with larger and more diverse samples can indicate whether or not these processes regard the whole second-generation Chinese population, if they apply to other ethnic groups as well, and whether there are in-group differences (e.g. between mothers and fathers).

Thus far, scholars examined either the role of ethnoculture in the childrearing practices of first-generation Chinese (Chao 2000; Geense and Pels 1998) or the incorporation of the second-generation Chinese youth (Kasinitz et al. 2008; Portes and Rumbaut 2001). By bringing these two literatures together, I moved the debate forward. Long-term assimilation processes are in part determined by the intergenerational transmission of ethnoculture. Decedents of immigrants either lose components of their ethnoculture by the third or fourth-generation or merge them with elements of the host culture, creating a type of new hybrid culture and childrearing practices. While this study only examines a selection of ethnoculture, it does provide a piece in the larger 'assimilation' puzzle. It demonstrates that certain aspects of assimilation are not the same in every national context and nor is the culture into which the second-generation mixes

their own culture to create a new hybrid form. Second-generation Chinese parents match their intergenerational transmission of their ethnocultural emphasis on education to the needs of their national surroundings, which, naturally, affects their third-generation children differently. In the U.S., adaptation implies that parents accept the part of their ethnoculture that stresses educational achievement. Their children will most likely continue to obtain high academic achievements, especially given the high socioeconomic status of their parents (Lareau 2003). In the Netherlands, parents adjust to the mainstream by opposing this part of their ethnocultural values; they no longer stress academic achievement and success, and raise their children with values similar to the native-born Dutch, focusing on innate abilities and happiness. In the United States and the Netherlands the second-generation Chinese approach their ethnocultural values regarding education in dissimilar ways—either accepting or opposing them—yet they both adjust them to their national context. These findings indicate that adjustment to the host society may not have the same (long-term) implications in different countries. Although it is too early to examine the educational outcomes of the third-generation Chinese, it is likely that their potential academic achievement, and as such, their socio-economic assimilation, depends on the context in which their parents raise them.

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# Reinvention of Ethnic Identification Among Second Generation Moroccan and Turkish Dutch Social Climbers

by MARIEKE SLOOTMAN (University of Amsterdam)

## Abstract

In this article, a trajectory of immigrant incorporation is identified among ethnic minority social climbers that is characterized by reassertion and reinvention of ethnic identity in early adulthood. In-depth interviews with university-educated, second generation Moroccan and Turkish Dutch show that ethnic identification is relevant for minority social climbers, contrary to what is often assumed. However, this ethnic identification is not a static and self-evident given. This study once more illustrates that ethnic identification not only varies between individuals within an ethnic group, but also varies over time and between contexts. It shows how trajectories of social mobility affect the ethnic identifications of minority climbers and reveals the important role of co-ethnic, co-educated peers. The findings suggest that middle-class segments emerge that articulate their ethnic distinctiveness.

**Keywords:** ethnicity, identification, second generation, social mobility, segmented assimilation

## Introduction

Why do many people with immigrant backgrounds often identify in ethnic terms, 'even' when they are born in the country of residence, and 'even' when they are higher educated? It is widely assumed that the value of one's ethnic background automatically declines and that ethnic identification weakens during processes of upward mobility (Pott 2001). This assumption is negated by empirical evidence that demonstrates that higher educated Moroccan and Turkish Dutch maintain, on average, equal affiliation with their ethnic labels as lower educated individuals of the same ethnic background in the Netherlands (Slootman 2014). Ethnic identification of what I call 'second generation climbers' is an important theme, especially as the children of the post-war immigrants have now become adults and increasingly find ways into the middle classes, not only in the United States (Kasinitz,

Mollenkopf and Waters 2002) but also in Europe (Crul and Schneider 2009). Furthermore, ethnic identification has become topical in the last decennia due to the widespread emergence in many Western European countries of culturalized integration discourses, which are increasingly critical towards cultural and religious diversity (Joppke 2004; Uitermark, Mepschen and Duyvendak 2014).

In this article, I explore how ethnic identification relates to individual trajectories of social mobility among children of immigrants. Based on semi-structured interviews with second generation, university-educated Moroccan and Turkish Dutch with low-class backgrounds, I explore the relevance of ethnicity and how their ethnic identifications depend on social context, period and life-phase. The results reveal that their ethnic identifications are related to their trajectories

of social mobility in particular ways. I show that the main models of immigrant incorporation are not fully adequate to understand ethnic identification among second generation climbers, and I emphasize the importance of attending to relational and dynamic aspects of identification. The findings warn us not to treat ethnic identification as static givens for individuals or entire ethnic categories.

I present the empirical findings by life-stage. I discuss how participants describe their social relations and their positioning in the social contexts in three phases: (1) in their childhood and youth-phase, (2) in their phase of early adulthood at university, and (3) in their adult lives at the moment of the interviews. From these stories, a trajectory emerges that is characterized by reassertion and reinvention of ethnic identification in the climbers' early adulthood, which appears to be specific for climbers who are educational pioneers in their ethnic minority groups. After presenting the results, I interpret this trajectory of reinvention in the light of existing literature on ethnic identification. Before I present the empirical findings, I touch upon the main models of immigrant incorporation and explain my conceptualization of identity. I furthermore describe the Dutch case and the methodological approach.

### **Immigrant Incorporation and Ethnic Identification**

In thinking about the identifications of people with immigrant backgrounds in relation to socio-economic mobility, two famous models of immigrant incorporation spring to mind. The classical integration model of straight-line assimilation regards immigrant incorporation as a process in which immigrants eventually, over generations, become seamlessly incorporated in the middle-class segment of society, both in structural as well as in sociocultural respects. During this process, their ethnic orientations (orientations towards their heritage culture, towards the country of origin and towards people with the same ethnic background) gradually dissolve (Gans 1979; Alba and Nee 1997). This perspec-

tive does not account for the relevance of ethnicity among ethnic minority climbers. Segmented assimilation theory aims to remedy this shortcoming, and argues that for children of immigrants, orientation towards the heritage culture and towards the family and other co-ethnics provide important resources for social mobility (Portes and Zhou 1993; Portes, Fernández-Kelly and Haller 2009). However, the relevance of this perspective seems limited for explaining ethnic identifications among second generation social climbers, as it provides only one, rather instrumental, reason for ethnic identification (as a source for social mobility). Furthermore, the model is primarily applied on the group level and tends to overlook intra-group variations and developments over time (Crul and Vermeulen 2003; Stepick and Stepick 2010). Also, the model is developed for the American situation which, in comparison to the Dutch situation, is characterized by relatively high levels of segregation and the presence of 'native' minority groups. My focus on the development of ethnic identifications throughout individual life courses and the influence of the social context takes a more individual and dynamic perspective.

As ethnicity and identity are complex terms, it is important to explain the concepts I use. Following Brubaker and Cooper (2000) and Anthias (2002), I deem the concept of identity unfit as an analytical concept (see Sloomman 2014). On the one hand, the use of (ethnic) 'identity' has essentializing tendencies, making identity into something that someone just 'has' based on one's background or cultural traits. On the other hand, it is too broad a concept to do the analytical work, as it is used to refer to both structural characteristics and individual affiliations, and to both external labelling and self-understandings (Brubaker and Cooper 2000). Rather than assuming that individuals have a given identity, following many others such as Giddens (1991), Hall (1991) and Jenkins (2008), I focus on *processes* of identification. Focusing on processes enables us to recognize the interactional and temporal aspects of identification. In particular, with 'iden-

tification', I refer to the self-identification of individuals, which can be influenced by the external ascriptions of others and by current stereotypes. Self-identification has to do with how people position themselves, and how they apply the identity-labels that are available (such as 'Moroccan', 'Turkish', and 'Dutch'). 'Identification' has to do with how they relate to these labels and how they experience and define their belonging in social situations. I do not automatically assume that expressions of identification reflect cultural practices and social relations; I prefer to analyse to what extent this is the case. In this paper I analyse to what extent expressions of identification are related to certain practices and relations. When I refer to someone's 'ethnicity', I do not refer to one's identification or sociocultural orientation, but solely to the birth country (or countries) of one's parents. The term 'co-ethnics', then, refers to people whose parents are from the same country as the parents of the individual in question. I do not imply that being co-ethnic automatically entails high levels of recognition, identification, cohesion or solidarity; this needs to be studied rather than assumed. Instead of using the common term 'natives', I use the term 'ethnic Dutch' to refer to people with two Dutch-born parents, as the term 'natives' obscures the ethnicity of the ethnic Dutch and falsely excludes members of the second generation, who are, after all, also born in the Netherlands.

### **The Case of Second Generation Moroccan and Turkish Dutch**

The focus of this article is on the Moroccan and Turkish Dutch in tandem because, as I will explain, the two groups have comparable positions in Dutch society. The Moroccan and Turkish Dutch are the largest ethnic minority groups in the Netherlands and have a Dutch-born second generation that is currently coming of age. Around five percent (4.5%) of the 16.7 million Dutch citizens are Moroccan and Turkish Dutch, of which roughly half belongs to the second generation (CBS 2012). The share of first and second generation Moroccan and Turkish Dutch is much

higher in the larger cities. In some Amsterdam and Rotterdam neighbourhoods, they comprise between forty to fifty percent of the population,<sup>1</sup> making them the largest and often most established groups, particularly among the younger cohorts (Crul and Schneider 2010). In the late 1960s and 1970s, male 'guest workers' from Morocco and Turkey arrived in the Netherlands to work in lower-skilled jobs (Vermeulen and Peninx 2000). Many of them came from rural areas and had extremely low formal education levels. Later, their families followed them to the Netherlands. Everybody, including the original migrants themselves, assumed that they would eventually return to Morocco and Turkey. Hence, for a long time, they were oriented to their homelands and Dutch policy was aimed at facilitating their return (Scholten 2011). Ultimately, many stayed in the Netherlands. The Dutch government actively stimulated the cultivation of Moroccan and Turkish identities and languages till the nineties (Bouras 2012). While most of the first generation remained in the lower socioeconomic strata, the educational position of the second generation is characterized by a large contrast between those who are advancing and those who are lagging behind (Crul and Doomernik 2003). Since the nineties, the share of second generation youth with a Turkish and Moroccan background starting in higher education increased from twenty to over forty percent (CBS 2012: 85). Despite the steady increase, the average education level among the second generation is still much lower than among ethnic Dutch. The ethnic Dutch more often enrol in higher education (nearly sixty percent), finish more quickly, and are less likely to drop out (Crul and Doomernik 2003; CBS 2012).

Moroccan and Turkish Dutch also have a similar status in the dominant integration discourse in the Netherlands. Like in many other European countries, the integration context in the Netherlands has shifted from being relatively toler-

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<sup>1</sup> Amsterdam: <http://www.os.amsterdam.nl/feiten-en-cijfers>, 1 January 2013. Rotterdam: <http://www.rotterdamcijfers.nl>, January 2013



ant to relatively intolerant regarding ethnic and religious difference (Duyvendak and Sloomman 2011). Requirements for sociocultural assimilation have increased (Ghorashi 2006; Scholten 2011). Particularly Moroccan and Turkish Dutch, who are predominantly Muslim, are often portrayed in negative ways (Uitermark 2012). Their supposed 'backward' culture and religion are seen as the root causes for many social problems, such as the perceived educational inferiority of (part of) the second generation in comparison to the ethnic Dutch, the sense that second generation youths are nuisances in public spaces, and the relatively high criminality rates among the second generation. Islam is often presented as incompatible with the 'progressive' Dutch culture (Uitermark, Mepschen and Duyvendak 2014). Ethnic identification and identification as Muslim is often treated with suspicion, and is seen as an unwillingness to fit into Dutch society. At the same time, Moroccan and Turkish Dutch, including the second and even the third generation, are persistently labelled as foreigners (*allochtonen*) and, therefore, as non-Dutch.

### Methods

The empirical data presented in this article were collected through thirteen in-depth interviews with university-educated second generation Moroccan and Turkish Dutch. I selected participants who were born in the Netherlands and who had at least one parent who migrated from Morocco or Turkey, as well as participants who arrived in the Netherlands at a very young age, before they entered the educational system. As the participants needed to reflect on their trajectories of mobility, I selected people who were not at the very beginning of their professional careers, and who were over thirty years old. All of them were born around the moment their family migrated to the Netherlands, making them what I call the 'early' second generation. This means that they grew up in neighbourhoods and attended primary schools that were not (yet) ethnically segregated and were strongly dominated by (lower-class) ethnic Dutch.

Nine of the interviews were conducted with Moroccan Dutch (four female and five male) and four with Turkish Dutch (two female and two male). Only one of the participants had a mixed ethnic background, as one of her parents was born in Morocco and the other migrated from Poland.<sup>2</sup> All participants were in their thirties or early forties at the time of the interview. Some of the participants were in a relationship (mostly married); others were single, and some had children. At the time of the interview, they lived in cities and in villages all over the Netherlands. They grew up in cities and villages all over the Netherlands, as well. All of them went to university and had jobs matching their education levels. Several worked as consultants, some ran companies they (co-) owned, one worked in the medical field, and others worked as researchers, technical engineers, or teachers. Four of the interviews were conducted in 2006, and the rest in 2011. Nearly all participants called themselves Muslim, but how they described their religiosity and what it meant for them greatly varied.

To avoid selecting participants *based on* their ethnic identification, thus selecting on the dependent variable, I did not use organizations with ethnic signatures as a starting point for recruiting. I recruited most participants via my own (primarily ethnic Dutch) private network, covering various professional branches in various parts of the Netherlands. A few participants were recruited via my professional academic network. As participation was voluntary, a certain bias could not be completely avoided. In explaining their willingness to participate, most participants expressed their wish to contribute to the Dutch debate, to be heard, and to challenge negative stereotypes. This implies that the participants are probably characterized by a relatively high social involvement. This bias is not necessarily problematic, as the aim of this study is not about representativity of all second

<sup>2</sup> Pseudonyms are used and personal details are slightly changed for reasons of anonymity.

generation climbers, but about exploring social mechanisms as they occur (among some). This does not mean that these mechanisms occur among all ethnic minority climbers, nor among all participants. Individual variations exist. Nevertheless, the interviews expose trends that point to particular mechanisms and a particular trajectory, which are important to identify and further explore.

The interviews were semi-structured and lasted between one to four hours. They were all in Dutch. To avoid an emphasis on ethnic background and ethnic identity from the start of the interview (and because I was originally primarily focused on their process of social mobility), I introduced the interviews as focusing on trajectories of social mobility among children of immigrant parents. In the first part of the interview, the participants described their educational and work trajectories in a chronological way, focusing on their social environments and crucial decisions. This provided quite a broad impression of the composition of the various social contexts they moved in, and of how they experienced their social relations and their position in the various contexts, without the participants interpreting these situations through the lens of ethnic identification. In the later part of the interview, when we discussed the feelings of being 'Moroccan', 'Turkish' and 'Dutch', we used these details to critically reflect on the participant's articulations of ethnic identification. This approach enabled me to back up more abstract expressions about orientations and identifications with more 'practical' or 'factual' details. In this way, I tried to come to more solid findings about peoples' identifications, as interviews only give access to retrospectively constructed memories and to accounts that are produced in the specific interview setting. To understand the participants' identifications, in the data analysis I closely attended to the use of the ethnic labels, as well as to expressions of belonging that were formulated in terms of 'feeling different', 'feeling similar' and 'feeling normal'.

### **Phase 1: Downplaying Ethnicity in Childhood and Youth**

The accounts of the participants' childhoods were loaded with memories of 'feeling different' and the longing to be 'normal'. As children, the participants yearned to be accepted as normal in the eyes of others. There were various reasons as to why they felt different in their primarily 'white' schools and neighbourhoods. Some participants were bullied throughout their childhoods. Some mentioned examples of differential treatment; for example, when Moroccan and Turkish Dutch children at age twelve were referred to lower consecutive education levels than their equal-performing ethnic Dutch peers.<sup>3</sup> Others did not mention active exclusion, but just felt that their lives deviated from the lives of their ethnic Dutch classmates. Their clothing and appearance differed from their ethnic Dutch peers, or they experienced gaps in knowledge and language skills. One participant recalled that she felt different because she had eight siblings. At home, they spoke Turkish or a Moroccan dialect with their parents, and they had to assist their parents in navigating Dutch society. Many participants felt they stood out and missed out on friendships during childhood because they were not allowed by their parents to join in social events. Some reported that they had internalized negative stereotypes and that they missed co-ethnic role models. They had wondered if 'the Turkish' were indeed less intelligent than 'the Dutch', because there were no co-ethnics in the higher social strata of Dutch society. Or they had assumed that their Moroccan (Tamazight) dialect lacked a written version because the Amazigh people were not smart enough to write – and did not realize this was a consequence of the suppression of Amazigh cultures in Morocco.

Whether because of active exclusion or not, when the participants felt different, this generally was a negative experience. Feeling like an

<sup>3</sup> In the Netherlands the education system is stratified from the start of secondary education at age twelve.

outsider was a reason to try to hide the dimension of difference: their ethnic background. Many participants in their childhood and youth tried to downplay their ethnicity in order to be as 'normal' as possible. They wanted to avoid standing out so that they would be accepted as one of 'us', as the following quotations of Nathalie and Mustapha illustrate. Nathalie remembers a situation when she openly was called names in the classroom:

That was... that was – this felt – this REALLY felt terrible, yes. Yes. And maybe, indeed, maybe that's what makes you behave as-Dutch-as-you-can, as-normal-as-you-can..., as some sort of compensation. (...) When you realize that THAT's a reason to be excluded, you try to fix it and minimize it as much as you can, in order to be as NORMAL as possible. (Nathalie, father from Morocco and mother from Poland)

At primary school, you are just busy trying to fit in. Trying to avoid standing out in a negative way – or in a positive way. That really hurt. – Yes, actually, you have always learned about your cultural background – to actually hide it somehow. (Mustapha, parents from Morocco)

Most parents placed high value on education, and they envisioned bright futures for their children (not only for their sons), that they might become doctors and lawyers. However, in nearly all cases, the practical support they could offer their children was very limited. Often, parental restrictions even hampered the development of their children, not only socially, because the children were not allowed to take part in social events, but also educationally; for example, grown-up children were not allowed to attend the university and the study of their choice, because this required them to move to another city and live on their own. For many parents, in spite of their high educational expectations, it was most important that their child was a 'good' 'Moroccan' or 'Turk'.

### **Phase 2: Joint (Re-) Exploration of Ethnic Identity at University**

Although their secondary school experiences varied, the participants described the moment they

entered university in surprisingly uniform ways. In their secondary school period, some participants felt accepted and developed a positive self-image. Said formed close friendships with ethnic Dutch peers, and his educational achievements made him realize he was doing well and could be proud of himself. Others felt excluded and insecure. Berkant felt terribly unhappy at secondary school, where his unfamiliarity with the life worlds of his ethnic Dutch classmates made him feel isolated and out of place.

At university, the participants suddenly encountered students who shared their ethnic background. This moment was spontaneously recounted in emotion-laden terms by many participants, such as by Said, Berkant and Mustapha:

The funny thing is – at university you find out – Yes, there I DID relate more to, well, Moroccan Dutch students. This was kind of a change. In fact, your whole life you did not do that. There you meet soulmates [*lotgenoten*], higher educated Moroccan Dutch students. That was a real revelation. For all of us. We still are in contact. But I remember the moment of revelation at that time: 'Apparently I am not alone' – I always felt THE exception. They were at your own wavelength, let's describe it this way. There were incredible levels of mutual understanding. Of course, that is fabulous. We surely all were... this outsider, you know. That was a fantastic period, indeed. I primarily related to Moroccan Dutch people. Students. They were my best friends. Look, I also participated in a normal student fraternity, so there I did interact with other – But when you ask me: who did you mostly relate to, then it is primarily [with Moroccan Dutch].

Then, you suddenly ARE at university, you ARE together with people – Well... since the second year, when I became involved in the Turkish student association – that was a PEAK experience. Suddenly, a whole new world unfolds, um – with an urgent need to share your experiences with somebody who went through the same as you did. So that was really a peak, my time at the Turkish student association. Really a peak. (Berkant, parents from Turkey)

So, when at university I did meet Moroccan students, for me that was a relief. Indeed, there was no need anymore to explain myself. About why this and why that. So, at that moment I started to explore my roots, also via my studies, as I did a research project in Morocco. And I became active in

the student environment. Yes, Muslim, Moroccan, whatever, youth association as well – I have since then been very involved with the Moroccan community. I very much enjoyed it. It gave me heaps of energy, and it really made me grow as a person in that period. (Mustapha, parents from Morocco).

These delighted accounts were precipitated by unprecedented mutual recognition in the university setting. There was the sudden insight: 'Apparently, there are more of us'. The participants felt a 'match' with these co-ethnic students, who were on the same 'wavelength'. There was a sudden, urgent need to share stories with people who had lived similar experiences. These co-ethnic students knew what it was like to be, in Said's words, 'the exception' in their school environments, and they encountered identical problems in their relations with co-ethnics. For Karim, meeting co-ethnic student Kamal was 'life changing', as he finally felt appreciated as a person, instead of feeling criticized. Like Karim, Kamal was also burdened by high expectations from his family and 'the entire Moroccan community'. Both men were put 'under a microscope' and felt the pressure to pray and marry, and to behave as 'one of them' (their co-ethnics). They felt the heavy imperative to succeed in educational and professional terms. Sharing these experiences was a relief. Even participants such as Esra and Imane (female participants with a Turkish and a Moroccan background), who initially kept their distance from co-ethnic students, in the end felt like fish in water among them. Contrary to their expectations, these fellow students appeared not to be as conservative as other co-ethnics, but to be modern, liberal and emancipated. Many participants were members and/or founders of Moroccan or Turkish student associations. This does not mean that the participants' university networks only consisted of co-ethnics; their friends (who were all higher educated) had various ethnic backgrounds, including ethnic Dutch, and various participants (also) participated in 'general' student associations without ethnic signatures. However, despite the ethnic variety, it was these *co-ethnic co-educated* peers whom

many participants felt the closest bonds with, who were their real 'soulmates'.

In their early adult life, many felt the increasing need to explore and reassert their ethnicity because it increasingly felt like a (missing) part of themselves. Hicham explained that he and many of his co-ethnic peers struggled with a dawning sense that during their process of social mobility, they had neglected a 'part of themselves', which suddenly started feeling like a loss. Ahmed felt an increasing desire to develop his 'Moroccan side', which made him move back to the city where his parents lived. He wanted to find out what being Moroccan meant for him and how it had shaped him. In addition, he longed to strengthen the bond with his family. He now has a new bicultural 'balance', which makes him feel happy and 'peaceful'. Not only Ahmed identified in dual terms; nearly all participants expressed that, in addition to feeling 'Moroccan' or 'Turkish', they also felt 'Dutch' (and sometimes they indicated that they felt Dutch even 'more'). They had come to see their dual identification as a valuable asset. Feeling 'Dutch' no longer stood in the way of feeling 'Moroccan' or 'Turkish', nor the other way around.

### **Phase 3: Continued Ethnic Identification in Adult Life**

The reasserted ethnic identification extends into their current lives and, for most participants, this is reflected in their friendships and social commitments. Many participants showed a social engagement that was (partly) related to their ethnic background; they aimed to improve the situation of stigmatized minorities in society, and they were involved in a variety of social initiatives. They aimed to bridge cultural differences or support the next generation of co-ethnics. Berkant explained that he wanted to provide co-ethnic youth with the co-ethnic role-model that he himself didn't have. Regarding friendships at the time of the interview, nearly all of the participants' close friends were higher educated, having various ethnic backgrounds, including ethnic Dutch. Still, just like at university, many – or even

most – of these friendships were with co-ethnics. Furthermore, quite a few participants helped found and/or were active members of professional organizations with co-ethnic signatures. (This, by the way, did not stop them from being members of ‘general’ professional organizations without ethnic signatures).

All participants, except Nathalie (who has a mixed ethnic background), refer to themselves as (at least partially) Moroccan or Turkish. Besides the reasons for this ethnic assertion mentioned above (that ethnicity starts to matter because it increasingly feels like an essential part of oneself and because it appears to have shaped one as a person in significant ways), there are additional reasons to assert one’s ethnic identity, which depend on the direct interactional context. One reason to assert one’s ethnic identity in certain contexts is to challenge negative stereotypes. Particularly because of their educational and professional success, social climbers are able to negate the negative stereotypes that are connected with ‘Moroccans’ and ‘Turkish’ (and ‘Muslims’). De Jong frequently encountered this behaviour among the Moroccan Dutch college students she studied (2012: 79). Said explained that by highlighting his ethnic background as a successful professional, he proved widespread negative stereotypes wrong:

I actually highlight it all the – I am just PROUD of it. I find it important to – I WANT to show that you can be both Moroccan and successful. I want to, very deliberately, show that these two CAN be combined. Whenever I can, I also say I am a Muslim. Whenever I can I say I celebrate the Ramadan. And whenever I can I say I regularly pray. And whenever I can I say that I... whatever – that I visit Morocco every year (...) To SHOW the right picture and to show that in your mind you are too black-and-white. (Said, parents from Morocco)

Another reason for ethnic identification is external labelling. Being labelled in ethnic terms can cause individuals to self-identify in ethnic terms. Rumbaut calls this ‘reactive ethnicity’ (2008). All participants feel addressed by the polarizing dominant integration discourse, and they frequently encountered moments that others

labelled them as ‘Moroccan’, ‘Turkish’ or ‘Muslim’ (in other words: as ‘not-Dutch’). For some, the attention to their ethnic background and the apparent social relevance of minority ethnicity raised their interest and led to exploration and increased affiliation with their ethnic identity. For others, this just led them to present themselves in ethnic terms, because they felt identification with other labels is futile when it is not accepted by other people. Ahmed’s quote illustrates this:

Actually, now I think about it... Nine out of ten times I am not addressed as Dutch, but as Moroccan [by ethnic Dutch], whereas inside I feel like a Dutch Moroccan, both. (...) Look, I actually do not call myself Dutch, because you are not seen as Dutch. (Ahmed, parents from Morocco)

Clearly, when one is not accepted as Dutch, it can be hard to claim that one is Dutch (see also the Dutch studies of Omlo 2011 and Van der Welle 2011). External labelling as ‘Moroccan’ or ‘Turkish’ enhances the social relevance of one’s ethnic background and makes it hard to escape it. Although some climbers might have expected that their social mobility would halt the exclusionary labelling as ‘Moroccan’ or ‘Turkish’ – just like the Moroccan Dutch college students hoped for in De Jong’s study (2012) – for most respondents, this turned out not to be the case.

### **A Trajectory of Reinvention Among Pioneering Minority Climbers**

The empirical findings reveal a specific development of ethnic identification as it takes place among second generation climbers, which is parallel with their trajectories of social mobility. During childhood and youth, many Moroccan and Turkish Dutch participants tried to downplay their ethnicity, because in their primarily ‘white’ environments, they feared that they would be excluded because of their ethnic background. In early adulthood, many social climbers started reshaping and reasserting their ethnic identities. This consecutive rejection and reassertion of ethnic identity is also observed among other groups, such as Chinese youth in Britain (Song 2003: 111), or Asian Americans in the United States (Min and



Kim 2000). In the case of the Moroccan and Turkish Dutch, their co-ethnic, co-educated peers at university appeared crucial in this process of reassertion. Many of the participants experienced unprecedented levels of understanding among these students, who shared both their ethnic background and their education level. In their later lives, for most participants, their ethnic identifications had become important and valued parts of themselves (in combination with a self-identification as Dutch), which the participants asserted in certain contexts at certain moments.

Characteristic for this trajectory is the reinvention of ethnic identification in early adulthood. Participants not only *reasserted* their ethnic identity (which they had downplayed previously), but they also *reshaped* their ethnic identity to make it comply with their higher education levels. This is implied by the compelling narrations about meeting co-ethnic students at university. Meeting co-ethnic students was described as a 'revelation', which indicates that the participants had not experienced their ethnic identity in a way that felt applicable to their personal experiences until they met other higher educated co-ethnics. It is through the specific social interaction with their co-ethnic, co-educated peers that the social meaning of their ethnicity fell into place and became more fitting. Together, they created a relation to the ethnic labels that applied specifically to them, as higher educated Moroccan and Turkish Dutch.

I reflect on this trajectory in the remainder of this section. First, I argue that the role of the co-educated and co-ethnic peers at university is important for understanding the reassertion of ethnic identification among minority climbers. Next, I explain how the ethnic identification among the social climbers that were studied depended on their social mobility, and why this particular trajectory is specific for minority individuals who are educational pioneers. I then discuss the parallels with the idea of a 'minority culture of mobility', which indicate that this reinvention of ethnic identity among

minority climbers is a relevant and broad social phenomenon.

#### *The Role of Co-Educated Co-Ethnic Soulmates*

Although the resurgence of ethnic identity at university is not unique to the Moroccan and Turkish Dutch climbers studied, their case complements the explanations offered by other authors for such resurgence. Waters (1996) points to heightened ethnic identifications of both 'black' and 'white' students in college. She explains that interaction with people who are different makes 'individuals realize the ways in which their backgrounds may influence their individual personality'. My findings show that for Moroccan and Turkish Dutch climbers (who attended largely 'white' secondary schools), it is rather the encounter with similarity and mutual understanding than with difference that made them realize how their specific backgrounds had influenced their lives.

Min and Kim's study among Asian-American professionals (2000) confirms the importance of similarity for the resurgence of ethnic identification among climbers at college. However, the way in which they relate this similarity primarily to sharing one's ethnic background appears to be too simplistic. Similar to the Moroccan and Turkish Dutch participants, the Asian-Americans in Min and Kim's study had wanted to conceal their ethnicity in their childhoods because of the fear of exclusion. At college, however, this concealment was replaced with a sudden exploration and establishment of ethnic identity, in their interactions with other co-ethnic students. Min and Kim explain this reassertion by the large presence of other Asian Americans in colleges and by how colleges nurture the Asian ethnicity, such as by offering courses on Asian countries and languages. However, contrary to this American case, in the Dutch case, university curricula did not support a fostering of Moroccan or Turkish identity, nor was there a large presence of co-ethnic peers. The interviews show that the mutual understanding among these peers, which led to the ethnic reassertion and reinvention, was

based on a combination of shared ethnic backgrounds and shared pathways of social mobility. In other words, it was not only that their peers shared their ethnic backgrounds that helped these students form a fitting ethnic identification at university, but rather that their peers shared *both* their ethnic background *and* their educational trajectory. Issues that were of importance to them (such as having a progressive mentality, receiving disappointingly low secondary-school advice, experiencing pressure from parents to be successful and to remain a 'good' Moroccan or Turk at the same time) only led to mutual understanding among these co-educated, co-ethnic peers, who experienced comparable processes of social mobility.

#### *Social Mobility and Educational Pioneers*

The findings underscore the relevance of the intersection of ethnicity and education level. The role that ethnic background played for the participants was mediated by their education level. Consequently, ethnic identification is shaped in particular ways by social mobility, as are trajectories of ethnic identification. For the participants, it was not the case, as it is often assumed, that their upward mobility rendered their ethnic background irrelevant, nor did it lead to a weakened ethnic identification. This observation parallels the findings of many other studies among the same ethnic groups as well as among ethnic groups in other countries (see for example Buitelaar 2009; Min and Kim 2000; Pott 2001).

The trajectory of social mobility influenced the ethnic identification of the second generation climbers in two ways. First, the trajectory of upward mobility determined the social contexts in which they manoeuvred. Contrary to the situation at lower education levels, in their higher educated environments, they were among the very few with a minority background. At the same time, their education level and profession made them distinctive among their family and other co-ethnics, who are predominantly lower-class. This particular intersection of two characteristics shaped their belonging in various envi-

ronments. It also caused the need to reshape the ethnic labels, and led to the unprecedented mutual understanding among co-educated co-ethnics. Secondly, upward mobility created the opportunity to negate negative stereotypes, although this requires a clear articulation of one's ethnic identification. A high education level and a middle-class status equip the minority climber to refute negative stereotypes, provided that his (or her) ethnicity is noticed.

The trajectory of the reinvention of ethnic identity for ethnic minority climbers who are educational pioneers in their ethnic groups, as it emerged from the empirical data that I discussed, is unique in two ways: Firstly, the participants did not assert their ethnic identity until they met co-ethnic students at university; with hardly any co-ethnics in their secondary schools, they did not meet any co-educated co-ethnics until they entered university.

Secondly, due to an absence of a 'middle-class ethnic identity', they had to reshape their ethnic identities in order to make them applicable to their achieved education levels. When the participants grew up, there was a complete lack of co-ethnic role models embodying success in the Netherlands. What was considered typically 'Moroccan' and 'Turkish' in the Netherlands was, therefore, primarily constructed in relation to the lower class. This affected the participants' view of what it meant to be Moroccan or Turkish, as is illustrated by memories displaying that they had internalized demeaning stereotypes. The interviews suggest that they also needed to break with ethnic stereotypes that were dominant among co-ethnics. In their pursuit of social mobility, participants frequently collided with the strict norms of being a 'good' 'Moroccan' or 'Turk' as held by their parents and other co-ethnics, the anecdote about not being allowed to leave the parental home to attend a distant university, as a good example. Some participants reported that co-ethnics were critical about the high social positions of other co-ethnics, whom they condemned for being 'too Dutch'. This indicates that, for participants, it could be hard

to combine (aspects of) social mobility and the accompanying acculturation with what was generally considered a 'good' 'Moroccan' or 'Turk'. The absence of higher educated co-ethnic predecessors and of alternative Moroccan or Turkish identifications that fitted the participants' higher education levels explains why meeting co-ethnic students felt like a revelation and why the role of ethnicity suddenly fell into place. It also explains that they jointly worked to reshape their ethnic identities in order to make the labels 'Moroccan' and 'Turkish' feel applicable to their higher education levels.

*A 'Minority Culture of Mobility', or Rather 'Minority Middle-Class Capital'*

The prevalence of ethnic identity among minority social climbers in adapted forms to fit the achieved middle-class status echoes the idea of a 'minority culture of mobility', introduced by Neckerman, Carter and Lee (1999). These authors argue that segmented assimilation theory overlooks a specific trajectory of assimilation: the assimilation into an existing minority middle class. They argue that minority middle-class cultures exist in response to the particular challenges faced by ethnic minority climbers, just like we have seen in the discussion of the Dutch case in this article. In the professional realm, dominated by ethnic majority members, ethnic minority climbers stand out because of their minority ethnicity and their lower-class background. In the spheres of their families and co-ethnic community, they stand out because of their achieved middle-class status. These challenges lead to the development of specific cultural elements and specific social spaces (with co-educated, co-ethnic soulmates), which protect from discrimination, and where the minority climbers can switch to familiar communication styles and enhance their skills to manoeuvre in both kinds of settings (see also Carter 2003; Clerge 2014; Lacy 2004; Mehan, Hubbard and Villanueva 1994; Vallejo 2009; 2012). Actually, because of the static and bounded connotations of the term 'culture', and because these cultural elements seem to help

people deal with social mobility rather than aim to enhance mobility, I prefer the term 'minority middle-class capital' to a 'minority culture of mobility'.

This idea of a 'minority culture of mobility' or 'minority middle-class capital' parallels my argument in its emphasis on the possibility of being middle-class without completely assimilating into the ethnic majority mainstream, and in presenting an alternative incorporation trajectory of becoming middle-class with a *middle-class minority identity*. In addition, the literature supports the idea that the ethnic identification of minority climbers is not a mere adoption of common ethnic images, but rather entails an adaptation of ethnic identity to the achieved middle-class status. The Dutch case differs from the model of Neckerman and colleagues, because in the case of the United States, a minority middle class (of African-Americans) is already available to other minority groups as a possible destination for assimilation. In the case of the Moroccan and Turkish Dutch pioneering climbers, however, there was no such minority middle-class available to tap into, and instead they had to create it themselves.

### **Conclusion and Discussion**

In this article, I have shown that for the case of upwardly mobile second generation Moroccan and Turkish Dutch individuals, ethnic identification is by no means irrelevant. Many of these social climbers identify in ethnic terms and feel affiliated with ethnic labels. As we have seen, there are various intrinsic and extrinsic reasons for (re-) assertion of their ethnic identity, which partly relate to their social mobility. Many of the participants increasingly realized how strongly their ethnic background has shaped them as persons and affected their experiences in all kinds of social environments. They realized this all the more once they met co-ethnics who shared their high education levels. Some even felt they had 'ignored' a part of themselves throughout their climb. Sometimes participants accentuate their ethnic identity to challenge negative stereotypes,

or they do so in reaction to persistent labelling by others. These reasons indicate that the climbers' ethnic identification is not solely 'symbolic' (Gans 1979), as their ethnic backgrounds had very tangible consequences. These reasons also show that the reasserted identification is not purely 'reactive' (Rumbaut 2008), as it is much more than merely a reaction to external labelling.

What the findings teach us about the character of ethnic identification resonates with other empirical studies. In the trajectory I exposed, the ethnic identifications of the social climbers were reinvented: the meanings of the labels were adapted to their achieved positions. This underscores the variable and dynamic character of ethnic identification that also emerges from other studies. For example, Baumann analyses how the meaning of ethnicity is renegotiated in the London Southall neighbourhood among people with various ethnic backgrounds (1996). Pott shows how Turkish German university students employ ethnic identification in various ways (2001), and Bhatia and Ram explain how political events suddenly changed the ethnic self-identification of Indian Americans (2009). This dynamic character is furthermore illustrated by the development of ethnic identification throughout the individuals' lives. The relation of individuals with the ethnic labels is influenced by an interplay of feelings of belonging, experiences of difference and sameness, demographic composition of the social environment, external ascriptions, and social discourses, and therefore varies per phase and per social context. Wessendorf's study shows that a similar complex of factors influences the personal identifications of second generation Italian migrants throughout their life courses (2013). The Dutch case studied here reveals that these factors make the particular trajectory of reassertion and reinvention of ethnic identification unique for minorities that are educational pioneers in their ethnic groups.

The findings demonstrate the limited applicability of the main integration models to understand the identificational aspects of incorpora-

tion processes of immigrants, as these models tend to underestimate or overlook the multifaceted relevance of ethnic background and ethnic identification for immigrants (and their offspring) who are upwardly mobile. In addition, the macro, or group level, perspective of these models does not do justice to variations between individuals, between life stages and even between contexts. To do justice to the experiences of minority individuals, we should acknowledge intra-group variations, dynamics over time and the role of the context (such as the national discursive climate and the demographic composition of schools and neighbourhoods). If Moroccan and Turkish Dutch were solely analysed as if they were homogeneous groups, and if individuals are thought to have autonomous and static ways of identification, the dynamics exposed in this article would be entirely overlooked.

Although the findings cannot be generalized as 'the' trajectory of ethnic minority climbers, this article identifies a trajectory of incorporation that is hitherto underexposed. This trajectory of reinvention is important to notice and to further study because it contributes to our understanding of the prevalence of ethnic identification among social climbers with immigrant or ethnic minority backgrounds. It indicates that middle-class individuals, or even middle-class segments, emerge that do not lose their ethnic distinctiveness.

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# The Fine Art of Boundary Sensitivity. Successful Second Generation Turks and Moroccans in the Netherlands

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## Abstract

This article investigates in what ways the highly educated second generation of Turkish and Moroccan descent in the Netherlands deal with the increasingly impermeable, bright boundaries in various fields in Dutch society, including the labour market. We find evidence that these individuals employ a strategy of sameness and difference throughout their careers to deal with societal and work-related boundaries. Their emphasis on professional sameness opens up ways to relate to and instil confidence among colleagues with a background of native parentage. They avoid giving up parts of their identity through assimilation by keeping their differences in place where it matters most to them. This juggling of sameness and difference seems to be an individual and situational balancing act, based on an awareness that boundaries exist, and a sensitivity towards dealing with them.

**Keywords:** second generation, professionals, labour market, social boundaries, sameness/difference

## Introduction

The topic of migration in the Netherlands has received ample attention in Dutch public discourse for quite some time now. This attention has mainly been directed towards negative aspects related to migration and migrants, and specifically towards migrants with an Islamic background.

Stemming from migrants is the so-called “second generation”. This group consists of children of migrants who are themselves born in the country of settlement: in our case, the Netherlands. This second generation, and again the Islamic group in particular, also receives quite some negative attention in public discourses (cf. Slootman and Duyvendak forthcoming; Entzinger 2009: 8; Ketner 2009: 81; Vasta 2007: 714-715).

Because of these predominantly negative discourses, and a concurrent call for ethnic minority adjustment to ethnic majority norms

as the solution to problems related with ethnic minorities in society (Vasta 2007: 714; Ghorashi 2006: 16), ethnic boundaries in various fields in Dutch society seem to have become more distinct and impermeable over the years, or as Alba (2005: 20) calls it “brighter”, allowing no ambiguity about membership, and drawing a straight demarcation between those within the boundary lines and those outside (cf. Vasta 2007: 736). These increasingly bright boundaries can easily act to exclude (Alba 2005: 24).

In contrast to the dominant discourses about problems, as well as the actual problems that exist among the second generation, a sizeable number of the Moroccan and Turkish second generation, both male and female, is doing well within education (cf. Crul and Heering 2008; Crul, Pasztor and Lelie 2008: 25; SCP 2011) and the labour market (Entzinger 2009: 8; SCP 2011).

In this article we will primarily focus on the central question *what strategies highly educated second generation people of Turkish and Moroccan descent apply to gain entrance to and succeed in the Dutch labour market*. This focus on the labour market, and particularly on the different phases of the successful second generation's labour market careers, has two main reasons. Firstly, most of the research on successful second generation youth has been done in the field of education. Research on the labour market position of successful immigrant youth is still scarce. Secondly, we expect bright boundaries to be especially in place in the labour market, as the parameters for being qualified are fuzzier there than, for example, in the education system with its rather clear points of measurement. We can expect discrimination in hiring people with an immigrant background, a lack of possibilities of being promoted on the job and problems with acceptance of people with an immigrant background in leadership positions.

We will make use of the Dutch TIES<sup>1</sup> survey data from 2008 on the second generation in Europe and interviews of the Pathways to Success Project<sup>2</sup> from 2012 on successful second generation people in Amsterdam and Rotterdam. The two research projects show that the overwhelming majority of the highly educated second generation has a job and most of them have a job in line with their education. This result in itself is already interesting, since research has shown that the second generation is not always able to fulfil their educational promise with corresponding jobs (Alba 2005: 41) and that a so-called "glass ceiling" is in place for the second generation in the Netherlands (Entzinger 2009: 19).

<sup>1</sup> TIES stands for The Integration of the European Second generation, a large scale international study on the second generation in Europe, conducted in eight countries encompassing 15 European cities during 2007 and 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Pathways to Success Project entails in-depth interviews executed in 2011 and 2012 among successful second generation Turks and Moroccans in the two largest cities in the Netherlands: Amsterdam and Rotterdam.

We will continue this article with a theoretical discussion, followed by the methodology and an analysis of the interviews and how our findings relate to the theoretical outlines. We will end with a conclusion based on our central research question.

## **Theoretical Framework of our Study**

### *Ethnic Boundaries*

Boundaries in societies between different groups of people have long been in place, such as the boundaries between those who are affluent and those who are not, between men and women, and between people with different religious beliefs, to name just a few. Cultural and ethnic differences have often been the subject of research, among other things, to understand identity processes and processes of in- and exclusion.

The focus on how ethnic boundaries are drawn came under discussion when Barth claimed in 1969 that boundaries are not merely a given; they are social structures, making the boundaries themselves of more importance than the 'cultural stuff' (Barth 1994: 12). Barth explains how boundaries are drawn through an analysis of the power processes involved. Barth modified this viewpoint in his later work (see, for instance, Barth 1994), stating that both the boundaries and the 'cultural stuff' are important in understanding ethnic identity processes. He points out that central and culturally valued institutions and activities in an ethnic group may be deeply involved in their boundary maintenance by setting internal processes of convergence into motion (Barth 1994: 18). Boundary processes can thus not be properly understood by solely looking at how boundaries are created; one also has to pay attention to the people and their habits – that are partially shaped by cultural content of experiences – inside the boundaries.

### *Bright and Blurred Boundaries*

Boundaries seen as partially social constructions can help to understand why some boundaries seem more fixed and difficult to cross than others. This is because boundaries are, at least to

a certain extent, made to delimit people who either belong to a given group, or who don't. In other words, the processes of power, which result in in- and exclusion, essentially determine the rigidity of boundaries. This rigidity of boundaries plays a central part in a new theory about the importance of boundary crossing or blurring (Alba 2005).

Alba speaks of 'bright boundaries' when referring to boundaries that leave little to no room for questions about belonging, and which draw a sharp distinction between individuals being within the boundary lines and those who are not (ibid: 24). These bright boundaries come about through institutionalized interrelations between 'normative patterns' (ibid: 26) that indicate who belongs and who does not. Bright boundaries require people who are outside of the boundary to fully assimilate to the cultural norms and habits that are predominant within the boundary lines. Bright boundaries thus call for 'boundary crossing', which involves individuals adopting the norms and values of the "other side" of the boundary, enabling them to become included in the group of which they want to be a part. This boundary crossing changes nothing about the nature of the boundary. It demands a personal change of the individual wanting to gain entrance to the group (ibid: 23; Wimmer 2008: 1039).

Crossing a bright boundary can be a challenge for individuals. Not only does it mean that boundary-crossers have to leave behind what is familiar to them in terms of cultural habits and values, but it also imposes the threat that they might become an outsider of their former group, while maybe always remaining some sort of outsider within the new group (Alba 2005).

Boundary crossing offers a way to deal with bright boundaries; yet, it is not the only way in which individuals can try to establish access to the dominant group. Alba (2005: 23) also mentions 'boundary shifting' and 'boundary blurring'. Boundary shifting touches on boundaries changing in such a way that those who were once outsiders become insiders and it '...requires large-scale preliminary changes that bring about a con-

vergence between ethnic groups' (ibid: 23). An example of boundary shifting is the inclusion of Judaism within the dominant Western religions, both in Europe and in the United States. Such a large-scale change does not happen overnight and, according to Alba, anything similar is not likely to happen anytime soon for new migrant groups, if they are to happen at all in a time of continuous migration (ibid: 23-24). Furthermore, boundary shifting seems to imply an absence or, at least, a sharp decline of the brightness of boundaries. One of the ways through which this decline can come about is by means of boundary blurring.

Unlike boundary shifting, boundary blurring does not involve a large-scale societal change in order for so-called "outsiders" to belong, although it may set in motion processes of boundary changes. Neither does it call for so-called "outsiders" to give up on their ethnic identity in order to belong, as is the case with boundary crossing. Blurring boundaries '...implies that the social profile of a boundary become[s] less distinct (...), and individuals' location with respect to the boundary may appear indeterminate' (ibid: 23). Blurred boundaries allow for belonging in combination with multiple ethnic identities without asking for a 'zero-sum choice between identities' (Slootman and Duyvendak forthcoming), as is the case with bright boundaries. Blurring boundaries thus entails diminishing the brightness of a boundary, resulting in less clear demarcations between those who belong inside the boundary, and those who do not. This gives way to more permeable group boundaries, which, moreover, allow for greater chances of the "outsiders" identifying with the new group (Ersanilli and Saharso 2011: 912).

Boundary blurring thus seems to be an alternative to boundary crossing (at least for those people wanting to gain entrance to the dominant group) and, in many cases, is a more feasible option than boundary shifting. Yet, how does the social profile of a boundary actually become less distinct? In other words, what is needed for social boundaries to become less bright and

more blurred? According to Alba, a possible explanation for blurring a boundary is when boundaries are considered 'porous and allow for the incorporation of cultural elements brought by immigrant groups' (ibid: 25). And while this explanation can be considered valid for the United States and its century-old history of large migration flows, how can boundary blurring be achieved and explained for societies such as the Netherlands, where the extensive labour migration after the Second World War demarcated the beginning of a modern migration society? The Netherlands has become increasingly intolerant towards migrants and ethnic minorities (Vasta 2007), claiming an 'imagined national community' (ibid: 736) in which the Dutch of native parentage 'own the place (...) because they were there first' (Slootman and Duyvendak forthcoming). They ask for a zero-sum decision between ethnic identities (ibid; Ghorashi 2010) and make it 'near impossible for ethnic minorities to integrate into and become part of a Dutch national identity' (Vasta 2007: 736).

#### *Boundary Drawing in the Netherlands*

In the Netherlands, as well as in other North-Western European countries, discourses and policies related to migrants (and the second generation) have changed over the years, becoming more negative and leading to more exclusion in various fields of society (Ghorashi 2006; Vasta 2007; Entzinger 2009; Ersanilli and Saharso 2011; Slootman and Duyvendak forthcoming). This exclusion is manifested, among other things, through discrimination of immigrants and their children in the labour market (cf. Foner and Alba 2008; Siebers 2009a).

This clear social distinction between immigrants and their children, on the one hand, and people of native parentage on the other (Alba 2005: 20), seems to affect Muslims the most (cf. Ghorashi and Sabelis 2013). This is partly because Northern European societies generally view religion as a problematic factor when it comes to immigrant adjustment and belonging. Moreover, Islam as such receives the most atten-

tion (Crul and Mollenkopf 2012; Foner and Alba 2008: 368). These exclusionary (as opposed to integrated) practices play a crucial part in facilitating or hampering the second generation's feelings of belonging and participating in society (Crul and Schneider 2010).

#### *Dealing with Bright Boundaries*

Recent research in the Netherlands by De Jong (2012) among highly educated second generation youth of Moroccan descent shows how they try to find ways around the bright boundaries. She found that the students show an awareness about the multiplicity of their (ethnic) identity, and, moreover, an awareness about which parts of their identity to highlight or not in particular situations and contexts. The students in De Jong's study see attending higher education as a means to become part of mainstream society and as a way to escape the mostly negative discourses related to their ethnic group. At the same time, they do not want to denounce parts of their ethnic and religious identity. They do, however, usually keep these parts private, mindful that expressing precisely these features might hinder them in their attempt to belong. They emphasize as such their "sameness" based on being fellow students, but they do not solely adapt to Dutch norms, values and practices, as they simultaneously try to maintain the values of the ethnic (and religious) group to which they belong through their parents' background. By staying true to the values of their ethnic group, they stay loyal to their parents, gaining trust and freedom from them that is needed for their participation in higher education.

The students in De Jong's study thus try to belong to the majority culture by choosing to keep their ethnic and religious identity intact but private. They do not openly portray their differences compared to the majority group in their dealings with the people of native Dutch parentage because they realize that their religious and ethnic identity might frustrate their attempt to be seen as the same, thus hindering their attempt to belong to the majority group.



These findings are in line with research done by Siebers (2009a) in a study on employees of the Dutch national tax administration. He found that first generation ethnic minority employees actively employed the strategy of wanting to be seen as a 'good colleague', stressing, as did the second generation in De Jong's study, their sameness in relation to their native Dutch colleagues. These migrant employees are aware that showing their difference, whether explicitly through particular clothing such as a head scarf, or more implicitly through respecting religious customs while in the work environment, such as abstinence of alcohol during company parties, can compromise the sameness relationship with their native colleagues. This awareness of the risks involved in showing "difference" is reflected in the idea that sameness – instead of equality – is the organizational norm (Ghorashi and Sabelis 2013; Holvino and Kamp 2009; Van den Broek 2009; Puwar 2004), and therefore 'the other' is tolerated as long as the sameness is not challenged.

The studies conducted by De Jong and Siebers show the central importance of de-emphasizing ethnicity in various public spheres, while simultaneously keeping some aspects of ethnic and religious identity intact. In environments in which boundaries are particularly bright, at times they also emphasize similarities based on other social divisions (cf. Wimmer 2008: 1031) as an individual strategy. For the strategies to be 'successful', the individuals need to be flexible in operating in different contexts and be keenly aware of the boundaries and the sensitivities involved. The second generation seems particularly apt to do this. The second generation possesses the ability to 'sometimes negotiate among the different combinations of immigrant and native advantage and disadvantage to choose the best combination for themselves' (Kasinitz et al. 2008: 7). This capacity to negotiate between various aspects of one's identity permits people of the second generation to preserve important elements of their ethnic background, while at the same time enabling them to bring to the fore identity

aspects linking them to members of the ethnic majority group.

To explore more precisely the strategies the second generation employs, we will look in detail at different phases of their labour market careers. A first hurdle in their labour market careers is the transition from an educational institution to the labour market. The unemployment rates of immigrant youth for years have been higher than those of youngsters of native parentage background, which is even more so the case since the economic recession. Several explanations have been offered, most importantly discrimination and the lack of network contacts "in the right places" (Crul and Doornik 2003: 1057; Bovenkerk *et al.* in Vasta 2007: 723), as well as a general lack of places to do apprenticeships, leaving it up to young people themselves to enter the labour market (Crul and Vermeulen 2003: 981). It has also been argued that internalized negative views could be detrimental to their self-esteem as well as their job performance (Siebers 2009b: 63-64; Ghorashi and Ponzoni 2013).

Transition to the labour market could be different for the highly educated second generation than it is for immigrant youth overall. One such difference might be that while discrimination for the highly educated second generation is still in place, it's less permeating than it is for the second generation youth with lower levels of education (Bovenkerk *et al.* in Crul and Doornik 2003: 1057). Less discrimination for the highly educated is a premise that the second generation youngsters of Moroccan descent from De Jong's study (2012) seem to take as point of departure for their future prospects in Dutch society. Yet, the opposite could also be true, resulting in an emerging elite who is more easily frustrated by the lack of opportunities and discrimination against them (Entzinger 2009: 22).

### Methods

As mentioned above, the data in our article comes from two studies: mainly from the 'Pathways to Success Project' (PSP), and in part from the study 'The Integration of the European Sec-

ond Generation' (TIES). Starting off with the latter, the survey data for TIES were gathered in 2007 and 2008 in 15 cities in 8 European countries, among which are Amsterdam and Rotterdam in the Netherlands. In these two cities, 1000 people of second generation Turkish and Moroccan descent between the ages of 18 and 35 were interviewed about their lives (Crul, Schneider and Lelie 2012), as well as a comparison group consisting of people of native born parentage. The sample was drawn from administrative register data from the cities Amsterdam and Rotterdam, which included the respondents' birthplaces and the parents' birthplaces. The second generation sample drawn from the register data is representative for the two second generation groups in both cities (Groenewold and Lessard-Phillips 2012).

From the Dutch TIES data it came to the fore that a sizeable group of the second generation of Turkish and Moroccan descent was attaining higher education. This outcome made us realize that part of the second generation is becoming increasingly successful in the Dutch Education system and may also be successful in the Dutch labour market. As a consequence, we became interested in finding out about their pathways to success during and after finishing higher education, resulting in the Pathways to Success Project.

For the Pathways to Success Project (PSP) we thus focused on the second generation people of Turkish and Moroccan descent who obtained a university of applied science diploma (BA) or a university (MA) diploma. Additionally, we included people who did not have a BA or MA diploma but who work in a professional position managing at least five people. On top of this, we included people who earned more than €2000 net per month. This definition of "success" aimed at objectifying the notion of success.

The interviewees in the PSP study had to match with (at least) one of the three categories, but many fitted overwhelmingly in the first category (which overlapped with the two other categories): they were successful because they

had finished higher education and had found a job in accordance with their educational level.

The positions in which the interviewees work can be condensed into the following sectors: social sector (including legal services), education sector, health sector, business managers, financial sector and ICT sector. 114 semi-structured interviews among second generation people of Turkish and Moroccan descent between the ages of 28 and 38 were conducted in 2012 in the two largest cities in the Netherlands: Amsterdam and Rotterdam for the PSP. The 54 interviews in Amsterdam were done by employees of the statistics bureau of the Municipality of Amsterdam (O+S). The 60 interviews in Rotterdam were done by Master students in Sociology and supervised by a PhD candidate associated with the project. Unfortunately, due to a lack of funding, there is no native-born parentage comparison group in the PSP study.

We started off with contacting people who had participated in the TIES study, during which time they were attaining or had finished higher education. This group proved to be difficult to track down after five years; many of them had moved. Others had little time in their busy schedule to participate in the study. This caused us to make the decision to extend our search for interviewees through snowball sampling. We asked the former TIES respondents who did participate in the PSP if they could come up with other second generation people of Turkish or Moroccan descent who would meet our criteria of success, and if so, if we could contact those people. Furthermore, through the personal networks of our interviewers in Amsterdam and Rotterdam, some of whom were of second generation Turkish or Moroccan descent themselves, we also found respondents.

The PSP interviews took approximately one to one-and-a-half hour per interview. The questions were semi-structured, leaving room for further inquiries into certain topics, but also ensuring that all domains that we wanted information on were covered in the interviews. This was espe-

**Table 1: Pathways to Success division between cities and gender.**

	Rotterdam		Amsterdam		Total
	Women	Men	Women	Men	
Turkish 2 <sup>nd</sup> generation	17	14	13	13	57
Moroccan 2 <sup>nd</sup> generation	16	13	13	15	57
Total	33	27	26	28	114
Total	60		54		114

cially important since we worked with different interviewers.

All interviews were voice-recorded and literally transcribed by the interviewers. The transcriptions, along with the voice-recordings, were sent to us and we prepared the texts for qualitative analysis. For the analysis, we coded all interviews along the lines of our codebook using the program 'Kwalitan'. This coding enabled us to obtain an overview of the nature and frequency of responses by all 114 interviewees. Furthermore, it enabled us to analyse possible differences between men and women, second generation Turks and Moroccans, as well as people living in Amsterdam or Rotterdam.

We aimed at obtaining a sample as equally divided as possible, between the cities, as well as between men and women, leaving us with the distribution as seen in Table 1.

## Analysis

### *Transition from Education to the Labour Market*

The first point we looked at in our study was the transition point from school to work. This point has become less clearly defined since it is not uncommon nowadays that people return to education after entering the labour market. This is also true for second generation youth (Keskiner 2013). In addition, young people enter the labour market while engaged in fulltime study. They work student jobs or they need to do an internship before they enter the labour market full time.

These experiences often play an important role (as we will see) when entering the labour market. Nevertheless, the transition from full time school to work for highly educated professional youth appears to be problematic. The highly educated second generation has less difficulty accessing jobs than their lower educated peers, but they deal with more problems than young people of native background. The TIES survey conducted in 2008 shows that 23% of the Turkish and Moroccan second generation with a higher education diploma experiences unemployment for a short period after leaving fulltime education. This is only true for 16% of the respondents of native parentage in the TIES survey. The duration of unemployment is usually short (only a few months) but it is an indication that some TIES respondents did experience difficulties entering the labour market. We will show below the various ways in which the successful second generation of Turkish and Moroccan descent from the Pathways to Success study have dealt with these difficulties.

Moving from being a student to being a professional happens at various paces and the effort it demands seems to differ among the highly educated group from the Pathways to Success research Project. Some of the respondents state that the effort required was minimal. They report facing no boundaries at all when entering the labour market. They almost immediately got a job or already acquired a job before finishing full-time education. Most of them, however, entered the labour market before the financial crises hit,

**Table 2: Successful Turkish and Moroccan second generation: encountered discrimination while looking for a job.**

	Never	Almost never	Sometimes	Regularly	Often
Turkish 2 <sup>nd</sup> generation	53%	16%	18%	8%	4%
Moroccan 2 <sup>nd</sup> generation	40%	13%	18%	12%	8%

Source: TIES survey 2008

when there was a general lack of highly skilled people. Other interviewees indicated considerable difficulties, and they describe at length the process of sending in application letters and receiving rejections, one after the other, often-times not knowing what the precise reasons for the rejections were. For these interviewees the transition was strenuous. In this regard, some respondents also refer explicitly to the negative media images of immigrants:

This is where the downside of the negative media image kicks in. Of course there is an economic crisis as well, we have to be honest about that. But I have really had to struggle for half a year and react to every job opportunity in like 40 to 50 companies before I finally got a chance. In the end, I got a job at an international company. I think that is pretty characteristic. (XX - translation)

The respondents can only guess what the motivation is for not inviting them to an interview or for not hiring them. In the TIES study only a minority expresses that they were confronted with discrimination while looking for a job (see Table 2).

Some of the Pathways to Success people explain more in detail how difficult it is to point the finger at discrimination experiences. It often concerns small incidents and questions during the interview that seemed to be strange, akin to subtle discrimination which is less visible and is quite ambiguous for those experiencing it. It is often not recognized as discrimination (also see Van Laer and Janssens, 2011). If discrimination is mentioned at all, the overall tendency is that the

respondents tend to ignore it because they do not want to be seen as passive victims because of this (cf. Van den Broek 2009):

Look, discrimination will always be there. It is second nature to humans, so yes, you have to take notice, it exists, it is there but I do not have to play along with it. I do not have to become a victim because of it. (XX - translation IW)

All Pathways respondents have succeeded in finding their first job in the end. Some, however, had to use alternative strategies to increase their chances. We highlight some of the most important strategies.

Students in higher vocational education (leading to a BA diploma) in the Netherlands are obliged to do an internship in an organization. The duration of internships can go up to one year. Of the Turkish and Moroccan second generation youth with a higher education diploma in the TIES survey, 15% found their first job through an apprenticeship and 14% found their current or last job through apprenticeships.

In Pathways to Success, internships offered relevant work experience and positive recommendations, leading to employment in- or outside the internship company.

My final internship project was with the KLM [Royal Dutch Airlines – IW], and then they just said: ‘do you want to stay to do more research in this area but also in other areas?’ (XX - translation IW).

Obtaining employers’ confidence is crucial for finding a job, especially for a first job when the interviewees usually still lack references by for-

mer employers. Knowing an employer personally, or through a friend or former classmate, can be helpful for creating confidence in the candidate, thus increasing the chances of getting invited for an interview and being offered a job. The respondents learn along the way that sometimes you only get to be invited if you have a contact within an organization.

The TIES survey found that about a quarter (27%) of the successful Moroccan and Turkish second generation respondents obtained their first job through a friend, colleague or family member. Using network contacts is also considered by the vast majority of the Pathways interviewees as being a crucial strategy for entering the labour market. Network contacts can help to establish a link with an employer, increasing the likelihood of getting invited for an interview:

I got a coach who could introduce me to his network contacts. He then presented me to someone he knew in the courthouse, and that is how I got a job interview and my first job. (...) I tried before, my letter was the same, my CV was the same, but I could not get a job interview. (XX - translation IW)

Yet asking for help and using contacts for finding a job touch on issues of pride, and some of the respondents dislike not being judged on the basis of their merits but on the basis of whom they know.

Interviewees also stress that their first jobs were not handed to them, even when they were introduced to their employer by a network contact. They still had to go through job interviews, assessments and trial periods, proving them-

selves worthy for the job, and relying first and foremost on their own abilities and not on who introduced them.

The strategies of using (extra) internships and network contacts often only come into play when the “normal” way of entering the labour market has failed. Both strategies open up boundaries by allowing the second generation to portray their professional identity for the first time, through which they manage to de-emphasize their ethnic background as the prevalent identity marker (cf. Wimmer 2008), showing their “sameness” as professionals, and finding common ground with the ethnic majority professionals as a consequence (cf. Siebers 2009a). These strategies offer a way to cross bright boundaries in the labour market, and to become part of the professional ingroup (cf. Alba 2005).

#### *Acceptance in the Workplace*

Getting hired in a job is not the same as being accepted by your fellow colleagues in the workplace. In the Pathways to Success interviews we asked about acceptance and discrimination in the workplace. Most interviewees claim to have had little to no experience with discrimination in the workplace, while simultaneously mentioning that they have noticed a change in the public and political atmosphere in the Netherlands towards ethnic minorities. Almost everybody mentions that the tone has become more negative and prejudice towards ethnic minorities has increased. In the TIES survey, the question of discrimination in the workplace was also asked.

**Table 3: Successful Turkish and Moroccan second generation: encountered discrimination in the workplace.**

	Never	Almost never	Sometimes	Regularly	Often
Turkish 2 <sup>nd</sup> generation	51%	22%	22%	2%	3%
Moroccan 2 <sup>nd</sup> generation	43%	22%	25%	6%	4%

Source: TIES survey 2008



As the TIES survey clearly demonstrates, a minority of interviewees report that they are often confronted with negative discourses and prejudices at work. Negative discourses and discrimination in the circles in which the successful second generation move are often subtler than in lower class environments. The PSP respondents are therefore reluctant to call it discrimination:

Yes there are remarks. Certain remarks, I do not know if you can truly call it discrimination because it is so subtle. You do not feel good about it, so that is why you think there is something wrong. But it is not like... you cannot prove that it is discrimination. It is really a grey area. (XX - translation IW)

Either open or subtler, the discourses in society and the effects they have on the workplace can become a serious obstacle in feeling accepted in an organization as a colleague. Those who mention it also assume that the harsh opinions of co-workers stem from the negative political climate in the Netherlands (see also Siebers 2010). They report how public and political debates seep through in the workplace of their organizations:

Yes, as I said before, on the work floor, mostly with clients. But also inside the company you hear things and you experience things having to do with your religion. That is, at this moment in time, all very negatively portrayed [in public] and since I have an Islamic background, you hear things here and there and it makes you think: should I make a comment about this or not? (XX - translation IW).

Similar to the outcomes in the TIES survey, the women within the Pathways to Success Project wearing head scarves most often report about remarks concerning religion.

Of course things happen but I do not know, I do not know... you are with someone, and you just come from a meeting with that person and you go for lunch together, and then she starts about your head scarf. Don't you have anything else to talk about? You get it? It is not discrimination or anything but it does give you the feeling like they still see you as the woman with the head scarf and not as X [name interviewee – IW] who happens to wear a head scarf." You see? That happens every now and then. (XX - translation IW)

Respondents of the Pathways to Success Project report that openly expressed racism or discriminatory remarks are extremely rare, especially in the context of the workplace. In the most openly racist cases, it is not colleagues, but clients or customers, that are the perpetrators of racism.

Respondents deal with experiences of racism in different ways. What they all have in common is that they consciously choose if and when to react. Some of the respondents choose to confront people in a very direct manner:

People make wrong remarks about head scarves or something like that. Then I will be the first to respond. (...) And you hear Muslims this, Muslims that. Then I will clearly say: "listen, I am one too and I feel addressed and I do not agree with you." (XX - translation IW)

Other respondents position themselves above such remarks or they will prove them wrong in practice:

Sometimes things are said that are hurtful. (...) When I was younger, I reacted ardently to these things. But not anymore, I do not do that anymore (...). (...) When things are said about Islam, of which I think they are incorrect, then I explain, so I deal with it more easily. That is because when you grow older, you are able to explain things better, you are stronger. (XX - translation IW)

Yes, I have had the feeling that I was treated differently than people who had done the same as I. Same functional level, same age (...). (...) I did not get projects as easily. That you are excluded in a subtle and perhaps unintentional way, that certain things are not granted to you. (...) My strategy or tactic is to show them that I can do it. If you do not grant me a project, I will go get it myself. (XX - translation IW)

Above all, interviewees are very cautious to describe incidents as racism. They often stress that they are not sure if they are not accepted because of their Turkish or Moroccan backgrounds or because of the fact that they are young, women, fresh out of university, working in a profession dominated by older men: "50 plus, bald or white haired." (XX – translation IW).

The successful Turkish and Moroccan second generation seems to be aware that they have to be very careful in the Netherlands to call some-

thing racism, as racism as a pattern in society is not an accepted viewpoint (cf. Vasta 2007; Ghorashi 2014) and, therefore, it is not without danger for their careers to confront people at the workplace with accusations of racism. It can easily backfire on them. They often just cope with it or choose to ignore it, positioning themselves in both of these reactions as active agents, refusing to be victimized by discrimination (cf. Van den Broek 2009).

Another strategy for gaining acceptance in the workplace for the second generation is through emphasizing their professional identity. Initial resistance by some colleagues is often overcome over a course of time because of their professional success:

In the beginning it is startling for them that you have this position. And then they hear your story and see what you have accomplished, how many customers you have, what you have built. And then you can see that they do have respect for you. Yes. (quote by XX - translation IW).

Acceptance in the workplace for the second generation can thus be accomplished by showing that they are capable professionals and good colleagues (Siebers 2009a), and in that sense, no different than their colleagues of native Dutch parentage. They emphasize sameness to weaken the fixation on difference, and they become accepted by their colleagues based on the quality of their profession (cf. Wimmer 2008). Their professionalism acts as a binding element with colleagues of native Dutch parentage, allowing for acceptance and a feeling of belonging in the workplace.

I noticed because I was THE guy who was hired for sales but ended up with the managers. To a large extent they [other managers – IW] had an attitude towards me. The good thing is, people like us who are faced with some resistance, we bite the bullet. I did not respond to their attitude but I worked like crazy. I booked really impressive results. And now they take me seriously as a manager. (XX - translation IW)

The vast majority of the interviewees expresses a wish to climb the career ladder further. The

highly educated second generation of Turkish and Moroccan decent is very ambitious. They managed to enter the labour market and are mostly content with their current position – which is, in most cases, a position in line with their education – but they have a clear vision for the future: they know where they want to go and they plan to get there.

One of the driving forces behind the ambitions of the second generation is that they want to keep developing themselves. They want to grow, become better at what they do, specialize, explore new fields, work abroad, earn more money, gain more influence, start their own company. Most of the interviewees who do not yet have a management position express that they would like to move into such a position. They look for possibilities in their own organization, but if they feel like they will not get a fair chance, they will also look for possibilities elsewhere. Many respondents advanced their careers by changing jobs.

At a certain moment, I had had a promotion after three years, I started wondering: do I still like this? Am I going to grow further? Do I want to become a manager or not? You know, I will just go and work for another company, closer to home, more meaningful, more interesting. That I am challenged more, that it is professional, that I can develop myself. (XX - translation IW)

They constantly look for new challenges and they change their pathways to new and better positions:

Yes, something better came along. You know, you are young, you have to be flexible. You have to climb [the corporate ladder – IW] as fast as you can, especially when you are young, you know. I am now at a position that took other people 30 years to get at. I believe that you have to stay focused and seize your opportunities. (XX - translation IW)

Even those who are already in high-level position express they want to achieve new goals, more often unrelated to financial gains or prestige.

So I have everything, and yes, it is weird but at a certain moment in time, then yes, you want to achieve more. You know? Not in terms of money or

anything but more in terms of being more successful in reaching your goals and yes, I think you can achieve anything you want, you only have to do it. (XX - translation IW)

From the interviews, it is clear that the uncertainty of many respondents as they enter the labour market is, over time, replaced by self-confidence and a firm belief in possibilities. This attitude can partly be explained by learning the rules of the game and playing along with them:

And yes, I know the tactics now. Let me put it this way, I have been through so many job interviews, I actually just say what they want to hear. (XX - translation IW)

Positive experiences in the labour market also play a role in building self-confidence (cf. Siebers 2009b: 63-64; Ghorashi and Ponzone 2013). The interviewees are making themselves visible: they become noticed as professionals, are good at their job, ambitious, hardworking and looking for opportunities. They do, however, know they “[h]ave to work twice as hard.” (XX – translation IW) because they have a Turkish or Moroccan background.

#### *Acceptance of Leadership Position*

The true test of acceptance in the workplace is being supported in a leading position by colleagues. More and more, successful second generation professionals are moving into leadership positions. In the TIES survey, one in five second generation respondents that are active in the labour market have a higher education diploma and supervise people below them. They often supervise people of Dutch descent. A supervisory role could be seen as the ultimate test of acceptance by colleagues of Dutch descent. Do they encounter resistance to their authority?

Interviewees in our Pathways to Success Project state that having grown up in the Netherlands, they are used to Dutch customs and feel “Dutch” in their professional behaviour. They are accepted in their leadership position partly because of their fitting style of professionalism and work ethics, as for example expressed through the leadership style of second genera-

tion managers, which is one of working together on a joint outcome, informal, friendly and little emphasis on hierarchy:

Just Dutch, let us do this and if I have something to say, there is always a platform to deliberate. (XX - translation IW)

This leadership style is in line with the feeling of acceptance that interviewees experience because they speak the same professional language as their colleagues. By speaking the same professional language, people become more enthusiastic and willing to cooperate. Two interviewees also explicitly refer to the organizational culture in which there is no room and no tolerance for political views when it comes to ethnic minorities. In these organizations, it is all about doing your job and doing it well. And as long as you do it well, you get the credit. “No matter what you look like” (XX- translation IW).

Acceptance, in this case, thus becomes strongly related to being a professional, skilled colleague, instead of belonging to the same national, ethnic or religious group. It is precisely this sort of acceptance that the highly educated second generation is looking for; the kind of acceptance they can achieve by being good at what they do at work:

They look at your knowledge and skills and no attention is paid to your background or ethnic background. (XX - translation IW)

This so-called colour-blind strategy seems to be in concordance with the diversity approaches that are dominant in Northern European societies. These approaches hold the expectation that “the other becomes the same” and difference, in whatever form, is denounced and considered undesirable, as pointed out by various authors discussing diversity in organizations (Puwar 2004; Holvino and Kamp 2009; Ghorashi and Sabelis 2013). Furthermore, the colour-blind strategy closely resembles the strategy of de-emphasizing ethnicity, as described by Wimmer (2008), through which boundary blurring occurs.

Putting one's professionalism and work identity to the fore thus enables the second generation to emphasize their "sameness" in relation to their colleagues of native parentage. Yet, de-emphasizing ethnicity is not entirely what the successful second generation seems to be doing. However sensitive they are to the bright boundaries, their situational choice to downplay their difference does not mean that they do not stand up for their ethnic or religious distinctiveness when they feel the need to.

### *Staying True to Oneself*

Seeking recognition for the different aspects of their identity (professional, ethnic and religious) is important for the interviewees, since they feel that parts of their identity occasionally conflict with work or organizational related issues; they do not want to compromise certain aspects of their identity.

They do, however, sometimes need to make compromises, feel the need to adjust, and leave certain aspects of their identity in the background. These actions are born out of fear of conflict, based on different expectations, opinions or ignorance from colleagues. Interviewees do not want to hide or conceal parts of their identity, but do find themselves sometimes putting them "on hold" during working hours:

Sometimes you have to put on some sort of mask, while still staying really close to yourself. People know about me that I am religious but do I express it? No, you would not be able to tell by the way I dress or anything. (...) I will always be honest about being religious and Muslim. (...) I do not give in on that. (XX - translation IW)

Giving up, no. But distance, yes. And with which I mean that I do not give up on my principles, values and standards. But when I am at home, I can pray on time. And of course, that is not an option in an institution like that. (XX - translation IW)

Interviewees find ways to manage day-to-day interactions with colleagues without touching upon sensitive topics. Sensitive issues often have to do with religious aspects, such as fasting during Ramadan, observing Islamic holy days or

not drinking alcohol. The most often mentioned uncomfortable situation at work is when alcohol is served at company drinks. Such a situation makes the cultural and religious differences obvious to colleagues:

For example, I do not drink alcohol. When everybody is drinking a beer and I have a coke, it just stands out. (XX - translation IW)

That is [drinking alcohol – IW] something I don't do. I will have a drink, coffee or tea. But I will not drink alcohol and that sets you apart. (XX - translation IW)

Difference can, however, also become an asset in the workplace, especially in cases where the customers or clients are of ethnic minority background as well:

I do notice with youngsters, especially when they are youngsters with an immigrant background, that (...) there is a click (...). (...) Some will say: 'I will not cooperate with the psychologist'. And then they see me and they think 'Ah, she is one of us. It should be OK then'. (XX - translation IW)

The strategy of juggling sameness and difference is, in essence, what the successful second generation of Turkish and Moroccan descent is doing. They only put to the fore their ethnic or religious background when conflicts are imminent and unavoidable, displaying their difference at the risk of losing acceptance at the work place. They therefore do not cross boundaries, and leave behind their ethnic group's customs and fully embrace those of the majority group. Their strategy also does not amount to what Alba calls boundary blurring: 'participati[ng] in mainstream institutions [while maintaining their] familiar social and cultural practices and identities (...)' (Alba 2005: 25). Due to their awareness that difference can potentially jeopardize their professional status, they only display personal, social and cultural practices when there is no way to avoid difference, or when difference could be considered an asset for the organization. In addition, they do not expect boundaries to blur; they only hope to be respected for their own individual choices. The strategies they use are individual and context-based. The strategy of

'sameness' through de-emphasizing ethnicity and emphasizing social similarities (Wimmer 2008) opens up pathways to success for the second generation, as it provides them with means for acceptance in organizations that are in the Dutch context, which is still predominantly focused on sameness instead of equality, let alone diversity.

### **Boundary Sensitivity as Alternative to either Boundary Crossing or Boundary Blurring**

We have shown in this article that the Turkish and Moroccan second generation respondents from the Pathways to Success study have employed various strategies during the different phases in their labour market careers. Through these strategies, they have seemingly overcome bright boundaries that are in place in the labour market in the Netherlands, especially for ethnic minorities of Islamic background. What the strategies have in common is that the successful second generation does not want to be passive victims in the face of discriminatory practices or remarks at their workplace. They actively engage with exclusionary practices in different manners by performing a complex balancing act in which they, on the one hand, stress their quality and professional identity as being similar to the majority group members and, on the other hand, they want to be respected for who they are ethnically and religiously. Their refusal to fully assimilate sometimes makes their professional position in the labour market a vulnerable one.

We argue that rather than a process in which the successful second generation crosses ethnic boundaries or blurs boundaries, they circumvent boundaries by being very sensitive and competent in dealing with the limitation of boundaries. This sensitivity has become second nature for them (cf. Den Uyl and Brouwer 2009), through which they juggle sameness and difference, resulting in what we would call "boundary sensitivity": an individual and contextual strategy, circumventing bright boundaries with the aim of gaining acceptance while staying true to oneself. With this strategy, the successful second genera-

tion avoids boundary crossing, which holds the inherent risks of losing the link with the ethnic group of the first generation, as well as never truly becoming accepted by the majority group (Alba 2005: 26). The strategy is also pragmatic, since they are aware that boundary blurring – where difference is accepted and belonging to the majority group goes hand in hand with belonging to their own ethnic group – is, in most organizations, and in the present Dutch anti-immigrant context, not a viable strategy (ibid: 25).

The highly educated second generation is particularly apt to develop a strategy of 'boundary sensitivity' because they have grown up learning and reading differences, resulting in multiplicity competence. The strategy of boundary sensitivity is their answer to the bright boundaries in Dutch society. It is this subtle yet fine art of boundary sensitivity that resolves the apparent paradox of a growing successful, highly educated Turkish and Moroccan second generation group in a country context with bright boundaries. They actively make use of the sameness and difference strategy depending on each situation, thereby circumventing bright boundaries and establishing themselves through de-emphasizing ethnicity. They manage to maintain and show difference, sometimes even conflicting differences, and thus display boundary sensitivity to gain entrance and acceptance in the Dutch labour market.

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# Social Mobility, Habitus and Identity Formation in the Turkish-German Second Generation

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## Abstract

Social mobility literature widely assumes that socially upward mobile individuals ‘alienate’ from their ‘milieu of origin’ while adopting the patterns of acting and thinking of the ‘new milieu’. The most frequent underlying concepts are the ‘habitus transformation’ or even the ‘habitus cleft’, which presume that the acquisition of a new habitus necessarily involves moving away from the previous one. This article presents three contrasting case studies from a research project among socially upward mobile individuals of Turkish background in Germany to show that the static juxtaposition of ‘either ... or’ is too narrow. Most respondents maintain intensive relations with family and friends from their ‘milieu of origin’, while at the same time ‘assimilating’ to the expected habitus in their professional environments and high-ranking positions. This article suggests borrowing elements from Identity Theory – especially concepts such as hybridity and multiplicity – to show that transformations in individual habitus do not necessarily go along with relevant levels of ‘alienation’ in neither direction. As a consequence, the authors propose ‘habitus *diversification*’ as a more promising concept for including frequent bridging strategies and the active switching between ‘habitual’ codes and languages.

**Keywords:** second generation, social mobility, habitus, Germany, identity

## Introduction

Erfolg (...). Ein herkunftsfremder Spätdeutscher reagiert nicht selten unwirsch ob dieser Zuschreibung – wieso? Er ahnt, dass man ihn fast des Verrats beschuldigt: an der Kultur der Heimat seiner Eltern. Er weiß um die Implikation – verätzt und entstellt ist das begabte Arbeiterkind, eine andere Möglichkeit kann und darf es nicht geben. – Feridun Zaimoğlu, 2014<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “Success (...). An origin-alien Lategerman not infrequently reacts rather stroppy to this ascription – why? He senses that he is almost accused of betrayal of the culture of the homeland of his parents. He knows about the implications – burned and disfigured is the gifted worker’s child, another possibility can and must not be there.” (In: Ezli and Staupe 2014: 77, translation JS).

Turkey has been the country of origin of the largest group of immigrants in Western and Northern Europe since the early 1960s, when bilateral agreements were signed on labour recruitment between Turkey and a series of European countries. Family reunification with spouses and children and, after the military coup in Turkey, especially Kurdish minorities and members of the urban intelligentsia followed. Including their native-born children and grandchildren, most of these migrants today live in Germany: an estimated 2.5 million persons. Due to its size, and also because labour migrants from Turkey were particularly recruited among the poorest and



lowest educated, these immigrants have thus been facing the greatest challenges in achieving upward social mobility. They have attracted the most attention and are taken as the most 'prototypical' group for illustrating supposed 'integration problems' or even 'failure' in German integration literature.

A rapidly increasing body of literature today assesses the question of migrant social mobility from an intergenerational perspective by looking at how the second and third generations fare – because their situation allows a better perspective on the long-term effects of immigration on societies. As numerous studies have also shown, over the past decades, children of Turkish immigrants in Germany have been facing particular challenges in their educational careers and, consequently, in striving for good professional jobs. Even though their advancement in their educational credentials in relation to their parents and grandparents is immense, processes of social mobility have been particularly slow in Germany – especially when compared to their 'ethno-national' peers in other European countries (see e.g. Crul, Schneider and Lelie 2012; Wilmes, Schneider and Crul 2011). This notwithstanding, there is an increasingly visible middle-class in Germany with family roots in Turkey that has also attracted some attention by social scientists and – especially in recent years – considerable media interest in their 'success stories'.

Beyond the question of the (dis-)proportional representation in well-paid and socially prestigious jobs, analysing social mobility processes and the individual trajectories of the second generation can tell us something about mechanisms of social reproduction and existing social boundaries in the society 'at large': Which boundaries apply and how are they socially constructed? What are valid strategies for overcoming structural barriers and managing to cross these boundaries? What kind of 'transformations' do individuals have to undergo to successfully manage their transition to higher social strata in their upward careers?

### Social Mobility, Boundaries and Habitus

Social stratification implies that there are boundaries in place between different social strata (or classes or groups). These boundaries are socialised and internalised in childhood and youth; their actual brightness or rigidity depends on their role for the 'general setup' of a given society. Social climbers simultaneously highlight these boundaries by making them more visible *and* question their seemingly 'natural' social order by showing that it is possible to cross them.

Pierre Bourdieu developed some of the most influential concepts for the analysis of social stratification. According to him, social difference is primarily based on different access to and disposability of economic resources and power, i.e. economic, social and cultural capital. The concept of *habitus* bridges the gap between the individual and the collective, because it describes as much the meta-individual structures – 'the rules of the game' – as their incorporation in mostly rather subconscious individual judgements on tastes, norms and behaviours – 'knowing the rules' and acting according to them. Since *habitus* is at the same time individual and collective, it allows explaining specific individual behaviours and preferences, but also uncovers them as collectively shared and reproduced in the wider structures of society. In this combination of the two aspects, the idea of *habitus* explains why a given social structure is so durable and difficult to be substantially changed (see Bourdieu 1977: 72, 95; 1984; 1989: 12; 1990).

Upward social mobility may 'undermine' the notion of 'durability' in Bourdieu's *habitus* concept; however, boundaries between social strata themselves are generally not getting 'blurred' by individuals that cross them: it is the individuals who change, but not the social order.<sup>2</sup> Social mobility, therefore, presents a particular challenge to the upwardly mobile individuals: They

<sup>2</sup> We can see a parallel here to Fredrik Barth's observations on the function of boundaries between ethnic groups. According to Barth, ethnic boundaries are not challenged by individuals who move over them, e.g. by migration or interethnic marriage (Barth 1969: 9).

do not only lack the support of parental capital, which makes career possibilities of (upper) middle-class offspring so largely independent from individual talent and abilities, but they also have to find their way into social fields with whose habitus they are not intimately familiar. A child from a poor, working class family, managing her/his own way all the way up to university and becoming e.g. a doctor or a lawyer, in one way or another, inevitably also crosses the habitus boundaries between the strata of the working poor and the free professions.

This process has attracted the interest of a considerable amount of studies on social mobility in which, in fact, the concept of habitus stands central.<sup>3</sup> The issue of habitus boundaries is, moreover, particularly interesting for studies that are looking at the intersections between social and other kinds of relevant inner-societal boundaries – especially ‘racial’ or ‘ethnic’ or between ‘immigrants’ and ‘natives’<sup>4</sup>. Being Black in the UK, Black or Hispanic in the U.S., or Turkish or Arab in most parts of Western Europe more frequently than not means coming of age in a comparatively low educated, working class family. The access to middle class-dominated educational and professional ‘milieus’ thus generally goes along with a transition from an environment, in which being Black or immigrant is nothing noteworthy, to a predominantly, if not almost exclusively ‘white’ and non-immigrant environment.

Bourdieu himself mentions several moments of what could be called ‘habitual unsettledness’ in his own trajectory from the peasant countryside to high academia (Bourdieu 2002: 46, 76 et

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. Rosenberg 2011; London 1992; Torres 2009; Horvat and Davis 2011; Byrom and Lightfoot 2012; El-Mafaalani 2012; Abrahams and Ingram 2013; Dalhaus 2013; Jo 2013; Lee and Kramer 2013. See Reay 2004 for a critique of the ‘habitual use’ of the habitus-concept especially in research on educational success.

<sup>4</sup> See e.g. for the USA and the UK Pattillo 1999; Moore 2008; Zhou et al. 2008; Torres 2009; Wright, Standen, and Patel 2010; Rollock et al. 2011; 2013; Vallejo 2012a, 2012b. For Germany and the Netherlands, as two continental European examples with a wide body of literature, see e.g. Vermeulen 2001; Pott 2002; Cain 2007; Dalhaus 2013.

passim). Overall, however, the habitus-concept has certainly served better in explaining the *reproduction* of inequality than in shedding light on the breaks from it. Therefore, the relationship between habitus, understood as durable meta-individual *collective* structures, and *individual* trajectories of social mobility has been open for different interpretations in social mobility literature.

Two terminologies and slightly different concepts dominate these interpretations: Particularly in studies on the access of students from non-privileged family backgrounds to higher education institutions, the Bourdieusian term of ‘*cleft habitus*’ (Bourdieu 2008: 100) or *habitus cleavage* is common (Torres 2009; Abrahams and Ingram 2013; Lee and Kramer 2013). The terminology implies that working class poor and/or Black/immigrant students at prestigious, upper middle class-dominated universities have to perform a radical change in their behaviour, tastes and language. According to Lee and Kramer, this leads to “weakening relationships” in the home community because the “potentially painful process of habitus cleavage” makes it difficult to “balance” the newly acquired with the old habitus (Lee and Kramer 2013: 31, 32).

While this concept primarily looks at the *distance* between two habitus that represent two different ends of the social ladder, the other dominant concept in this literature, *habitus transformation*, rather focuses on the process of the conversion that individuals have to undergo when moving from one social stratum to another (see e.g. Horvat and Davis 2011; Rosenberg 2011; Byrom and Lightfoot 2012; El-Mafaalani 2012). According to Aladin El-Mafaalani, for example, the transformation in habitus of his interviewees – German social climbers from immigrant and non-immigrant families – “appears to be (...) a necessary condition for (social) ascension as understood here” (2012: 319) which implies a “perception of alienation from the milieu of origin” (ibid.). Despite a difference in perspective, both terminologies thus describe the movement from one habitus to another as a moving *away*

from one's working class past, and building up a distance to the 'milieu of origin' of the family and the home community. Intended or not, this leads to a representation of 'milieu of origin' versus 'milieu of arrival' as separate units whose mutual boundary is not only clearly marked, but also internalised by the social climbers themselves.<sup>5</sup>

This rather static understanding of habitus lies in stark contrast to a completely different body of literature: the theorisation of identities and identity formation. Strangely enough, habitus and identity are very rarely conceptualised together, although they are undoubtedly close to each other. Habitus is acquired and 'internalised' in early childhood to adolescence, and it attempts to describe and explain practices and attitudes of groups and persons. Habitus thus groups together individuals according to their shared or similar positions in the wider social space. Identities provide 'labels' for the belonging to groups. In the 'ideal', non-conflictive case, belonging to a certain group coincides with habitual practices of distinction. Moreover, both identity and habitus are based on the existence and definition of boundaries (cf. Cohen 2002; Jenkins 2008; Donnan and Wilson 1999 and many others).

In contrast to the usage of habitus in large parts of social mobility literature, Identity Theory stresses the hybridity, fuzziness and multiplicities in practices of (self-)labelling and representations of belonging (cf. Çağlar 1997; Schneider 2001, 2010; Wimmer 2013). Each individual represents a unique combination of belonging to a diverse range of group categories (Devereux 1978: 164ff.) that allows her/him to make use of context-sensitive, adequate attitudes and behaviours – in other words: habitual practices. Habitus could thus be defined as the

performative dimension of identity: the *practice* connected to specific categories of belonging. Bringing the two concepts together reveals a tension – inherent in *both* concepts – between deterministic aspects (mostly rather unconscious and thus unquestioned), on one hand, and a certain empirical 'fuzziness' that also includes at least the *potential* for change in biographical perspective on the other. Another tension lies in the relationship between habitus as a *collective* 'structuring structure' and a 'matrix' for *individual* "perceptions, appreciations and actions" (Bourdieu 1977: 95). This similarly applies to identity: it is a personal attribute, but each category of belonging is a collectively shared group category.

Why, then, are identities multiple, hybrid and dynamic, but habitus is stable and enduring? If habitus is, in fact, the performative practice of specific forms of belonging, why should individuals not dispose of a variety of habitus, allowing them to be involved in several *different* 'games', playing these according to their respective rules? The problem is that the idea of habitus as 'an open system of dispositions' (see note 5) makes the notions of 'habitus cleavage' or 'habitus transformation' far less convincing – at least in the rigidity of an 'either ... or', as they are presented. There is, obviously, no doubt that access to a prestigious law firm from a working class background means entering a *new* world, whose explicit and implicit rules have to be learned and be adapted. The question is whether this must necessarily go along with an 'alienation' from the *previous* world.

In this regard, we suggest that linking the habitus concept with insights from identity literature can introduce more fruitful perspectives into the study of social mobility processes. This is particularly interesting in the case of individuals growing up in immigrant or 'ethnic minority'-families because social climbers from these origins deal with both kinds of boundaries: their 'habitus of origin' includes the immigrant origin of the parents as much as predominantly a working class background.

<sup>5</sup> Bourdieu himself actually softened the rigidity of widespread understandings of habitus: "Habitus is not the fate that some people read into it. Being the product of history, it is an open system of dispositions that is constantly subjected to experiences, and therefore constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its structures. It is durable but not eternal!" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 133)

### 'Pathways to Success'

In the following sections, we want to address the question of habitus and identity among intergenerationally upwardly mobile individuals of Turkish background in Germany, making use of data from the *Pathways to Success*-Project, which analyses trajectories through education and into well-paid and/or high prestige jobs in three German urban agglomerations: Berlin, Frankfurt and the Ruhr Area. The sample of interviews executed in 2012-13 includes 74 members of the Turkish second generation, mainly between the ages of 25 and 45. Almost all of them come from families in which the parents maximally completed lower secondary education. Another 20 respondents come from non-immigrant families, also with parents with no academic education. By far, most of our respondents successfully gained university degrees and they have achieved responsible positions in professional fields that can be characterized as predominantly mainstream middle- or even upper class. Regarding the fields, there is an emphasis in our sample on law, teaching, the public administration and the business sector, including entrepreneurs and employees in leading positions.

Following the above mentioned literature, 'habitus transformation' or 'cleavage' should be a dominant pattern in our interviews. In the course of their trajectory, our interviewees had to adapt to new ways of acting and thinking in social fields which no one in their families had previously entered and, because of this, there were no role models at hand in the local and ethnic communities in which they grew up. They are very likely to have developed new interests, goals, tastes, and life-styles on the pathway of achieving higher education and entering into their respective professional fields, while – according to the hypothesis of habitus transformation – ties to childhood friends etc. are likely to have loosened after they left their native neighbourhood for their studies or jobs.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Empirically, our data are narratives collected through interviews; they do not include systematic

This will be examined closer by looking at three case studies.

### Case 1: Alienation and Social Distinction

The case of Onur Aktaş<sup>7</sup>, a 42 year old stock exchange trader in Frankfurt, can be seen as a prototypical representation of 'cleft habitus'. Onur describes the departure point of his trajectory as a 'classical guest worker biography'. Born in Turkey, he came to Germany at the age of six to join his parents who had come to the Frankfurt area as recruited labour migrants. After primary school, he was recommended for middle secondary school (*Realschule*), and then he continued to the upper secondary level at a vocational high school where he took his *Abitur*. Already at this stage, his main professional aim was 'earning money', an intrinsic motivation he closely links to the financial shortages he experienced in his family. For this reason, Onur followed a two-year apprenticeship at a bank and then started directly working for a broker at the Frankfurt Stock Exchange, in an environment he describes as 'extremely conservative' and in which social background, family networks and different markers of high social status (e.g. cars, clothes etc.) played an important role. As a 'Turk' and 'foreigner', he says, he was an absolute exception at that time (i.e. approx. 20 years ago). He was successful in what he did and, as a consequence, moved into higher positions. He made a lot of money while, at the same time, he completed a degree in Business Studies. After some years, he

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ethnographic fieldwork beyond observations from the interview situation itself. The directly accessible social practice analysed in this article is thus limited to the 'discursive habitus' of our respondents in a particular social situation, in an interview with a researcher. While this means considerable limitation for addressing questions of habitus in the Bourdieusian sense, language and communication are important social practices in and of themselves, which give insights into discursive and communicative dispositions. But they obviously do not represent 'the whole story': we simply do not know whether the observation of other forms of social practices would have led to different interpretations.

<sup>7</sup> All respondents' names have been pseudonymised.

decided to take a break. At the time of the interview he only worked part-time and planned to take up studies in Philosophy or Psychology for his own intellectual development.

The transformation of the ways in which he did or saw things, and the distinction from the habitus of his working class 'milieu of origin', is a structuring narrative in Onur's account. He describes his school trajectory as a process of learning the necessary skills and codes to achieve educational success, all of which were not provided in his family. As he points out, his parents lacked the knowledge of the essential structures and capacities needed for a successful educational career and could therefore give him no support at all. Instead, Onur emphasizes the decisive role of a teacher who showed him how to establish a basic learning environment at home:

There was this teacher who somehow saw my potential, I think. She supported me and also set the course with my parents in a certain way. My parents are rather simple people: both, my mother and my father, had only four years of primary school. And they were just not familiar with learning structures, you know? They wanted that their children would be better off than they, but what could they contribute to that? There was very little. Providing some structure, taking care that the child learns to develop discipline in the first place, to be able to concentrate, and also teaching the child to be patient, until it has learnt something. Or also just these very basic things, like taking care that I was in bed in good time, so that I am not totally sleepy in the morning, that I got a desk for myself, these actually quite basic things. I believe that her intervention also led to getting me really on some track at some moment, you know? (§17, 19)<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> „Es gab eine Lehrerin, die einfach irgendwie schon mein Potential, glaube ich, gesehen hat, die das gefördert hat (...) und auch mit meinen Eltern dann da schon Weichen gestellt hat. (...) Meine Eltern (...) waren recht einfache Leute. Sowohl meine Mutter wie auch mein Vater hatten vier Jahre Grundschule, mehr nicht. Und also denen waren einfach Strukturen von Lernen nicht bekannt ja? Also die wollten zwar gerne, dass ihre Kinder es mal besser haben als sie selbst, aber selbst dazu was beitragen, ja? Da kam eben herzlich wenig. Also einfach 'ne Struktur schaffen, (...) dafür zu sorgen, dass das Kind (...) überhaupt

Onur lists here different educational practices and cognitive patterns that, in his eyes, are fundamental for a successful school career, and he presents his parents as unable to transmit them. He acquired the necessary educational 'attitude' only thanks to a person from a higher social milieu. Onur's metaphor of 'taking a completely different track' than the one predetermined by his family can be interpreted as a deep transformation of schemes of thinking and acting.

Onur represents this transformation through clearly distancing himself from the habitus of his home environment. Throughout the interview, he marks differences between his current values, goals, interests, and social contacts – and those of his family and the working class environment he comes from:

But these are also all people who, in one way or the other, are also intellectually interesting for me. It is a completely different kind of people. When I think about the friends and acquaintances that my parents had and compare them with my people, they are *absolutely* different, very, very different people they are, yes. (§83)<sup>9</sup>

In Onur's view, the 'intellectual standards' of his current circle of friends – he mentions, for instance, people working in academia or in higher positions in business – and his own acquired cultural capital render closer social connections to the lower educated and working class 'milieu' of his parents practically impossible. This becomes visible in the following reference to a friend from childhood – apart from his parents, the only

lernt Disziplin aufzubauen, (...) 'ne Konzentration aufzubauen, (...) auch dem Kind Geduld beizubringen, bis es etwas gelernt hat. (...) Oder dann eben so ganz einfache Sachen wie dafür zu sorgen, beizeiten im Bett zu sein, dass ich irgendwie eben morgens nicht total verpennt bin, (...) dafür zu sorgen, dass ich 'n Schreibtisch bekommen hab, (...) also eigentlich relative Basics. Ich glaub, das (die Unterstützung durch die Lehrerin) hat auch dazu geführt, dass ich dann wirklich in so 'ne Spur rein gekommen bin, ja?"

<sup>9</sup> „Das sind aber auch alles Leute, die in irgendeiner Form, ja, die also für mich auch intellektuell interessant sind (...) Also es ist 'n gänzlich anderes- (...) wenn ich überlege, was meine Eltern für Freunde, für 'n Bekanntenkreis hatten, und was ich jetzt für- da sind ganz andere- ganz ganz andere Leute sind das, ja.“



mentioned remaining contact – who comes from the same Turkish ‘guest worker’ background, but did not enter higher education and today is a manual worker. After having introduced him in the interview as ‘a friend’, Onur feels the need to correct himself:

Well this, he’s not my *friend*. Friendship is something at eye level. He is just a very very good acquaintance. (§83)<sup>10</sup>

‘Real’ friendship relations are for Onur only thinkable on the ‘same level’ which he defines by similarities in cultural capital and the position in the social space. This strong sentiment of social distance even extends to his parents. This becomes particularly evident in the following extract:

Well, if my parents were not my parents, they would not be the kind of people I would have contact with. That should be clear. The mutual exchange, the topics they are interested in don’t interest me. Maybe that’s a big word, but there is actually a- some sort of- a kind of alienation there. He (my father) just lives in a completely different world, there are hardly any intersections with what I do or what I am. I don’t know, for example, that they watch so much TV, which always really turns me off. I just visited my father in Turkey and on our last evening he sat there watching a sort of Rambo-film for four hours, with interruptions again and again. And then there is this coke commercial: ‘Take a sip of happiness from the bottle’ – and what does my father do? He goes to the fridge and gets himself a coke (laughs). With this kind of things I just think: ‘What am I doing here?’ (§89)<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> „Also dieser, das ist nicht mein *Freund*. Freundschaft ist was auf Augenhöhe. Also, das ist einfach ‘n sehr sehr guter Bekannter.“

<sup>11</sup> „Naja, wenn meine Eltern nicht meine Eltern wären, wären das keine Leute, mit denen ich Kontakt hätte. Das muss man einfach festhalten. Also der Austausch die Themen, die sie interessieren, interessieren mich nicht. (...) Das ist vielleicht ‘n großes Wort, aber es ist schon ‘ne- schon ‘ne-‘ne Art Entfremdung da, dass der (Vater) einfach in ‘ner ganz anderen Welt lebt, (...) da gibt’s einfach wenig Schnittmengen (...) mit dem, was ich mache oder wie ich halt im Sein bin. (...) Was weiß ich: dass die so viel Fernsehen schauen, was mich immer nur abtörnt. Ich hab jetzt meinen Vater besucht in der Türkei (...) und an unserem letzten Abend (...) saß er da und hat irgend so ‘ne Art Rambo-Film gesehen, vier Stunden lang und immer wieder mit Un-

Onur describes a feeling of ‘alienation’ from his parents, being the result of his acquired position in the social space and the accumulation of economic and cultural capital, as well as his adoption of the habitus of his ‘new world’. Onur’s case illustrates almost in an ideal-typical way the acquisition of a habitus that Bourdieu associates with the dominant classes. His life-style, taste and cultural preferences do avoid all connections to as much his Turkish *and* his working class background and instead celebrate the typical elements of the ‘goût de luxe’ (Bourdieu 1984) and the insignia of German *Bildungsbürgertum*: there are repeated references in the interview to his interest in classical music and philosophy, and his apartment – where the interview took place – is elegantly equipped with parquet floor, stuccoed ceiling, exquisite furniture and pieces of modern art.<sup>12</sup>

In Onur’s case, identification and distinction are first of all based on *social class* affiliation, but they intersect with ethnicity. On the rare occasions that Turks in Germany appear in his narrative he uses expressions like e.g. ‘Ghetto of Turks’, and he also associates his own experience of stigmatisation during childhood and youth mainly to *class-related* aspects such as the lack of money in his family. Onur has internalized the strong discursive association in Germany of ‘Turkish’ with the working class and low-education which leaves no room for whatever forms of hybridity or the simultaneousness of multiple identities and connected habitual practices. He might still

terbrechungen. Und dann machen sie Cola-Werbung – ‘Trink ein Schluck Glück aus der Pulle’ – und was macht mein Vater? Geht zum Kühlschrankschrank und holt sich ‘ne Cola! (lacht) Alles so Sachen, wo ich dann einfach denke, ‘was mach ich eigentlich hier?’“

<sup>12</sup> The term *Bildungsbürger* refers to a part of the middle-class that highly values education in a quite traditional sense as ‘classical education’ with a strong focus on ‘high culture’ – especially classical music and languages, such as Latin and Ancient Greek. German *Bildungsbürger* are mostly wealthy, they work in traditionally high prestige-professions, such as doctors, lawyers and university professors, and they use education – more than material goods – as a status symbol and differentiator to lower social classes, including the gross of immigrants.

be perceived by outsiders as ‘a Turk’, but for him that does not mean much more than the ‘mere coincidence’ of having Turkish parents.

Looking at the entire sample of our Turkish second generation interviewees, however, Onur is not only a rather extreme case, but also an exception. Certainly, all respondents have been facing similar challenges in developing strategies for dealing with differences between their ‘milieu of origin’ and the skills and socio-cultural competences needed to survive in their respective professional environments. Our next case represents a strategy that takes an almost diametrical position in regard to the role of the ethnic and the social background in the narrative of success.

### Case 2: Connection and Ethnic Distinction

In the case of Erkan Özgenc, a 32-year old IT professional in Berlin, the steep upward career is not accompanied by feelings of social distance and alienation towards his Turkish working class ‘milieu of origin’. Quite on the contrary, potential gaps in social class affiliation are bridged by emphasising a strong identity as Turkish and Muslim and the supposed cultural values and cohesiveness of an ‘ethnic community’. Erkan was born in Berlin into one of the ‘typical Turkish’ neighbourhoods of the city, but his parents, both with only a few years of formal education and working in low status jobs, purposely moved to a middle-class neighbourhood when he and his brother approached school age. Being a bright pupil in primary education, Erkan went to a *Gymnasium* for secondary education, but approaching the moment of transition from lower to higher secondary he was, as he tells, practically forced to leave the school by a teacher who bluntly said to him that she would do anything to prevent him from becoming the ‘first Turk’ at this school to pass the final exam. He changed to a vocational *Gymnasium* and successfully gained his *Abitur*. Already during his studies of Informatics at the Technical University, he took up student jobs in the IT departments with different companies. Upon graduating from the university, one of

these companies, a large global player, offered him a full-time position as an IT consultant. Today, he is still working there and has achieved, as he defines it, a ‘good middle-class position in society’: he lives with his wife and children in a self-owned apartment situated in a relatively heterogeneous middle-class neighbourhood.

In contrast to Onur, the structuring element of Erkan’s career narrative is not alienation from the ‘milieu of origin’, but continuity and identification with it. Though Erkan’s parents could not help with his educational career either, he tells a very different story about what they meant for him during the time at school:

Let me put it like this: my parents educated us very well in terms of well-educated behaviour, of culture, of values. But in actual school matters, we had to educate ourselves, my brother and me. They knew what a ‘1’ and what a ‘6’ meant (i.e. the best and the worst school grades; CL) but that was enough. So we knew: ok, we need to take an effort in school, good grades are good, bad grades are bad. (§40)<sup>13</sup>

It is revealing that in this reply to the question about the role of his parents for his school career particularly the transmission of *cultural* values is emphasised. Throughout the interview, Erkan refers to things done and thought that in his view are ‘common for us’ or ‘in our culture’. For example, when he tells about his time at university and about having contact mostly with other Turkish students, he describes ‘typical’ modes of sociability that distinguished ‘them’ from ‘German’ students:

Simple things such as, I don’t know, when we are in the canteen, one person gets up and gets tea for everyone. He just asks ‘Who would like to have tea?’ and then usually everybody answers ‘yes’ and then he simply gets the tea. And no one asks afterwards:

<sup>13</sup> „Also ich sag mal so, meine Eltern haben uns von der Erziehung her sehr gut erzogen, also vom Verhalten, von der Kultur her, von den Werten her (...). Aber rein schulisch haben wir uns eigentlich selbst erzogen, mit meinem Bruder. Also die wussten was ‘ne Eins und was ‘ne Sechs war, (...) aber das hat auch schon gereicht. Also wir wussten halt: Ok, wir müssen uns in der Schule anstrengen, gute Noten sind gut, schlechte Noten sind schlecht. (§40)“

‘What do I owe you?’ For us that is just common practice: if you have something, you share it. There are, as I said, many cultural aspects in which we are just different and therefore the circle of friends is always very similar as regards language and culture. (§181)<sup>14</sup>

In Erkan’s case, the values he has been socialized into in his family are still guiding his everyday practices, social relationships, and perceptions of the world. According to him, his upward trajectory seems not to have performed any effect or change to these underlying, culturally defined principles. Erkan’s narrative does not express any feeling of social distance to his parents or to other lower-educated Turkish people as could be presumed in the light of his upward career and his position in the social space. His frequently used collective ‘we’, as seen in the above-cited extract, establishes a close link with the social environment of his childhood and adolescence.

This is possible and coherent because Erkan works with a basic distinction not along ‘social class’, but along ‘ethnic’ classifications and notions of ‘minority versus majority’. Throughout his account, Erkan particularly brightens the boundaries between ‘Turks’/‘Muslims’ (or even ‘foreigners’ in general) and the German *Mehrheitsgesellschaft* (‘majority society’).<sup>15</sup> He continuously points out strong differences in values, norms and practices between the two sides, but also mentions the regularity of experiences of exclusion and stigmatisation that he shares with his ‘co-ethnics’. An example:

<sup>14</sup> „So einfache Dinge wie, keine Ahnung, wenn wir in der Kantine sitzen, dann steht bei uns einer auf und geht halt Tee holen für alle. (...) Er fragt nur ‘Wer möchte ‘n Tee haben?’ und dann meldet sich eigentlich immer jeder und dann holt er halt den Tee. Und da wird dann nicht hinterher gefragt ‘Ja was schuld ich dir?’ (...) Bei uns ist es halt üblich, wenn man was hat, dann teilt man es. (...) Es sind, wie gesagt, viele kulturelle Aspekte, die uns unterscheiden einfach, und deswegen ist der Freundeskreis immer auch sehr gleichsprachig und gleichkulturell.“

<sup>15</sup> On the concept of ‘bright’ versus ‘blurred’ boundaries see Alba 2005.

It has happened several times already when we went shopping, that we were stopped by the security people: ‘We saw that you took something, you hid it in the pushchair, you did this at the cashier.’ Then he started screaming really loud, until we finally opened the pushchair in which our baby was sleeping. So we said to him: ‘If she wakes up, you’ll get into trouble’. And only then he noticed that we speak German and to him that was absolutely strange. (§207)<sup>16</sup>

Being ‘othered’ and discriminated against as a ‘Turk’ and ‘Muslim’ represents a biographical continuity for Erkan. He experiences that his accumulation of cultural and economic capital does not make much of a difference, but that he continues to be considered as ‘socially inferior’ simply because of his background. His emphasis on ethnic differentiations can be interpreted as *reactive* to social exclusion, and it is also visible in the way he describes his social relationships. Basically, all of his friends have a Turkish and/or Muslim background, whereas the relation to his ‘native German’ friends he still had in school did not last long – according to him, again because of ‘fundamental cultural differences’:

The big separation actually started right after the *Abitur*. Since the day of the *Abitur*, when I held it in the hand, I never heard or saw anything from my people at school again. Probably, we had never built up some real thing. I also have a friend, who for years had been separated from us, building up a German circle of friends. And after some years, he came over to us again and he told us: ‘Hey, you know what, as much as I tried to bring myself together with these people, at the end of the day I am always the Turk’, he said. So one can never-it just doesn’t work, the two cultures are so far apart. It is just a completely different understanding of certain things. We really only have Turkish friends, not because we don’t like the Germans,

<sup>16</sup> „(Es ist) auch schon häufiger (passiert), dass wir beim Einkaufen von Securityleuten angehalten wurden, von wegen ‘Ja, wir haben gesehen, wie Sie was eingesteckt haben’ (...) ‘Das haben sie im Kinderwagen versteckt, das haben Sie an der Kasse gemacht’. (...) Dann hat er ganz lautstark geschrien und dann haben wir dann im Endeffekt den Kinderwagen aufgemacht, sie hat geschlafen, wir haben gesagt ‘Wenn sie aufwacht, dann gibt’s Ärger’. Und er hat gemerkt, dass wir halt Deutsch sprechen, das war für ihn dann total fremd.“

but simply because the intersections don't work. (§319)<sup>17</sup>

In sharp contrast to Onur, Erkan defines friendship as sharing a common cultural or ethnic background which works irrespective of educational level or social class. This connects him to a social environment which can be extremely heterogeneous. Consequently, his circle of friends comprises well-educated people in high status jobs as much as people who, as he admits, 'did not really get their lives together'. The joint 'ethnic definition' of social ties facilitates strong feelings of solidarity with lower educated people, whom he can support thanks to the cultural capital and self-confidence developed during his career. He describes himself as active in 'defending our own people,' in case they are treated unfairly, and he is involved in voluntary projects supporting young people of immigrant background in their educational careers. His trajectory thus not only did *not* go along with a dissociation from the 'old' habitus, but, on the contrary, strengthened his social position in and his feelings of belonging towards the 'milieu of origin'.

At the same time, Erkan's narrative is not about 'failed integration' or anything similar. As stated above, he and his family are living a middle-class life. Regarding his professional context, there are certain reservations expressed in regard to socialising with his colleagues beyond

<sup>17</sup> „Die große Spaltung hat eigentlich direkt nach'm Abitur begonnen. Also, am Tag des Abiturs, wo ich's in der Hand gehalten hab, hab ich nie wieder was von meinen Leuten aus der Schule gehört oder gesehen. (...) Man hat nie wahrscheinlich so richtig was aufgebaut. (...) Ich hab auch 'n Freund, (...) der hat jahrelang sich von uns abgespalten, der hat sich so 'n deutschen Freundeskreis aufgebaut. Und nach etlichen Jahren kam er dann mehr mal wieder zu uns rüber, so wenn wir uns getroffen haben, (...) und hat dann erzählt 'Ey wisst ihr was, so sehr ich mich auch versucht hab, mit den Leuten irgendwie zusammen zu bringen, im Endeffekt bin ich der Türke' hat der gesagt. Also man kann niemals- das geht einfach nicht, die Kultur ist so fern voneinander. Also das Verständnis für gewisse Dinge ist einfach komplett verschieden. (...) Wir haben halt wirklich nur türkische Freunde, nicht aus dem Grund, weil wir die Deutschen nicht mögen, sondern einfach, weil die Schnittpunkte nicht funktionieren.“

the work context. These reservations are mostly based on the perception that his ethnically 'German' colleagues wouldn't understand the rules imposed by his Islamic belief and also on his own rejection of the central role of alcohol in socialising events. But despite this, he seems to have internalised quite well the 'rules of the game', i.e. the habitus and strategies needed to be successful on the job.

The fact that his professional environment and the private social contexts are clearly separated does not present any particular difficulty for Erkan, who has been facing the challenges of switching between 'different worlds' since his childhood:

One still lives between two cultures, you know? So you come home: a completely different world, in school it's a completely different world. Nowadays with work, it's still the same: when I go to work it's still a very strange world for me that just functions in a different manner than with us at home. And then somehow you have to combine this. (§82)<sup>18</sup>

This reference to 'different worlds' clearly contrasts the two cases. Onur has made his professional and private lives part of the same social sphere, consisting of an almost exclusively 'white' intellectual upper middle class. When Onur talks about a 'completely different world', he refers to the world of his parents and the Turkish working class from which he moved away in both the literal and the figurative meaning. For Erkan, the 'two worlds' are separated, too, but they both remain relevant for him: his self-identification is clearly with the world of his parents and his 'milieu of origin', but performing practices belonging to the 'old' habitus does not exclude knowing the 'codes' for being successful as a professional in a mainstream global company and acting accordingly in the respective contexts.

<sup>18</sup> „Man lebt ja zwischen zwei Kulturen, immer noch, ne? Also, du kommst nach Hause: ganz andere Welt, in der Schule ist 'ne ganz andere Welt. Das ist heute mit Arbeiten immer noch so: Wenn ich arbeiten gehe, ist für mich halt immer noch 'ne ganz fremde Welt, die halt einfach anders tickt, als es zu Hause bei uns ist. Und dann muss man das ja irgendwie kombinieren.“

The position of the Turkish minority as one of the most prominent Others in current German self-definitions (Schneider 2001, 2010; Mandel 2008) and the clear boundaries between what is associated with the 'Turkish' and the 'German worlds' suggests little room for members of that minority to really 'become part' – in a dual sense: as the *ethnic* label 'being Turkish' is discursively linked with low educational and professional status, our upwardly mobile respondents face the problem of defining themselves in a social position that is still largely absent in public discourse. In a way, Erkan's *reactive* identification with his 'own ethnic group' and Onur's *over*-identification with the mainstream middle class represent two alternative strategies that seem to be closest at hand.

Yet Erkan, like Onur, is not prototypical for the gross of our sample. Taking such a clear side in a strongly contested field of belonging and identity politics is apparently not the most attractive option. Quite on the contrary, most of our professionally successful interviewees employ all kinds of *bridging strategies* between the 'two worlds': They feel at home in Germany and their hometown, but they are also connected to Turkey; they maintain close relations to their families, but also feel at ease with their fellow students or colleagues, even when the latter group does not share the same social or ethnic background. Even when discussing an obvious cultural difference between Turkishness and Germanness, the largest part of our respondents expressed that both references have been intimately part of their socialisation. For them, the actual challenge is how to balance out the multiple and hybrid, social and ethnic identities and the habitus of the different 'worlds' in which they feel they belong.

### Case 3: Social Mobility without Alienation and Distinction

This will be illustrated with our third case, the narrative of Meral Çinar, a 31-year old risk manager at a bank in Frankfurt. Meral was born and grew up in a middle-sized town in Bavaria. She had a smooth school career thanks to the

'luck', as she calls it, of having met a supportive school environment. After primary school, she directly accessed the academic track *Gymnasium* – where she was one of just a few children from immigrant families – and she passed the final exam *Abitur* without a problem. While still studying Business at the University of Applied Sciences in her hometown, she decided to spend a year in Istanbul to study Turkish literature. After taking up her Business Studies again in Germany, she wrote her thesis at a global transportation company in Frankfurt and was offered a job there. She declined, however, and instead applied for a two-year traineeship at a renowned bank in Frankfurt. To her own surprise, she successfully passed the highly demanding and selective recruitment process and, after the traineeship, was offered a permanent contract. In the interview, Meral still presents herself as being overwhelmed by this privileged and 'elite' professional context. She lives in an upper-middle class residential town near Frankfurt – another 'elitist' environment, she laughingly admits – but she moved there mainly because family lived nearby. When we met for the interview at her workplace, her appearance stands out: she wore a short, tight black dress, high heels, and quite heavy make-up which was in clear contrast to her passing-by female colleagues in their discreet business pantsuits.

In Meral's narrative, we see a combination of the necessary transformations and adaptations in the course of her steep professional career on one hand, and a quest for continuity in the most fundamental values, norms and identifications from her childhood socialisation on the other. She gives a vivid account of the adaptation process 'from a *Gastarbeiterkind* to a certain class, I did not know before', as she describes it herself, that she experienced upon entering her current job:

The first year, I was actually permanently overstrained, and I also told my parents: 'It's great here, I like my colleagues and the bosses, everyone is nice, but I am overstrained. This is a world where I do not belong!' It was simply so different for me,



this elitist class where I do not come from, where I was not born into. But then, at some moment and without noticing, I became more influenced, also in the course of my professional achievements. I don't know, at some moment, it was just no trouble anymore and I started to really feel more and more at ease. How shall I say? Today it is like that: I really enjoy working here. (§29)<sup>19</sup>

Meral describes the process of acquiring and internalizing a new habitus which allows her to act and behave properly in this new social context. Her account also illustrates that acquiring a new habitus also means *identifying* with that new environment. Yet, it is also important for her to maintain or establish different types of connections to her Turkish and working class origins. In regard to her parents, for example, Meral emphasizes the importance that her family attributed to education in spite of both parents having only spent a few years in school:

I come from a family that values education a lot. Even though my parents are guest workers they always wanted that we advance well in school and learn a good profession afterwards. That was very clearly their priority, so when we needed something for school or tutoring classes, they never saved on this. These are actually the values they transmitted to us very strongly.

They made very clear to me, maybe in contrast to many other Turkish families: "You can always marry and you will also certainly find a husband, but first learn a good profession so that you can be self-reliant and independent and do your own thing". (§7, 9)<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> „Das erste Jahr war ich eigentlich permanent überfordert und (...) hab das auch so meinen Eltern gesagt. „Das ist toll hier, ich mag zwar meine Kollegen und Chefs, die sind alle nett, aber ich bin nur überfordert, das ist 'ne Welt, in die gehör ich nicht rein!“ (...) Das ist so einfach anders gewesen für mich, so diese elitäre Schicht, aus der ich nicht komme, in die ich nicht hineingeboren wurde. Ja und dann irgendwann, (...) ohne dass ich's gemerkt hab, hat das immer mehr eingefärbt, auch mit den fachlichen Erfolgen. (...) Ich weiß nicht, irgendwann ist es mir selber von der Hand ganz einfach gegangen und ich hab mich dann wirklich immer wohler gefühlt. (...) Und ja, wie soll ich's sagen? Jetzt ist es so, ich arbeite hier super super gerne.“

<sup>20</sup> „Ich habe 'ne Familie äh, die sehr viel Wert auf Bildung legt. Meine Eltern sind zwar Gastarbeiter, aber sie wollten immer, dass wir schulisch vorankommen und dann später auch einen guten Beruf erlernen(...)

Meral's parents might not have been able to support her school career by helping with homework etc., but they transmitted a sort of 'fundamental orientation' that guided her educational goals and aspirations. This is actually a very widespread narrative in our interviews, and it has also been reported in several other studies on social mobility in immigrant families as an important element in the 'intergenerational transmission' of educational aspirations (e.g. Raiser 2007; Nicholas, Stepick and Stepick 2008; Tepecik 2011). By this, 'social climbers' establish continuity between their current position and their family. The upward career is presented as *product* of internalized parental aspirations and not as result of individual habitus transformation.

But Meral's reference to family values also includes the ideals of independence and individual autonomy, i.e. values that presumably guide her personal goals and attitudes to this day. This even connects her upward career and professional habitus to the mobility narrative of her family. Meral thus manages to discursively bridge what appears as a deep cleft between the 'two worlds' in the two previous cases. This becomes visible at different moments in the interview. The following quote illustrates three parallel lines of continuity in Meral's narrative: (a) the familial habitus of aspiring educational and professional success, (b) the ongoing strong reference to 'Turkishness' (including Turkey and the Turkish community in Germany), and (c) the 'juggling' of the two 'spheres' of her family (and the 'Turkish community') and her 'German' circle of friends:

Die haben auch die Priorität ganz klar darauf gelegt. Das heißt, wenn wir irgendwas für die Schule gebraucht haben, oder Nachhilfeunterricht, daran wurde nie gespart. Und das sind eigentlich die Werte, die uns sehr stark vermittelt wurden.“

„Also die haben schon sehr klar gesagt, im Gegensatz vielleicht zu vielen anderen türkischen Familien: 'heiraten kannst du immer, 'n Mann findest du auch immer, aber erlerne einen guten Beruf, damit du selbstständig bist und unabhängig sein kannst und dich selbst verwirklichen kannst.'“

My position towards the family was always different from my (German) friends. It was clear to me that I would *not* move out at age 18; that was not a primary goal. I have two elder brothers: I am very free, but, at the same time, it is pretty clear that I cannot just bring a number of male friends at home. There are certain limits that I have to respect. And these made some differences. I also do not eat pork, and I listen to a different type of music. For me it was clear that I would travel to Turkey every summer, while my friends would go every year to a different place. That does not mean that I would have been the typical swot in school: I went out at night and lived that life *too*. I sometimes went to Turkish discotheques where I would have never persuaded someone from my class to join in (laughs). So, I went with my Turkish friends to the Turkish discotheque on one weekend, and the next weekend I did something with my German friends and we had just as much fun. Also my ideas about men are different from my German friends, very different actually. I have a rather classical understanding of gender roles. I would not like to have a husband who stays at home for three years when I get a child and then welcomes me every evening with an apron around his waist and our child on his arm. (§67)<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> „Die Einstellung zur Familie war immer anders bei mir als bei meinen Freunden. Für mich stand halt fest, ich zieh nicht aus mit 18. Das ist jetzt für mich kein primäres Ziel. Ich hab zwei große Brüder: ich bin zwar sehr frei, aber trotzdem war's dann irgendwie auch klar, ich kann hier nicht beliebig viele Freunde haben männliche oder äh so mit nach Hause nehmen, da gibt es schon gewisse Grenzen, die ich einhalten muss. Das waren dann halt Unterschiede. Oder ich esse kein Schweinefleisch und ich hör auch andere Musik. Und für mich ist klar, dass ich jedes Jahr in die Türkei fliege, während meine Freunde jedes Jahr in ein anderes Land fliegen. (...) Ich war jetzt aber nicht der typische Strebertyp, der dann irgendwie ausgeschlossen war, weil ich (...) viel unternommen hab und auch abends weggegangen bin und irgendwie dieses Leben auch gelebt hab. Ich bin vielleicht auch manchmal anders weggegangen als die anderen, also in türkische Diskotheken, da hätte ich niemanden aus meiner Klasse überreden können (lachend) da mitzugehen. Aber dann sind halt meine türkischen Freundinnen und ich in ,ne türkische Disko gegangen an dem Wochenende. Und am nächsten Wochenende war ich dann mit meinen deutschen Freundinnen unterwegs und das hat genauso viel Spaß gemacht. (...) Ich glaube, auch mein Männerbild ist schon anders als von meinen deutschen Freundinnen (lacht), sehr stark anders, (...) ich hab doch schon 'n klassischeres Verständnis, was die Rollenverteilung angeht. Also (...) ich fände es nicht toll, wenn ich ,n Kind bekomme und mein Mann

Already in the almost exclusively German and middle class-environment of her *Gymnasium*, Meral became used to 'switching' between the different habitual practices there and at home – which is similar to the practice of 'code-switching' that has also been identified in studies on ethnic minority middle class in the U.S. and the United Kingdom (e.g. by Neckerman, Carter and Lee 1999; Moore 2008; Rollock et al. 2011).<sup>22</sup> Becoming familiar with the professional habitus in her current company was a challenge, but has not led to any sort of questioning or even abandoning the internalised norms and modes of behaviour of her 'Turkish side'. On the contrary, they still guide her everyday practices and they are directly linked to a strong feeling of Turkish identity. Yet, different from Erkan, neither certain feelings of Otherness in her professional environment nor the partially differing life-styles of her 'German' friends go along with drawing a clear *ethnic* boundary. Even though she highlights aspects that distinguish her from the 'German mainstream', she also expresses a strong feeling of being 'at home' in German society and totally at ease in her professional context.

This narrative strategy also bridges differences in social class. She underscores, for instance, the heterogeneity of her social contacts and that she would never judge people on the basis of their educational attainment or current professional activity. Meral has developed a strong understanding of the struggles and challenges of moving up, translated into a sort of 'habitus as social climber' – i.e. becoming part of an upper-class professional environment, but, at the same time, cultivating elements of her working class-origins. This resembles to what Rollock et al. describe in regard to the Black middle class in the United Kingdom as 'immediacy of stories, memories

sagt „Ich bleib jetzt drei Jahre zu Hause, geh du arbeiten und mach deine Karriere“ und er mich jeden Abend mit Schürze und unserem Kind auf 'm Arm empfangen würde.“

<sup>22</sup> See also the vast linguistic literature which was the first to observe and describe 'code-switching' as a normal and widely unproblematic exercise in multilingual environments (see Gogolin and Neumann 2009 for an overview of some current debates here).

and advice from a working-class past', making it difficult to unambiguously self-identify as 'just middle-class' (Rollock et al. 2013: 263). Meral demonstrates that maintaining and cultivating the connection to one's origins can be successfully combined with building up social and emotional ties to environments with completely different rules at work.

Even though Meral also uses the metaphor of 'different worlds' to describe her experiences of dealing with her different social contexts, the task is not to decide for one or the other, but to find a way of expressing her feelings of belonging to *both*:

I have also learned to deal with these two worlds. On the one hand this world of the bank, and the moment I leave the bank, the fact that there is also a real world. I see this here (the bank) also as a sort of soap bubble. It is very selective, and when I am out there with normal people then I need a day or two to acclimatise again. It's really like that, but that's the same with many colleagues, because here you get used to a certain way of speaking, to use certain phrases and formulations. The way you work, the way you think, you become intensely part of the company. I identify very strongly with what I do. But it also helped to be aware of this and tell myself that this is, in fact, a sort of soap bubble here. (§27)<sup>23</sup>

The agile 'switching' between certain practices and 'languages' represents a connection strategy that is quite common among the 'social climbers' in our sample. Growing up in Germany as children of Turkish immigrants made them learn

<sup>23</sup> „Ich hab gelernt, mit diesen zwei Welten umzugehen. Einmal diese Welt der Bank, und immer wenn ich diese Welt verlasse, dass es nochmal eine echte Welt gibt. Also ich seh das hier so 'n bisschen als Seifenblase an. Hier ist es schon sehr stark selektiert, und wenn ich wieder draußen bin, wieder unter den normalen Menschen, dann brauch ich wieder ein, zwei Tage, um mich zu akklimatisieren. Es ist wirklich so, aber es geht auch vielen Kollegen so, weil du bist es nur gewohnt, (...) in 'ner gewissen Art zu reden, gewisse Redewendungen, Formulierungen zu gebrauchen (...). Die Art, wie du arbeitest, die Art, wie du denkst, also du wirst sehr stark zu dem Unternehmen. Ich identifiziere mich auch sehr stark über das, was ich tue. (...) Aber es hat mir auch geholfen, so dieses Bewusstsein zu sagen ‚Okay, das hier ist nun mal 'ne Art Seifenblase.‘“

to cope with distinct social and cultural contexts since childhood days: a 'private sphere' in which Turkish language and cultural practices predominated and the 'public sphere' of a German speaking school environment. Thus, even though the professional career gives access to still a very different social experience, Meral's narrative – and similarly the narratives of a large part of our respondents – indicates that they have acquired the basic skills for this already in their youth. Developing and applying these skills is challenging, but certainly in most cases not 'painful', as was stated by Lee and Kramer (2013) at the beginning of this article.

### Conclusion

The processes of upward social mobility for our respondents require transformation and adaptation in (at least) two intersecting categories: social class and ethnicity. To describe this kind of transformation, a widely used concept in the literature on social mobility has been 'habitus', a term developed and extensively described especially by Pierre Bourdieu whose empirical studies, e.g. on the differentiating function of tastes and preferences within the social classes (Bourdieu 1984), moreover laid a solid fundament for the presumption that crossing social boundaries must go along with profound changes in the habitual practices of upwardly mobile individuals. The focus on the boundaries between social strata emphasises the stability and durability of a given collective habitus. However, most of the literature does not distinguish in conceptual terms between habitus as a collectively shared set of dispositions which demonstrates remarkable continuity and stability, and its representations in individual attitudes and behaviours which can change in the course of a biography. As a consequence, individuals tend to appear as 'imprisoned' in the prescriptions of a given habitus, so that 'escaping' from it and adopting a new habitus is understood as a deep and permanent transformation.

While this might still work conceptually for the crossing of social boundaries, it becomes

increasingly problematic when we look at the intersections between social class and other relevant dividing lines in society, e.g. gender, 'race' or ethnicity. The cases presented demonstrate a much wider range of possible reactions than is suggested by the concepts of 'clefthabitus' and 'habitus transformation'. While there is no doubt that transformations in habitual practices happen in processes of upward social mobility, the examples of Erkan and Meral illustrate that they do not necessarily lead to *replacing* one habitus by another, but rather to a *diversification* of the repertoire of social practices, 'languages' and modes of behaviour.

In our view, much can be gained by bringing together the concept of habitus with the very closely related concepts of identity and hybridity. Identity literature offers a conceptual framework that stresses elements of process, change, and multiplicity. Applied to the concept of habitus, it would entail, for example, the possibility of 'switching' between social practices within a dynamic set of 'multiple habitus', according to the given social context. Linking the two approaches, we therefore suggest thinking in terms of *habitus diversification* to describe and conceptualise the ways in which 'social climbers' deal with adaptations and transformations when crossing social boundaries. An important focus should thus be on the strategies of *bridging* across different habitus instead of the rather limited perspective on the cleavage between them. At the same time, the habitus concept adds something to Identity Theory, too, in the sense that it directs our attention to the *structural* aspects in social mobility patterns, making evident that individual coping strategies are the result of individual and collective interactions within a specific wider social structure (see Baumeister and Muraven 1996; Reay 2004) – a structure that obviously also includes relations of power and inclusion/exclusion. Moreover, the habitus concept offers a way to link identity to practice, which is an aspect Identity Theory literature often has difficulties dealing with.

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# Turning Disadvantage into Advantage: Achievement Narratives of Descendants of Migrants from Turkey in the Corporate Business Sector

by ALI KONYALI (Erasmus University Rotterdam)

## Abstract

While researchers have often studied descendants of migrants in terms of their educational and occupational shortcomings, there is a lack of studies on an emerging group of professionals with exceptional achievements. Drawing on data collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews in Frankfurt am Main, Paris and Stockholm with business professionals whose parents migrated from Turkey, this article explores how they present their stories within the framework of struggle and success, while they try to avoid victimization. Their narratives emphasize the benefits of being exceptional and different in the competitive context of the corporate business sector, with its emphasis on innovative performance. In the face of group disadvantage, they differentiate themselves from other descendants of migrants from Turkey (with less successful careers) by stressing the role of personal characteristics and individual achievements. This is a common feature in the respondents' narratives in all three sites.

**Keywords:** descendants of migrants, corporate business professionals, occupational achievement, narratives, group disadvantage

## Introduction

Children of migrants from Turkey are among the most disadvantaged groups across Western Europe in regard to education, access to the labour market, and occupational attainments (Heath, Rothon and Kilpi 2008: 228). However, some manage considerable occupational achievements in spite of their potentially disadvantageous background. Classical approaches in migration research suggest explaining this phenomenon by looking at the decrease of ethnic and socio-economic differences over time in terms of assimilation to boundaries established by the dominant majority (Portes and Zhou 1993; Alba and Nee 1997). According to Neckerman, Carter and Lee (1999), individuals can make strategic use of a set of cultural elements usually associated with a minority group in order to accomplish economic mobility in the context of

group disadvantage. The idea of second generation advantage (Kasinitz, Mollenkopf and Waters 2004; Kasinitz et al. 2008) emphasizes the drive to become successful among immigrant parents and their children, arguing that the second generation is better equipped to function in a multi-ethnic and diverse environment.

While recent contributions emphasize the importance of considering institutional variations across different national contexts with regard to differing outcomes (Cruel and Schneider 2010; Cruel, Schneider and Lelie 2012), existing approaches to intergenerational social mobility usually do not focus on narratives of personal success or failure. Literature on intergenerational social mobility of children of migrants often theorize integration as a reachable endpoint by putting emphasis on educational and occupational

performances, while there is a lack of studies investigating the consequences of these subjective experiences. Therefore, the central research question of this article is: *How do successful adult children of migrants from Turkey narrate their occupational achievements?* With the heterogeneity of the Turkish<sup>1</sup> second generation in Western Europe in mind, this article addresses exceptional achievement narratives of persons whose lower educated parents migrated from Turkey to Germany, France and Sweden.

As part of the ELITES project that is researching successful<sup>2</sup> children of migrants from Turkey across four countries (Germany, France, Sweden and the Netherlands), this research in particular examines achievement narratives based on empirical data gathered through 18 qualitative interviews with corporate business professionals<sup>3</sup> in the metropolitan areas of Frankfurt (am Main), Paris and Stockholm. The main objective of this paper is to examine how occupationally successful individuals, who allegedly belong to a disadvantaged group in their respective societies, internalize and modify the dominant conception of achievement within the context of international business.

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that 'Turkish' does not claim to objectify the alleged ethnic belonging of individuals. Therefore, it should also not be perceived as an imposed homogenization of this group's diversity, but as a conceptual simplification to identify the parents' country of origin.

<sup>2</sup> The often interchangeably employed concepts of success and achievement both include a strong normative element since societal discourses as well as distinct opportunity structures shape their construction. Whereas the notion of achievement indicates the role of performance and agency, success (as well as failure) rather refers to a condition.

<sup>3</sup> Professionalism is a concept identifying symbolic resources (re)producing occupational orders based on expertise and craftsmanship (Schinkel and Noordegraaf 2011). The term 'professionals' as it is used here denotes that most of the persons involved have followed specialized training, although the business sector seems rather open towards newcomers and career changers due to its emphasis on innovation and performance.

Many respondents in this study have to engage in the negotiation of boundaries when trying to explain their achievements. Being in comparable positions to the businesspeople in Lamont's study on the French and American upper-middle class, they could also be regarded as men and women of considerable power who "frame other people's lives in countless ways as they conceive, advise, hire, promote, select and allocate" (Lamont 1992: 13). However, in contrast to professionals with native parentage, be they upper or working class, the migration of their parents provides them with an additional frame of reference for their achievements. Belonging to a disadvantaged group, they have to deal with a majority of peers of a similar background who have encountered more problems throughout their careers.

According to Mills (1959), the sociological imagination should take into account both individual lives as well as societal histories while trying to understand how they relate to each other. The ability to shift one's perspective is essential in order to elucidate the links between the 'personal troubles' of individuals and 'structural issues'. The importance of an approach that focuses on individual narratives lies in its ability to provide insights to the complex and sometimes contradictory subjectivities on the interweaving of identities, educational pathways and occupational achievements. Findings that are based on individuals' own representations and understandings of these relations could shed light on the wider implications of these narratives.

### Theoretical Framework

In order to understand how corporate business professionals whose parents migrated from Turkey frame their achievement narratives, a theoretical framework is presented in three interrelated sections: The first section briefly describes how group disadvantage can affect life chances of individuals; the subsequent section briefly discusses how (perceived) individual difference can be beneficial within the context of interna-

tional business; the final section conceptualizes achievement ideology as a meritocratic perspective that might downplay structural inequalities by explaining success and failure as an outcome determined by individual agency.

#### *Exceptional Individuals from a Disadvantaged Group*

The construction of identities is a contingent process of assignment and assertion, which in turn leads to social dispositions and agendas. The categorization of individuals into groups often influences their trajectories, and while one can occupy different positions in a variety of groups at the same time, both individual and collective identities are defined by making use of external 'others'. 'Construction sites' such as politics, labour markets, residential space, social institutions, culture, and daily experience can affect the salience of identities (Cornell and Hartmann 2007). The co-occurrence of labelling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination leads to the stigmatization of groups, which affects life chances of individuals. That is to say, when people construct categories and link them to stereotypical beliefs, individuals might have to deal with a devalued, or 'spoiled' social identity (Link and Phelan 2001: 363-365; Goffman 1963).

Recent comparative research confirms that children of migrants from Turkey are facing higher risks of unemployment, often report unfavourable treatment experiences while job-seeking, and they have a lower proportion among professionals and executives (Lessard-Phillips, Fibbi and Wanner 2012: 170, 190, 192). More specifically, in Germany, there is a widespread perception of sociocultural 'integration deficits' of the Turkish second generation which is disadvantaged in terms of employment, income levels and returns from education concerning occupational attainment (Worbs 2003; Kalter and Granato 2007). In France, there are persistent difficulties for the Turkish second generation to enter the job market in general and, more precisely, in acquiring high-status occupations (Simon 2003; Silberman, Alba and Fournier 2007). In Sweden, unemploy-

ment rates are consistently higher for children of migrants than for their native parentage peers. Again, the Turkish second-generation has lower probabilities of employment and lower levels of earnings (Westin 2003; Behrenz, Hammarstedt and Månsson 2007).

Salient labels are dependent on the context and not everyone has to cope with the same consequences of an ascribed group identity. Nevertheless, it can be argued that when entering into professional careers and climbing up the social ladder, the so-called second generation is embracing new roles while simultaneously challenging their marginalization based on ascribed group identity. Therefore, achievements of individuals who allegedly belong to subordinate groups can be subject to a 'politics of exceptionality' (Cuádriz 2006). Instead of considering their achievement in relation to institutional processes and structural opportunities, they are seen as individual exceptions to the usual pathways of group members. The following section discusses to what extent perceived difference can help individuals to advance in spite of group disadvantage.

#### *Diversity within the Context of International Business*

The notion of diversity within the context of international business is twofold: The entrance of minority group members into leading positions implies equal opportunity for individuals regardless of their background. However, there is also the potential for individuals to make use of their perceived difference by presenting themselves or being perceived as having an inherent competence within the context of international business, due to their immigrant background. Their perceived difference is not only to be tolerated by employers, clients and colleagues alike, but this 'cultural background' has the potential to enhance their individual careers.

In contemporary neoliberal 'knowledge economies', information is the essential commodity (Castells 2000). This allows for both competitiveness and achievement to be presented as



resulting from individual competences. Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) identify that the new spirit of contemporary capitalism justifies occurring transformations in the labour market with a new value system, highly influenced by multinational companies that emphasize the need for individual agency in post-industrial economies. The project-based nature of occupational positions makes career development dependent on individual characteristics which define one's 'employability' (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005: 185).

A neoliberal market framework promotes a drive of individual success in order to benefit from the possibilities of a global economy. In such an environment, profit is the main criterion for evaluating products and services (Bourdieu 1998: 128), whereas cultural competence can become a strategic device for individual benefits. So that, for instance, people who are supposedly able to operate in different cultural worlds because they are aware of relevant differences while doing business, can make use of diversity for competitive advantage in the global marketplace (Mitchell 2003). This is in line with Boli and Elliott (2008) who argue that the contemporary emphasis on diversity masks the individualization of cultural differences, which turns the self-directed, egalitarian, empowered individual into the most meaningful and valued social entity.

*Achievement Ideology: Justifying the Status Quo*  
While Bourdieu (1977) thinks there is a strong reproductive bias built into structures, Giddens (1979) claims that structures are both medium and outcome of practices that constitute social systems. Following these conceptions, Sewell Jr. (1992: 19) came up with a theory of structure, defining it as "sets of mutually sustaining schemas and resources that empower and constrain social action and that tend to be reproduced by that social action". This implies a concept of agency as a constituent of structure, while an agent is capable of exerting some degree of control over social relations. However, individuals can access different kinds and amounts of

resources for transformative action, depending on their social positions (Sewell Jr. 1992: 20-21).

Neoliberal thought normatively associates achievement with exemplary individuals (Ong 2006; Demerath 2009). When corporate business professionals regard the principles of the market as the legitimate regulatory mechanism of their activities, structural inequalities become part of the meritocratic system, in which individuals are accountable for different outcomes. Individual achievements of subordinate group members can also be conceptualized as the result of a resistance with subversive potential (Carter 2009). However, a system justification perspective seems applicable in order to understand why members of disadvantaged groups accommodate and rationalize the status quo, thereby both internalizing and perpetuating inherent inequalities (Jost and Banaji 1994; Jost, Banaji and Nosek 2004).

A system justification perspective enables one to perceive individual differences as determinants of inequalities. The mechanism at work is comparable to the 'American Dream' narrative; it is available for everyone, but the very fact that it exists is only due to the obliteration of the impossibility that everyone can simultaneously live the dream (Žižek 2002: 64). As a result, "the gratification of the upwardly mobile" can be complemented by "the pacification of the deeply poor", who might then believe that they have to turn things around themselves or remain accountable for their own failures (Hochschild 1996: 87). There is a general consensus among psychological literature stating that individuals tend to assume more personal responsibility for success than for failure. They also interpret and explain outcomes in ways that have favourable implications for the self (Mezulis et al. 2004). Whereas social science literature rarely theorizes the implications of presenting someone as an achiever, social psychological literature enables a more thorough understanding of the how and why people present themselves strategically, depending on the context and the social posi-

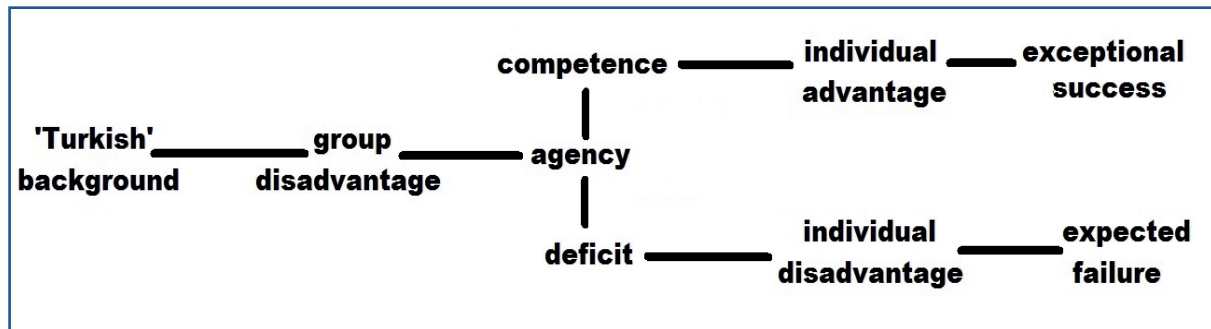


Figure 1: Turning disadvantage into advantage according to achievement ideology.  
Source: The Author © The Author.

tion they occupy (see Jones and Pittman 1982; Goffman 1959).

Individuals usually interpret achievement against the backdrop of previous experience. Indeed, according to system justification theory, people tend to justify the way things are, especially if their experiences tell them that change is hardly possible. One way to do this is by using stereotypes to differentiate between themselves and others while taking their own achievements as an evaluative standard. This naturalizes and appropriates inequality by emphasizing the role of individual characteristics (Jost, Banaji and Nosek 2004: 889).

Figure 1 shows how, according to achievement ideology, even potentially disadvantageous background characteristics, such as having parents who migrated from Turkey, can be transformed into perceived competence and individual advantage subsequently. As agency paves the way for both success and failure, those who fail to turn things around are responsible for the fact that they have to cope with constant disadvantages caused by their background.

## Methodology

### *Data Collection*

Professionals whose lower educated parents migrated from Turkey are the primary sample of this research project. Data was collected by conducting qualitative in-depth interviews in the metropolitan areas of Frankfurt, Paris and Stockholm. Whereas Paris and Stockholm are the capital cities as well as the economic and finan-

cial centres of France and Sweden, respectively, Frankfurt can be considered the financial capital of Germany, accommodating several major financial institutions and commercial banks. According to Sassen (2000), Paris and Frankfurt are two central nodes in a network of global cities binding international finance and business centres. The 2012 classification of the GaWC (13 January 2014) inventory of world cities places Frankfurt, Paris and Stockholm in the 'alpha' category of global cities.

Data collection started with a mapping of professionals in leading positions of the corporate business sector in each setting to make sure we would be able to talk to people in comparable positions. The final selection of respondents was based on at least one of the following criteria: (1) persons having organizational and managerial or employee responsibilities within a company; (2) persons who are working in a senior position in a smaller service firm (including owners and self-employed professionals); (3) persons who are in a specialist or expert position within a company. These criteria account for the diversity of professions in financial and professional services that are interrelated, as professionals can switch between (sub-) sectors and positions.

The initial aim was to talk to professionals with at least three years of relevant work experience, which resulted in differences within the sample, as some professionals were more experienced or in more senior positions than others. Since snowballing was employed, this fieldwork might leave out some professionals who fit the crite-

ria but who were either not as 'visible' or whose social networks were not accessible. Respondents across these three sites work in knowledge and capital-intensive service positions with an emphasis on financial and professional services. There are three typical characteristics for the professions in the sample: First, they have an inherent international character. Second, there is quite some diversity concerning educational and professional pathways. Third, they are relatively prestigious, although they are not so much based on high educational credentials (as compared to traditional professions such as law and medicine).

Interviewers collected information on their career trajectories, asking questions about their family background, social networks, their sense of belonging, as well as their work ethic and career goals. They were loosely structured; in other words, semi-standardized. Each interviewee helped structure the conversation with answers and comments, although the same set of key questions was used for each interview (Fielding and Thomas 2008: 247). In addition, respondents could raise their own issues so that, on average, the interviews took around 1 ½ hours. The interviews were conducted in German or Turkish (Frankfurt), French or Turkish (Paris) and English or Turkish (Stockholm). While the author of this article conducted all interviews in Frankfurt and Stockholm, two trained researchers collected data in Paris. Anonymity of all respondents was guaranteed beforehand, so that delicate information could also be accessed in an atmosphere of a frank discussion.

### Overview of Sample

The core empirical material in this paper consists of 18 corporate business professionals (12 male, 6 female) in Frankfurt, Paris and Stockholm (4 males and 2 females in each setting). Turkey concluded labour recruitment agreements with Germany in 1961 (revised in 1964), with France in 1965, and with Sweden in 1967 (Akgündüz 2007: 96). Respondents' birth years and their parents' year of migration roughly reflect the post-World War II labour recruitment patterns from Turkey to Germany, Sweden and France (see Figure 2). The fact that the oldest average sample is based

	Frankfurt	Paris	Stockholm
Respondents' year of birth	1968-1976	1971-1986	1962-1973
Parents' year of migration	1962-1973	1971-1988	1963-1971

Figure 2: Overview of respondents' year of birth and their parents' year of migration.<sup>4</sup>

in Stockholm, in contrast to the youngest sample in Paris, can be explained by the following reasons: First of all, the sample includes respondents who migrated with their parents at a young age (sometimes referred to as the 1.5 generation) as well as some whose parents reached their destination country as refugees. Secondly, Turkish labour migration to Sweden mainly consisted of independently arranged migration which also occurred before the recruitment agreement. Finally, it was only after 1970 that France started recruiting migrants from Turkey on larger scale (Akgündüz 2007: 94-111).

In most cases, both parents of the respondents were born in Turkey and migrated to Germany, France or Sweden between the late 60s and early 80s. The majority of them conducted low-skilled manual labour upon migration, while only a few managed to set up their own businesses. Generally raised in their parents' destination country, some respondents also spent (parts of) their early childhood in Turkey before they were reunited with their migrant parents.

<sup>4</sup> These are the years when one of the parents first entered the destination country. Usually the respondents' mothers followed (up to a few years) later, as recruited labour migrants or in terms of family reunification.

While the sample also includes individuals who attended secondary school and followed vocational training, most respondents obtained a university degree, predominantly within the subject areas of economics and finance.

The respondents' work experience in the area of professional and financial services falls within a range of 3 to more than 20 years, with most professionals having more than 10 years of experience. A majority of them were employed at a multinational company at some point in their career. Professional pathways illustrate the intertwined character of corporate business services. Whereas some worked their way up within a single company over many years, others changed their employer as well as their area of expertise more frequently. Likewise, some respondents left their employee position in a multinational company after several years in order to start up or work for a smaller company.

#### *Method of Analysis*

Since the aim of this paper is to explore individual achievement narratives, the collected data was analysed according to an issue-focused approach as described by Weiss (1994). This enables a focus on dominant tendencies while also taking into account nuances and alternative perspectives. Moreover, it allows empirical material to challenge theoretical preconceptions and vice versa. These four interrelated analytic processes are involved in this approach: coding, sorting, local integration, and inclusive integration. Coding links the data to theoretical pre-conceptualizations. This was done using the qualitative data analysis software *Atlas.ti*, which was also employed to sort the interview material subsequently. Once the material was sorted, it was locally integrated by summing up and interpreting relevant sequences. Finally, inclusive integration "knits into a single coherent story the otherwise isolated areas of analysis that result from local integration" (Weiss 1994: 160). That is to say, the researcher created a sociological account of the issue as a whole by connecting analytical sequences.

#### **Analysis**

In accordance with the theoretical framework presented above, the first analytical sub-section considers how respondents talk about the role their parents' migration played in their educational pathways. The second aspect focuses on how they narrate their professional position and the way it is connected to having parents who migrated from Turkey. The final section explains to what extent their achievement narratives help them to exclusively differentiate themselves as exceptional individuals from a disadvantaged group.

#### *'I had to make it': Benefit and Burden of an Intergenerational Drive to Achieve*

Professionally successful descendants of migrants often present their educational pathways as a continuation of their parents' migration project, which was driven by the desire to improve life prospects. In the narratives, one observes the crucial role that parents played in stressing that education was the key to success in their destination countries:

My dad always told me, always do everything that you want, but study, and if you need to redo your studies, then redo your studies, but study; I think that at that moment I saw the value of studying more. (Mr. Güven, Paris)

And that was actually her greatest wish that what she [his mother] could not achieve, that we do that. That we go to school, that was the most important thing actually, that we are successful, we go our own way, become independent. (Mr. Altay, Frankfurt)

Whereas some parents intervened more actively in critical moments, others simply conveyed the message that education was crucial and a primary reason for the struggle and sacrifices they were enduring upon migration:

Our parents were always triggering us. That is very important. Like 'look, these things are difficult, focus on studying and developing yourselves and work in better jobs'. (Mr. Şahin, Stockholm)

There was a clear demand to strive for educational and subsequently occupational achieve-

ment, and respondents often identified an unequal starting position as a result of their parents' migration. They indicated that the unequal starting position might have been caused by the fact that their parents were not highly educated, since parental support was mostly of an emotional kind. Nevertheless, they emphasized the crucial role of supportive parents as the basis for their subsequent achievements, thereby making explicit the link between their parent's migration project and their individual pathways:

(...) that we study here, study abroad, that we speak multiple languages, that we are internationally trained (...), these are all achievements of my parents at the end of the day. (Mr. Kaya, Frankfurt)

Whereas respondents from Frankfurt mentioned that they experienced difficulties predominantly in the early years of their educational pathways (sometimes due to spending parts of it in Turkey), respondents in Paris stated how they found out about the importance of a *grande école* degree to access a leading position in the corporate business sector. Those who could not attend elite business schools had to take longer routes to meet the requirements in order to advance in the labour market. Respondents in Stockholm who attended university also stated they had difficulties to adapt, especially in the beginning. However, across settings, respondents emphasized that they had the will to become competitive, helping to level the playing field:

We saw everything for the first time. Compared to the others, we were not competitive in the first couple of years of education. But as the years passed, one's own efforts and desire entered the picture and we started to become competitive. Their [referring to his native parentage peers] level of knowledge remained the same, but working hard, we<sup>5</sup> moved vigorously. A distinction began to be seen during the last year of college, I started to take the lead. (Mr. Toprak, Paris)

<sup>5</sup> In contrast to his reference to his native parentage peers, the context of the interview does not help clarifying whether the respondent also refers to his peers with a similar parental background, or whether he uses 'we' as a rhetorical means in informal Turkish language to talk about himself.

Ms. Suna (Frankfurt) attended a Turkish class within the German school system first; she remembered that the main point of it was to prepare her to return to Turkey. She claimed that her parents did not play a major role in her educational pathway. The fact that she went to the lower level of secondary schools in Germany was never questioned by them: "because the children of the neighbours also went there". Ms. Göksu (Stockholm), who did not attend university, remembered that her parents did not prioritize education either:

They did not know the language, they were working in factories, and they did not spend time with their kids. So the only thing they thought was to earn money to make ends meet. (...) That's why that what the first generation has done, blocked us a bit. They did not tell us that education is very important and therefore, we did not mind.

Ms. Onur (Paris) also had to deal with rather moderate parental support, even though they accepted her career plans. She said that, even as a young child, she had a drive to do something exceptional, but her mother told her: "okay, do, but don't do too much". The following statement seems to summarize the alternative view on the role immigrant parents played in their children's pathway:

Our mother and our father came here and they felt a lot of pain. It is as if that pain, even if they did not want it, maybe they were doing this without knowing, constantly felt like a burden on you. (...). Constantly it is like their story; their pain is on your back.

Although the small sample size does not allow for further generalizations, in contrast to most of the predominantly male respondents, some female respondents' drive to achieve also originates in an individual will to challenge parental expectations: "It was really me and my will to do it more than anything else" (Ms. Altın, Paris). In contrast, most male respondents present themselves as the embodiment of an intergenerational drive to improve life chances. One could argue that 'making it' while having parents who migrated from Turkey means that a general pattern of over-



coming disadvantage is part of the individual achievement narrative across sites. Existing differences in institutional arrangements certainly caused nuances in their narratives, to the extent that they identified different issues as obstacles. However, what the so-called second generation corporate professionals have in common is that they internalized their parents' migration project, which stimulated a drive to climb up the social ladder, in spite of all these obstacles.

*'I made it because of who I am': Turning Disadvantage into Advantage*

Talking about how they managed to get to their current professional position, some pointed out the importance of turning their potential disadvantage -- that arises out of their alleged belonging to a disadvantaged group -- into an advantage:

Actually, my mentality, my way of thinking is like that. So, no matter what kind of difficulties there are, it is necessary to turn it into an advantage somehow. (Mr. Şahin, Stockholm)

Most respondents emphasized that perceived difference can be considered a valuable attribute that one can make use of professionally. They pointed out that there is an inherent advantage to persons who grew up in two cultures because of the multiple viewpoints they have. Considering themselves as "different people, more open-minded" (Mr. Toprak, Paris), they assert knowing "both cultures" (Mr. Gündoğan, Stockholm), and they reflect on the role their background played in their professional pathway as "an advantage, because it was somehow interesting" (Mr. Altay, Frankfurt). However, it is also important to avoid being stigmatized and not being perceived as an 'average foreigner', Mr. Güçlü (Stockholm) argued. Stating that "not everyone can do this, because this is really people management", Ms. Cengiz (Frankfurt) conceives her abilities in providing services as given since she has a Turkish background.

Others make use of their alleged differences by taking over business responsibilities that are, for instance, related to Turkey, or have to do with their migration background in general. Such as

Ms. Topal (Stockholm), who used to be the diversity manager in her company: "(...) where I work, there is no one like me. So it's a plus. So it literally adds colour (laughs)". Most of the professionals consider using their exceptional attributes to their advantage in near future, if they have not done this already. Mr. Beyazıt (Frankfurt) or Mr. Aydın (Stockholm) especially focused on emphasizing their 'Turkish' background on the labour market in order to get to their positions. It seems that especially professionals with broader managing responsibilities that involve frequent interpersonal encounters can profit from an ascribed cultural competence, as they underline the importance of showing an advanced understanding towards their clients.

Interestingly, the tendency of professionals to emphasize difference as something valuable is also mirrored in the way they deal with potentially discriminatory encounters, saying that there is a value in dialogue and constantly explaining oneself to people, instead of being offended right away:

Then suddenly, people understand you. Suddenly persons who were unsympathetic, who were unsympathetic to others and who were perhaps discriminatory for others, suddenly, they are sympathetic (Mr. Beyazıt, Frankfurt).

With time, you also need to understand the other a little bit. You got to be a little relaxed. Not to be aggressive. There's no reason to get into a discussion. (...) but I have a few attributes, my religion, I have Turkish roots, these seem interesting to them, if you market it like this, it is going to be good. (Mr. Toprak, Paris).

Some respondents presented a more cautious picture of the role alleged differences play in people's pathways. For instance, Mr. Eren (Frankfurt), was more reluctant in directly ascribing what he called "a multicultural competence" to persons with a migration background; he makes it also dependent on their educational credentials:

Otherwise the cases of failed integration would not exist, I would say. (...) But in case of an academic with a migration background, I would say that he has that. Yes, prejudging I would suppose that he in any case has that.

Mr. Uzun (Paris) said that for a long time he has omitted the fact that he speaks Turkish on his CV when applying for jobs:

Afterwards when I started at the company, I have never hidden my origins but at the very start, at least, I did not want to be excluded directly because they saw 'Turkish' written down.

There were also some professionals in each city that felt openly discriminated against by certain statements from colleagues or clients at work. Mr. Gündoğan (Stockholm) argues that "sometimes you actually need to speak the local language better than the natives". Mr. Kaya (Frankfurt) could not adapt to the organizational culture within other companies in Germany, which is why he started his own. The female respondents' narratives also seem generally less determined to attribute advantage to their background. Reflecting on her pathway, Ms. Onur (Paris) said that her background in Turkey often seemed interesting to potential employers, but she still sees it as a cause of disadvantage, which requires her to be more driven than others: "you are constantly running behind. The gap is closing but you are still in the back". Even these alternative views implicitly conceptualize achievement as primarily determined by individual agency, which is in line with an achievement ideology present in their stories, as the following section will show.

*'If I can make it, every one of us can make it':  
Achievement Ideology*

The achievement narratives present stories that both praise and blame individual actions. They emphasize that in spite of all obstacles, everyone can make it:

I think that people will have to realize that everything is possible. Everything is possible, we have to stop looking at things negatively and start looking at things in an optimistic way (Mr. Güven, Paris).

Admitting there might be some truth to discrimination, most see individual responsibility as the main factor for achievement and underachievement. For instance, stating that she is not typi-

cally Turkish, Ms. Cengiz (Frankfurt) argued that a lot of persons with a migration background fail to make something out of their capabilities:

This is my experience, yes, I've started to deliberate relatively early on about what I want to be. (...) I believe that people don't do this sufficiently and I also think that parents can provide little support, because they themselves have this immigrant background.

When they talk about the reasons for the failure of others with a similar background, they deny virtue to persons whose labour market performance is deemed inferior:

They always look at it from a short-term perspective: 'how can I make money tomorrow?' If you think about the short-term at the age of eighteen, the best thing of course is to work in a restaurant, but what will happen in the long term? If they cannot think about this, their mothers and fathers have to. They also don't. (Mr. Toprak, Paris)

I mean I see this with Turks, which often annoys me. Looking for an easy route, the short cut. It is just not always the short cut, sometimes you simply have to work hard, right? This is how it is. (Mr. Altay, Frankfurt)

Respondents often see themselves as an illustration of how far one can get as long as one is willing and has a goal. In turn, when asked about reasons for higher unemployment among young people with a migration background, they argued that they do not do enough:

[Inequality of chances] is maybe 3% or 5%, let it be 10% of the reasons, but the remaining 90% are provided by other reasons and one of the biggest reasons is, we need to do much more, we have to send thirty instead of three applications. Or we have to send 300 instead of 30 applications. (Mr. Beyazit, Frankfurt)

Whereas they have all elements in their hands, all the things that they could do, they do not even realize this. (...) young people lack a strategic job searching. If you really want to work, you will find it. So I believe. (Ms. Onur, Paris)

Mr. Şahin (Stockholm) points out that there's a need for positive examples that show that it is possible. This was the reason for him to follow

what he calls an ‘idealistic career’ next to his professional one. He founded an association focusing on Turkish youth in Sweden:

We said that everything is a struggle. We made it, you can also make it. This reasoning we tried to inject. And this to an extent worked out. Because after I finished university, this generation, most of these persons, let me not say most, but about half of them started studying at the university. This means, if there are positive examples it works.

It was also often expressed that hard work alone is not enough and that one needs support, luck and resilience, but Mr. Erdiñç (Paris) is one of the few who explicitly mentioned the role of unequal conditions caused by more structural constraints: (...) [w]hen you don’t have the knowledge you don’t know where to go”. This, however, did not lead him to conclude with less emphasis on individual agency than other respondents: “if you work, if you inform yourself, you can be everything that you want”. His belief in individual agency was also nurtured by a religiously driven work ethic: “Allah gives to those who work”.

A few other respondents also acknowledged reasons for individual frustration, even though there might be the will to succeed. Such as Mr. Eren (Frankfurt), who mentioned the segregation of classes according to ethnic groups when he went to primary school. Accordingly, he states that 90% of pupils with a Turkish migration background went to the lowest secondary school category in Germany. Obstacles and frustration due to being perceived as ‘different’ play a prominent role in Mr. Uzun’s (Paris) reflections, as well. He suspects a ‘glass ceiling’ that kept him from moving further upward:

I tell myself I comply with all the criteria; I have done everything that I needed to do, what is there still left to do? I say, what is the last criterion that I don’t have?

He wondered whether this is the same discriminatory criterion that causes persons with ‘different’ names to apply more often in order to get a job interview. This did not prevent him from thinking that his case illustrates how one can

manage to achieve one’s goals “despite all those obstacles”.

Most respondents tell a story in which they stick out as exceptional individuals from a disadvantaged group. The discourse is shaped by an achievement ideology in which performance is evaluated from an agency-driven perspective, which often results in the differentiation of others with less exceptional career. They argue that personal characteristics explain why they made it while others did not.

### Conclusion

While there is a lack of European sociological literature on narratives of personal success and failure, some U.S. American research confirms that people tend to explain their own success as well as others’ failure through individual agency (cf. Hochschild 1996). The primary motive of this article was to examine occupational achievement narratives of adult children of migrants from Turkey in the corporate business sector across three sites. Upwardly mobile children of migrants from Turkey present their own trajectories as a continuation of their parents’ migration project which played a crucial role in stimulating their drive to achieve. They also take parental experiences as an additional frame of reference to evaluate their own position. Accordingly, achievement not only occurs in spite of whom they are, but is primarily caused by their self-conception, paired with an adaptive and optimistic stance towards difficulties they face.

Their narratives display similarities with some nuanced differences across contexts. In all three settings respondents have to cope with a group disadvantage. They are aware of this when they tell their exceptional story, as they always emphasize how they managed to overcome this disadvantage. In Germany, respondents especially underline the lack of resources in the early years of their educational pathways. In France, the *grandes écoles* still seem extraordinarily important in offering a shortcut into the labour market. The standardized compulsory primary education and generally high quality of universi-

ties in Sweden is why respondents do not identify access to institutions as a problem, but rather the adjustment to requirements. Once, however, they manage to adapt themselves to these requirements, their success becomes evidence of a functioning system. In addition, an increasingly internationalized corporate business sector seems to contribute to a comparable Turkish second generation experience that is rather similar across settings. That is to say, since they managed to bypass structural obstacles provided by local and national contexts, they themselves became part of a professional context whose dominant discourse is shaped by an achievement ideology which seems rather similar across settings.

Respondents clearly demonstrate an awareness of existing constraints and they were confronted with difficulties foremost in their educational pathways, but they also emphasize that ambition, opportunism and hard work can overcome these challenges. Their proven ability to adapt themselves to difficult situations strengthens their belief in and their justification of the status quo. Unwilling to simply accept an inferior position in society based on a disadvantaged group identity, they even attribute part of their achievements to it. Some of them even make professional use of their perceived difference, literally turning group disadvantage into individual advantage, making it a strong case for their own 'employability' and a main reason for their exceptional success (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005: 185). This becomes obvious in the ways in which they deal with potentially discriminatory encounters, as well, as they avoid critically confronting and exposing these controversial experiences as such. Moreover, they are even critical towards those that do feel offended. For them, being different thus not only refers to being different compared to the majority population, but also being different from others with a similar background (cf. Cuádriz 2006).

Their justification of the status quo happens at the expense of the already disadvantaged group (Jost and Banaji, 1994). When referring to the reasons why others do not manage similar

achievements, they also put the blame for 'failure' on the individual level, pointing out the deficits of others. Thereby, they not only demand that other children of migrants be as resilient and proactive, but they also expect other parents to be as supportive and motivating as their own. This might, in turn, strengthen the stigmatization of an already disadvantaged group (Link and Phelan 2001), while the counter-narrative, in which society needs to provide equal chances, was hardly found. However, although the small sample size does not allow for further conclusions concerning a gendered pattern, it is noteworthy that female respondents appeared to have a less resolute narrative on their own success and others' failure than their male counterparts.

There is a general tendency to stick to the narrative of achievement ideology that states that chances will come your way if you try hard enough. Even those corporate business professionals that feel a certain responsibility towards others from a similar background do this by once more stressing the necessity of individuals to invest in their goals. One could also argue that respondents are left with no other way to explain their achievements. Even if they are aware of their exceptionality, they might not really believe (anymore) that structural changes in the society are going to happen soon or should realistically be expected. So, it seems they can almost not dismiss individual factors to make sense of their own position. Nevertheless, they thereby accommodate and rationalize the status quo by both internalizing and perpetuating its inherent inequalities (Jost, Banaji and Nosek 2004).

Given that the selection of respondents was based on a certain professional position, the so-called 'dependent variable', one could argue that a comparative perspective is secondary to this article's argument. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that the narrative on the necessity to turn disadvantage into advantage was found in a similar fashion in all three cities. The similarities of achievement narratives across sites confirm the influence of a neoliberal emphasis on individual



agency in post-industrial economies (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005). Still, findings from this research cannot be easily generalized to other professional contexts, as they are based on a specific sample of corporate business professionals. Because of this, research conducted in other areas, such as law or education, may yield different outcomes. In the research that may follow, including a group of native descent in comparable professional positions, as well as focusing on institutional differences concerning issues -- such as labour market entry or the role of social networks in professional pathways -- might further our knowledge on the role of group disadvantage in individual career trajectories.

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