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Generation in transition: Youth transitions among native-born descendants of immigrants from Turkey

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5: Transition in School: Transition to Different Educational Trajectories

1. Introduction

The bulk of transition studies define the initial transition point as when young people make a transition from compulsory education into the labour market, further study, or inactivity. However, in stratified education systems in which students are streamed into different academic and vocational trajectories at an early age, the transition process begins much earlier, as educational tracking clearly shapes the future conditions of the transition process. Thus, in order to underline the retrospective nature of transitions, this chapter will therefore focus on the experience of early educational stratification among native-born descendants of immigrants from Turkey in Amsterdam and Strasbourg.

Over the last two decades, numerous studies have confirmed the link between educational stratification and its consequences in the labour market (Van De Werfhorst and Mijs, 2010). Various cross-national studies have demonstrated how the school-to-work transition process varies according to the level of stratification across education systems, as well as the occupational specificity in training systems where there is a tight fit between skills gained in training and employer expectations in the labour market (Allmendinger, 1989, Kerckhoff, 2001, Mueller and Shavit, 1998). Drawing on these findings, we can deduce that initial educational stratification will have significant consequences for students' transition process. Therefore, this streaming decision forms the first major transition students experience before they make their transition from school. The first part of the chapter describes the Dutch and French education systems in detail, with special emphasis on their respective stratification and streaming processes. TIES data will be used to describe the trajectories of native-born descendants of immigrants from Turkey in Amsterdam and Strasbourg. Presenting the field of education system and the rules of stratification first will help interpret students' motivations and orientations, let alone their practices.

The second part concentrates on the qualitative interviews with native-born descendants of immigrants, and on respondents' reflections on the stratification processes and their experience of it. It studies the extent to which distinct educational streams pre-ordain the outcomes of transition by providing discrete institutional structures producing different forms of capital crucial for labour market transitions. The conclusion discusses how initial tracking trends evolve and translate into the transition from school to work.

2. Stratification in Education Systems

Compared to other aspects of educational systems, stratification has a strong impact on young people's transitions from school. Durkheim ascribed two main functions to education systems; socializing and selecting young people for adult roles as citizens and workers (Emirbayer, 2003). Therefore, through training the ideal of meritocracy is fostered whereby education systems are assigned the responsibility for sorting of young people into different occupational roles while supposedly eliminating the effect of social backgrounds on the outcome, thereby enhancing equality of opportunity (Lauder et al., 2006). However, due to persisting educational inequalities, it is debated whether education systems annihilate or reproduce inequalities. While controversy continues over the reproductive versus democratizing effects of education systems, schools today continue to operate as the legitimate "sorting machines", selecting students for their future occupational roles. On the one hand, schools officially stream students into different educational tracks based on "merit". On the other, a subtle, covert differentiation operates through parental social background which may lead parents to more or less informed choices of school or subject, translating into advantages for their children.

Of these two sorting mechanisms, educational stratification through streaming into tracks is the most official. Allmendinger defines educational stratification as the designing of education systems to divide pupils into different vocational and academic tracks with varied outcomes and rewards (Allmendinger, 1989). Stratification decisions are officially based on meritocratic selection, such as tests and student grades. Previous studies have also associated educational stratification with the occupational specificity of vocational tracks. Mueller and Shavit have shown that most stratified education systems also provide a vocational education that offers training with occupation-specific skills which are recognized by employers in the labour market (Mueller and Shavit, 1998). Moreover, it has been argued that, in highly stratified systems with vocational specificity, vocational students experience a smoother transition to the labour market (Kerckhoff, 1995, Maurice, 1986, Mueller and Shavit, 1998). Nevertheless, this condition also depends on the labour market conditions at the time of the transition. In the current study, the Dutch education system is classified as highly stratified, providing occupation-specific vocational training through a combination of training in school and

intensive internship periods. In contrast, the French system is classified as less stratified, with different forms of vocational training encompassing both apprenticeship programs and school-based training with modest internship periods (leading to the BEP diploma) (Mueller and Gangl, 2003). There now follow descriptions of the streaming processes in the Dutch and French education systems, in light of the above mentioned theories of stratification. Each stage in the educational trajectories is augmented by descriptive information on the education experience of descendants of immigrants from Turkey using the Amsterdam and Strasbourg TIES data. The data provides rich and detailed educational histories for all respondents, helping to describe educational flows.

2.1. Streaming in the Dutch Education System (TIES data analysis)

In the Netherlands, compulsory education begins mostly at the age of four with primary school (*basisonderwijs*). There is no formal educational provision for pre-school children, though childcare facilities such as playgroups or day care are available. If parents work and make use of such facilities, they receive certain benefits based on their income level (Eurydice, 2007). Previous studies have shown that pre-school attendance is low among descendants of immigrants (Crul and Doornik, 2003). According to the TIES data, only 15% of native-born descendants of immigrants from Turkey living in Amsterdam attend school before the age of four, and the mean school starting age is 3.96.⁹

In the Netherlands, students are streamed into different educational tracks around the age of 12 as they enter secondary school. Previous studies have therefore classified the Dutch education system as “highly stratified” (Van De Werfhorst and Van Tubergen, 2007). The tracking decision is generally based on both the scores of a test (called CITO) that students take in the last two years of primary school and the advice of the primary school teacher.¹⁰ While the test score is the most decisive element in the streaming decision (Luyten, 2004), teachers can have an influential role in the choice of the educational stream by over- or under-advising (Hustinx, 2002). After streaming, students attend a “bridge class” (*brugklas*) for one or two years, and are provided with an opportunity to change their track. After the bridge year, students are directed towards one of the secondary education tracks. These tracks are divided into three main streams with varying orientations, durations and levels of selectivity, subsequently providing access to distinct higher education opportunities (see figure 1). The first track is the vocational oriented lower general track (*voorbereidend middelbaar beroepsonderwijs*, or VMBO). Over the last decade, all vocational tracks, namely the lower vocational education (VBO) and the lower general track (MAVO) were merged into the VMBO. This track now offers four different learning pathways, ranging from *VMBO-basis* to *VMBO-theoretic*, the

⁹ Since 2000, the government has provided opportunities for early years education to children of parents with education or language disadvantages (Eurydice, 2007). However, most of the respondents did not take up this opportunity.

¹⁰ 85% of Dutch schools participate in the CITO test, though some do not (Eurydice, 2008).

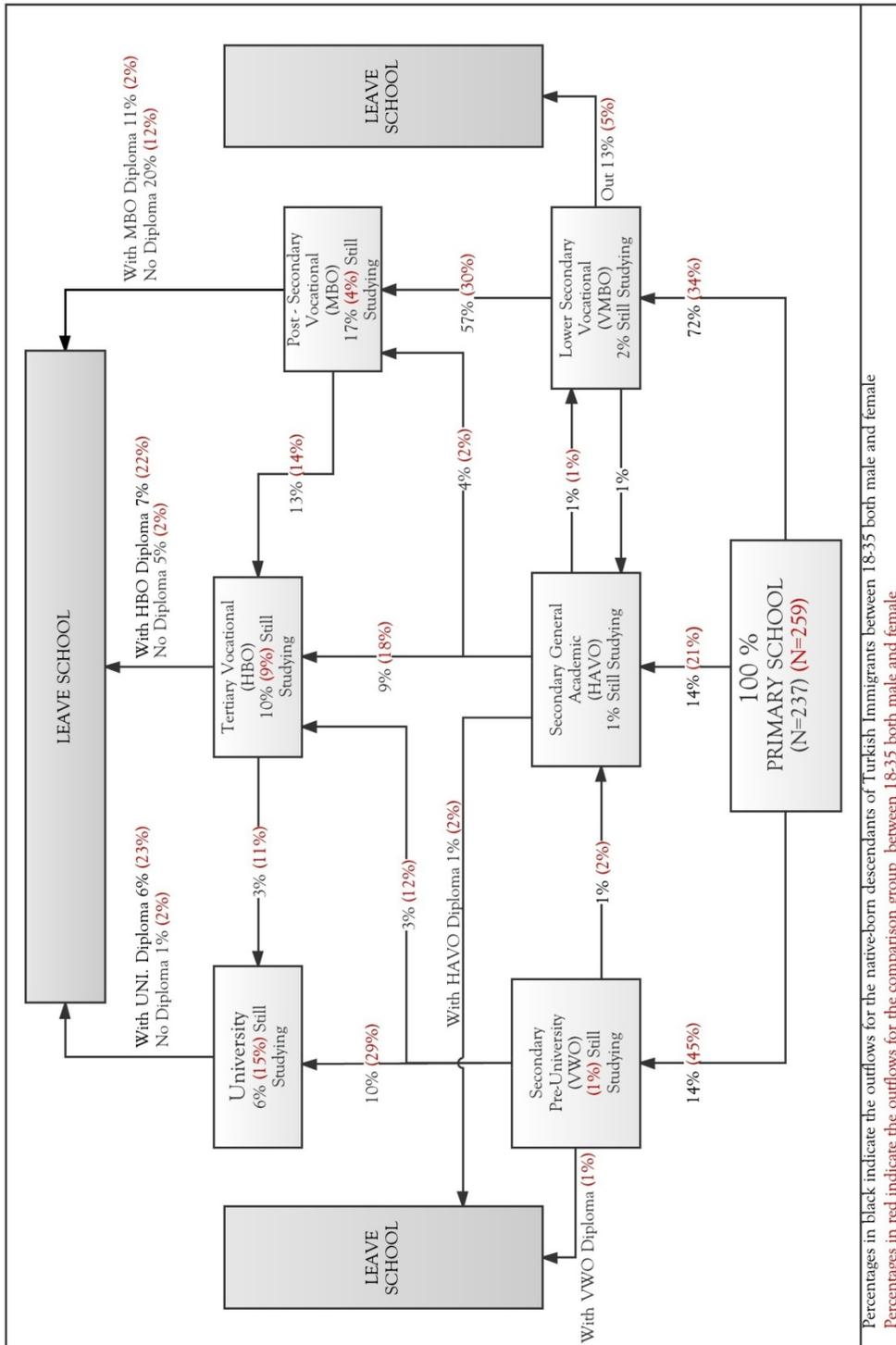
most advanced or selective stream.¹¹ This vocational education lasts four years and prepares students to post-secondary vocational education and training (*middelbaar beroepsonderwijs*, or MBO)(see Figure 6) . The second stream is the general intermediate track (*hoger algemeen voortgezet onderwijs*, or HAVO), which lasts five years and entitles students to higher professional education, also referred to as tertiary vocational college or education (*hoger beroepsonderwijs*, or HBO). The third and most selective educational track is the scientific– academic track (*voorbereidend wetenschappelijk onderwijs*, or VWO). The scientific-academic track takes 6 years and grants students direct access to university education (*wetenschappelijk onderwijs*, or WO). Despite this early stratification process, the Dutch education system does permit mobility between different tracks during secondary education. Not only during the “bridge year” but also throughout secondary school, students can try to switch tracks. VMBO students can transfer to HAVO in the fourth year of their study, and HAVO students can access VWO during fifth grade.

Figure 6 is a depiction of educational flows in the Dutch education system using the TIES sample for Amsterdam. In this figure, the streams illustrate the flows of students; so the figure should be read as 100% of the students who enter the system, and we see how they are streamed through the system. Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2007) described the streaming in the US education system using the metaphor of a “pipeline” to illustrate how students “leak” from the education system. Here, the intention is both to clarify the tracking system in the Netherlands (and later in Figure 7 in France) and also to show which pathways young people take in their educational trajectory. It incorporates all the respondents of the TIES Survey; the statistics in black represent the sample of the native-born descendants of Turkish Immigrants and those in red the comparison group. Those who hadn’t left the education system remain clustered in the boxes depicting their current education level. Those who left the education system are directed towards the box ‘leave school’. After primary school 72% of native-born descendants of immigrants from Turkey are tracked into the VMBO, while 14% pursue HAVO and another 14% VWO.¹² Even though the system allows for some permeability, when we look at intra-trajectory movements, not many students experienced mobility across secondary educational track; for example, 1% of all these respondents experienced upward mobility from VMBO to HAVO, while 1% underwent downward mobility from HAVO to VMBO, and 1% experienced downward mobility from VWO to HAVO. The distributions are strikingly different for the comparison group, where we see that 34% accessed the vocational track compared to 45% accessing VWO and 21% HAVO. However, mobility within tracks was also low among this group, in fact there is more downward mobility.

11 In the TIES survey, respondents had been educated under both the old and the new systems. Fig. 1 uses the new stream name, but includes those who attended either MAVO and VBO.

12 These are the final tracks that students enter after the bridge year, so this figure excludes the stratification prior to bridge year.

Figure 6: Respondents' routes through the Dutch education system



Following lower secondary school graduation, pupils from the VMBO track begin post-secondary vocational training with an MBO, as the VMBO is not a qualification in itself, but only lays the foundation for vocational training. In the Netherlands, the MBOs provide school-based vocational training with lengthy internship periods. The MBO comprises four different qualification levels; the lowest two levels (niveau 1- niveau 2), do not require diplomas or prior qualifications for entry. Furthermore, MBO-n2 is set as the minimum qualification to enter the labour market, and is also called the *startkwalificaties*. The MBO levels 3 and 4 (niveau 3- niveau 4) require a VMBO diploma. Students therefore build job specific skills that labour market employers recognize and value.

Furthermore, Dutch vocational training provides substantial hours of internship experience, during which young people gain experience of their future occupations. Some studies therefore describe the Netherlands as a country with employment logic (Iannelli and Raffe, 2007), as there is a strong coupling between the skills gained in the work place and labour market requirements, providing considerable transparency to students with respect to their credentials. In the coming sections we will discuss how this job experience has the potential to lead to the development of different forms of capital among the respondents.

According to the TIES data, the streaming works as most students pursued their institutional trajectories, with the exception of 13% of respondents with Turkish immigrant parents who left school before accessing MBO. However, the majority of students followed their tracks into the assigned institutions, and this was especially the case among those in academic-scientific (HAVO) or general-academic tracks (VWO). The Dutch education system also provides channels for those who received vocational education to attend university. Graduates of post-secondary vocational training (MBO) can access vocational colleges (HBO), and, after graduating can even enrol at university. In practice, those with any kind of MBO n-4 diploma gain access to all tertiary education institutions. However, they will still have to study another four years to achieve a tertiary vocational degree, and an additional two years if they would like to acquire an MA. As a result, even though vocationally tracked students are given this opportunity, they have to spend an additional three to five years to achieve a higher education diploma.

In a recent study using the Dutch national data set, Tieben et al. showed that the majority of students pursue the educational trajectory they were initially streamed into, and only a minority switch tracks and achieve upward mobility (Tieben et al., 2010). According to a recent report by the Ministry of Education, 14% of MBO graduates graduated into HBOs (Altinyelken et al., 2010). In the TIES data for Amsterdam, 13% of the respondents accessed HBO via MBO, though this only shows attendance of an HBO, rather than attainment rates. At the time of the TIES survey, nearly half of the HBO students were still at school, so overall graduation rates are hard to determine. If those with an HBO diploma would like

to pursue their education in the same area of study, their qualification counts as a bachelors degree, and they are required to conduct only one year of pre-masters preparation before studying for a Masters degree. Unlike in the French system, there are no institutionally recognized differences between higher education institutions of the same type in the Netherlands. However, among the two main types of tertiary education institutions, universities are generally perceived as more prestigious than vocational colleges (HBO). Nevertheless, Allen and his colleagues found that there are minor prestige differences among institutions of the same type (e.g., university A vs. university B) (Allen et al., 2007). As a result, except for the required secondary school diploma, selection hardly occurs during admission into higher education institutions (ibid).

In the TIES data for Amsterdam, among those who had successfully accessed a university education, the majority originated from VWO tracks; 10% of the sample of native-born descendants of immigrants from Turkey and 29% of the comparison group enrolled in university after finishing VWO. In the second group, 3% of native-born descendants of immigrants and 11% of the comparison group accessed university through HBO (see Figure 6).

2.2. Streaming in the French Education System (TIES Data Analysis)

In France, the education system is organized in three broad tiers; pre-school education, primary to lower-secondary education, and higher education. As opposed to the Netherlands, in France, the state provides public preschool education, which begins at age three and marks the starting age for almost 99% of children in France. Previous studies have shown that participation in pre-school education is significant in decreasing the chances of failure or repeating classes during primary school. (Duru-Bellat, 2000). Primary school begins at age six, and is the first stage of compulsory education. According to the TIES data, native-born descendants of immigrants from Turkey living in Strasbourg follow similar patterns; 99% attended pre-school education, and the mean starting age was 3.08. Nevertheless, 42.7% repeated at least one year during primary school, compared to 27% in Amsterdam.

The French education system provides a comprehensive education until the end of lower-secondary school (*collège*), where the most critical selection occurs. The last year of *collège* is called *troisième*. At the end of this year, around the age of 15, students are sorted into different academic and vocational trajectories. This process is called *orientation*, during which a “class council” (*conseil de class*) composed of teachers and school officials gather to make a streaming decision. Class councils consult the family and also take student grades¹³ into account, as well as the outcome of the *brevet des collèges* or *BEPC*¹⁴ exams. After the rounds of consultation,

¹³ The minimum grade point average (GPA) to enter baccalauréat general is 12/20.

¹⁴ These diplomas are not required to proceed into high school, but they might be influential in the decision making process (Brinbaum and Cebolla-Boado. 2007)

the class council reaches a final decision against which parents hold the right to appeal (Durier and Poulet-Coulibando, 2007).¹⁵ As a result of orientation, students are streamed into two lyceum-based tracks; academic or vocational. Academic lyceums last three years. In the first year, students attend uniform training (*seconde*). At the end of *seconde*, students choose between the general or technology tracks, which prepare them for *baccalauréat general (bac général)* or *baccalauréat technologique (bac tech.)* diplomas respectively. Of the two, *bac général* diploma is deemed the most prestigious, though both allow direct access to university or other higher education institutions, as well as to the preparation classes for the most prestigious universities (*grandes écoles*).

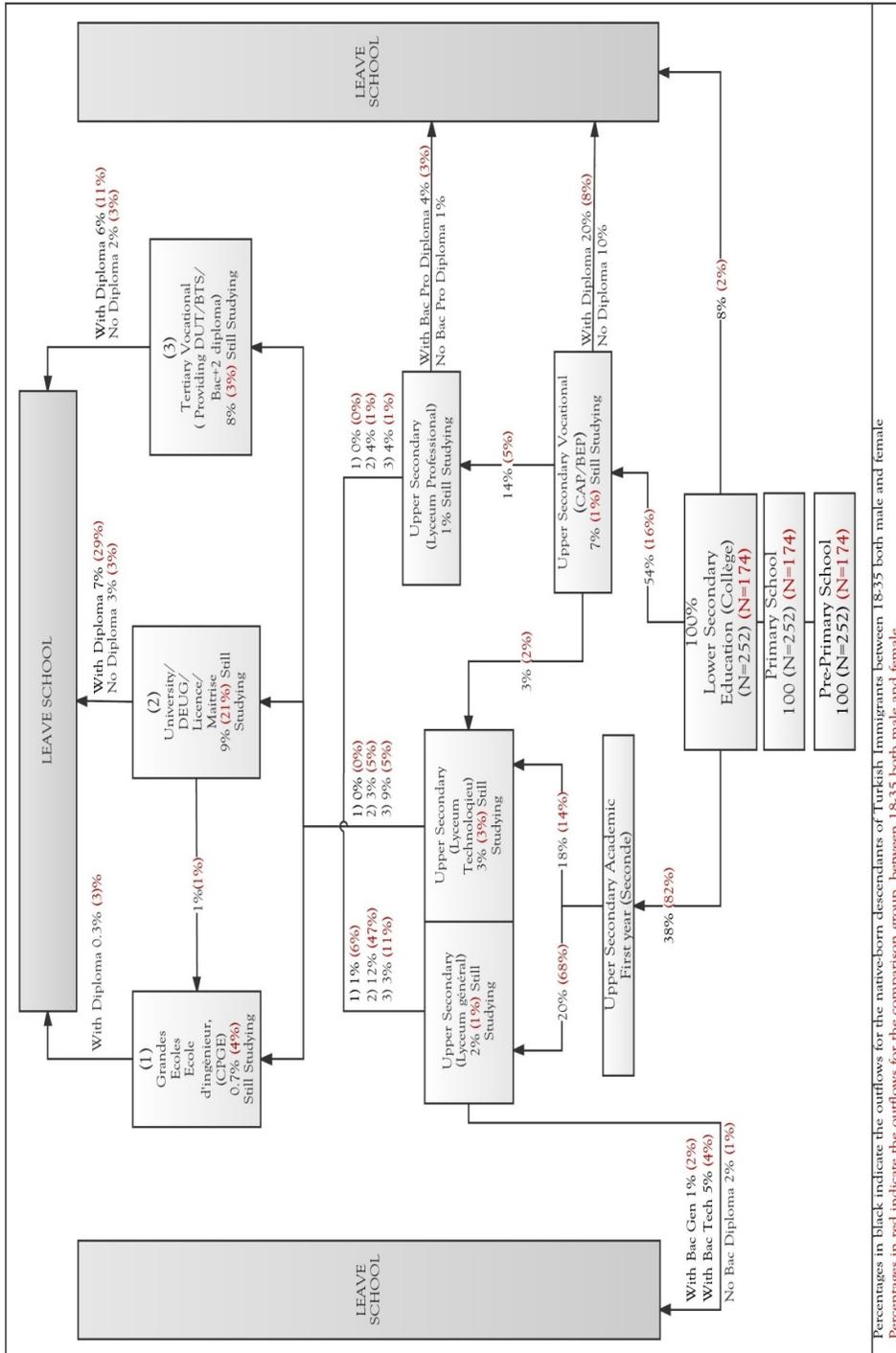
In contrast to the four-year vocational training in the Netherlands, the French vocational lyceums provide only two years of training combining general education with specific technical skills to prepare pupils for entry into the labour market. Again, vocational education is divided into two tracks. Students study either for the *Certificat d'Aptitude Professionnelle (CAP)* or the *Brevet d'Etudes Professionnelles (BEP)*. The CAP diploma requires apprenticeship periods, and is deemed less prestigious than the BEP diploma, which is a school-based vocational training with meagre internship periods. BEP holders can attend an additional two-year professional lyceum to obtain the *baccalauréat professional (bac pro.)*, which grants vocational students an opportunity to enter higher education.¹⁶ Furthermore, since the reforms of the 1980s, French lyceums have experienced considerable expansion in attendance as the number of young people gaining the *baccalauréat* increased from 20% in the 1970s to 62.5% in 2005 (Eurydice 2008). This growth was achieved by the creation and promotion of alternative forms of *baccalauréat* diploma, rather than an increase in attendance of the prestigious *bac général* (Duru-Bellat and Kieffer, 2008).

Figure 7 illustrates the educational flows among the TIES sample in Strasbourg. It shows that after lower secondary education (*college*) 54% of the sample of native-born descendants of immigrants from Turkey were directed from the lower secondary education vocational track of upper secondary education leading to CAP/BEP diplomas, while 38% were oriented towards academic track (lyceums). 8% had already dropped out of education during or after *collège*. If we read the streaming graph and round the percentages, the figures show that students, out of the 54% of students entered the CAP/BEP, and, from there, 20% left education after attaining their vocational diplomas (either CAP or BEP) while 10% eventually left without a diploma and 17% accessed lyceum and 7% was still studying.

15 Between 2000 and 2002, only 2% of parents appealed against a council decision (Durier and Poulet-Coulibando, 2007)

16 In particular, with the introduction of professional baccalauréat in 1985, students who finish vocational training (BEP/ CAP) are provided with the opportunity to extend their studies into a professional lyceum that grants a professional baccalauréat, giving access to higher education institutions and to university (ibid).

Figure 7: Respondents' routes through the French education system



Percentages in black indicate the outflows for the native-born descendants of Turkish immigrants between 18-35 both male and female. Percentages in red indicate the outflows for the comparison group between 18-35 both male and female.

Source: TIES Survey 2008

Among those who were tracked into the academic track (38%), at the end of the first year (*seconde*) 20% go to the general lyceum to attain *bac general* and 18% enter technical lyceum leading to *bac tech*. Again, these trends contrast with those of the comparison group; the majority of French-origin respondents (82%) entered the academic track while only 16% accessed the vocational track, and only 2% left education after *collège*. Among those who accessed the academic lyceum, the majority (68%) enrolled in general lyceum and 14% to technical lyceum. These trends accord with previous studies that show lower educational attainment among descendants of Turkish immigrants in France (Brinbaum et al., 2012, Silberman et al., 2007).

In France, there are clear prestige distinctions between different higher education institutions, with some universities (*grandes écoles*) requiring rigorous competition (*concours*) for admission (Kieffer, 2008). For such institutions, a lyceum diploma (*baccalauréat*) is not sufficient. Students have to take supplementary exams and in addition to students' exam results, the kind of lyceum diploma matters remarkably.¹⁷ Despite the increase in higher education participation among the children of immigrants and working class parents, these groups are still under-represented in the *grandes écoles* (Brinbaum and Cebolla-Boado, 2007, Brinbaum and Guégnard, 2010, Duru-Bellat and Kieffer, 2008). Students wishing to access engineering and social sciences courses at the *grandes écoles* need to attend highly selective two-year preparation courses (CPGEs) before the competitive exams. These courses mostly select *bac général* holders with excellent GPAs. However, regular universities (*DEUG* under the old system, *lisans* or *master* in the new system) are non-selective (with the exception of medical schools), but they do require a *baccalauréat* diploma. Additionally, the two-year tertiary schools such as STS or IUT are also somewhat selective. IUT schools are intended to train good students with *bac général* or *bac tech*. degrees for the university technology diploma (DUT). Students can continue from IUTs into Masters or even *grandes écoles* if their grades are eligible. STSs prepare students for the vocational tertiary diploma (BTS), and were initially designed for *bac tech*. holders, though they have become popular among all *baccalauréat* holders. One important reason for BTS's popularity is the dual study opportunity (*BTS en Alternance*), where students combine work with studying and experience smooth transitions into the labour market (Bidart and Pellissier, 2002).

When we look how young people continue their education after the stratification, Figure 7 illustrates that 18% of the native born descendants of Turkish immigrants in the sample go to lyceum tech; 3% were still studying at the time of the survey, 5% graduate with a *bac tech* diploma and 1% without a diploma and leave education,

17 Duru-Bellat and Kieffer shows that in the 1975-1980 birth cohort access to prestigious Grands Ecole is 7% in the entire cohort while this percentage goes up to 16% among *bac général* holders (Duru-Bellat and Kieffer, 2008)

9% enroll in semi-selective two-year vocational colleges to attain a BTS or DUT diploma, 3% goes into university. Students in general or technological lycées follow the pre-ordained patterns, with those holding a *bac général* preferring non-selective universities over vocational colleges. In contrast, those holding a *bac tech.* enter vocational colleges more often than universities. As in Amsterdam, most TIES respondents in higher education were still studying at the time of the survey, making it difficult to determine accurate completion rates for higher education. Nevertheless for those who finished we see that 7% of the descendants of Turkish immigrants left education with a university diploma, 6% with a vocational tertiary education diploma (BTS/ DUT) compared to 29% and 11% of the comparison group. From both groups only a small minority accessed the *grandes écoles* ; 7% of the comparison group and 2 % of the sample of native-born descendants of immigrants.

2.3. Comparative Analysis of the Dutch and French Education Systems

We have seen that the Dutch education system streams a large majority of native-born descendants of immigrants from Turkey into vocational education. By contrast, in Strasbourg a considerable group (38%) access academic training. This finding accords with the TIES research as a whole, which also encompassed Paris and Rotterdam data sets (Crul et al., 2012). Nevertheless, many studies have highlighted the descendants of immigrants from Turkey living in France as among the most disadvantaged second generation groups (Brinbaum et al., 2012, Silberman et al., 2007). However, when compared to the trends of stratification in Amsterdam, those in Strasbourg still seem to do better academically.

With regards to permeability, or the extent to which students can move across tracks, the majority of young people seem to continue their institutionally pre-conditioned educational pathways in both countries. Only 13% of the entire sample of native-born descendants of immigrants from Turkey accessed university via the long vocational track compared 8% who accessed the university or BTS via the professional lycée in Strasbourg. Thus, even though the French system is classified as less stratified and more comprehensive due to its later tracking, the outcome of the process has long-term implications in Strasbourg just like it does in Amsterdam.

Both the effect of tracking on transition and the permeability of tracks are two crucial issues for the interpretation of the qualitative data. Bol and Van de Werfhorst (2012) have recently illustrated that, while a high level of tracking in a national education system leads to better labour market allocation for young people, it also contributes to unequal educational opportunities since in such systems the effect of social class background is higher on tracking . The following analysis of the in-depth interviews seeks to discover how young people relate to

their initial tracking decisions and the role played by their parents and significant others during the process across cities.

3. Transition Experience in Amsterdam and Strasbourg (Qualitative Interviews)

SERDAR: It's not like I chose between MAVO or HAVO, I was sent to MAVO because this was my level

Is it possible to talk about a “choice” of vocational or academic track among the respondents in Amsterdam? The majority of the participants in the qualitative study argued that their test score at the end of primary school (CITO) was the most significant determinant in their streaming. At that point of stratification, hardly any of the students referred to their motivations or orientations towards schooling. For them, their track reflected their “education level” rather than their choice. Hardly any respondents' parents had been actively involved in the decision making process. Hence, according to the respondents, the “choice” was made by the “school and/or the test score” based on “merit”. Those respondents who were high-achievers throughout primary school scored well in the CITO test and thus made a direct transition into academic tracks, due to either their high grades or their prior placement in the “smart kids” clusters. Other students were mostly advised to enter the vocational track, where they remained unless teachers or significant others intervened in their educational destinies during their later school trajectories, such as in bridge year.

Gülden, the youngest child of Turkish immigrant parents, was initially tracked into vocational education. The part of her educational career she particularly enjoyed was her apprenticeship and work experience, and making a smooth transition into the labour market after receiving her MBO. Among her older siblings, she was the only one who acquired a vocational diploma, and is hence the highest achiever.

INTERVIEWER: What do you think about the stratification process at the end of primary school?

GÜLDEN: In fact, it is a good system, since everybody receives training at his or her own level.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think people are sent to right levels?

GÜLDEN: Well (pauses) I hear that students receive high grades but they are advised into lower tracks. I didn't experience anything as such. But still there is the Bridge year. You are given a chance to do HAVO during this year.

Gülden underlines the two compelling institutional discourses in the Dutch education system: The first is that the streaming decision is based “almost entirely”

on educational success, and hence everyone is sent to their “own level” of education; the other is that the system provides opportunities to switch tracks later.

Hakan was tracked into vocational stream, and was a last-year MBO student at the time of the first interview. When asked about tracking, he associated “test results” with “capacity”, meaning whether a student is able to manage a given track, and also relates “smartness” to attending an “academic lyceum”. Hakan defines the role of (education) systems as sorting people into appropriate levels.

INTERVIEWER: What do you think about the stratification process at the end of primary school?

HAKAN: I think it is good because they do a capacity test; they check your level. Can this boy or girl make it? Then comes the advice. I think CITO is most important; it shows what you (can) do.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think the selection is done fairly?

HAKAN: I think so, because if it was like Turkey... I mean, whomever I ask in Turkey, they say they are doing academic lyceum. I ask myself; are these people that smart? Or is there no system?

Moreover, the pledge that students will always have the opportunity to prolong their studies and upgrade their trajectories if they improve their educational success over time is successfully transmitted by the teachers. Tülin’s mother had serious health problems during the CITO period, so she scored poorly in the exam, and was advised into vocational track. Her aim was to reach HAVO. Her teachers convinced her that she could always pursue her studies in the future. The restrictions of the structure as well as the varying motivations of the students were balanced by the discourse of flexibility embedded in the system. On the one hand, the premise of flexibility is committed to re-introducing “agency” into educational decision-making, and on the other hand emphasizes the agent’s responsibility in shaping their educational career. These discourses were internalized by my respondents, and are evident in their accounts of their own educational careers. Even though some students questioned the accuracy of CITO in measuring educational capacity, they were generally confident that the selection process functioned quite directly based on one’s test score or “merit”.

In Strasbourg, the strong emphases on merit or the tight coupling between test scores and streaming decisions were not as evident in respondents’ accounts, while orientations and future motivations to study or work seemed to play a significant role. In Strasbourg too, the transition decision was primarily based on the grade point average (GPA) of the students during lower-secondary education (collège). However, the respondents also talked about their orientations and preferences with respect to the tracking decision. In respondents’ experience, all students had

selected institutions they would like to attend and this selection was evaluated by the class council based on their educational history in the institution.

In the academic track, once more the high-achieving students made a direct transition into academic lyceum. Can and Ayla had remarkably high grades throughout primary school and *collège*, and were the highest achievers in their class. Can even skipped a year during primary school. During the orientation process, they were directly advised to attend a general lyceum. For students with an only average GPA, some of whom qualified for the academic track, the patterns were more mixed. One group of students had good grades and were also positively encouraged to take the academic track by their families. Furkan had above-average grades throughout *collège* and was warned by his cousin at university to take the academic lyceum. He said he would have chosen the vocational track if she hadn't influenced his decision. Likewise, Selvi and Sevgi were steered towards the academic track by their fathers, who were well informed about the education system.

Among the vocationally tracked students, while the class council rejected the academic track selection of some of the students, other students preferred to take vocational tracks despite having grades eligible for the academic track. These students raised various concerns that led to this decision. First, they weren't certain whether the class council would agree with their choices. Second, they were uncertain of the outcome of an academic track, and unclear whether, if they failed to win a place at university, they would still be able to enter a profession. In the end, many of these students opted for vocational lyceum (leading to BEP). Most of these students expressed pro-work orientations. Boys in particular felt more pressured to learn a trade and earn their own income to become more independent. Selahattin was the ninth child of a first generation family. Hardly any of his older siblings had studied beyond vocational school. Even though he had very good grades in French during primary school, he didn't even consider studying in the academic track:

SELAHATTİN: My GPA was something like 13 or 14 [20] at the end of *collège*.

INTERVIEWER: What was the decision of class council?

SELAHATTİN: Well, they just review your (school) selections and they give a report of the final decision. In my case, they said nothing because I had already chosen BEP in construction (vocational track) and they were OK with it.

INTERVIEWER: How did you choose BEP construction?

SELAHATTİN: Well I had heard about the job and liked it. And my grades, well, they were OK, but I wasn't sure how far I could continue with them.

INTERVIEWER: So you had sufficient grades to access the academic track?

SELAHATTİN: Well, I am not sure, but also after general (academic lyceum), you have to continue two to three years. I don't know, it was hard.

INTERVIEWER: What did your parents say?

SELAHATTİN: Nothing. They said do what you want to do.

According to students like Selahattin, the academic lyceum and the baccalauréat diploma were vague options that entailed too much risk. Cengiz, another student who had good grades but followed the council decision to pursue the vocational track highlighted this uncertainty “you can't do anything with a *bac*; you don't have any occupation”.

However, some of these students pursued their education into a vocational baccalauréat, and some even accessed tertiary education. Such students decided to continue on to the next level when they scored high grades and were advised by teachers to try. Having guaranteed the vocational diploma (BEP) and avoided the risk of failing, the students moved into the next level to study for more diplomas, hoping this would increase their chances of employment. Again, credentialism came into play, even for students who were initially wary of entering the academic track. Despite the earlier emphasis on gender, similar working class values were discernible among the female students as well. Şebnem's GPA was also 14-15/20 in the last year of *collège*. Şebnem had first generation immigrant parents, who could barely assist her education. Even though 12 was enough to attend an academic lyceum, she preferred to continue to vocational training:

ŞEBNEM: I wasn't a great student. My grades were average, 14-15 over 20. They weren't 18 or 19. I was just above average. But I was a good student, had good relations with teachers. I could have gone to general lyceum. But I didn't want to. Because, you know, you make a direct transition to University. Back then I didn't think of University. Back then I thought a vocational degree would be sufficient, you know. But now it's different; the population grew, the degrees became less valuable. Back then I thought BEP would be enough for a good job. To earn a trade ... The class council approved my decision, because everyone wanted to do a *bac*, they were happy that some people were choosing vocational study. A bit sneaky, right? They didn't warn me or anything...

Şebnem went into vocational school with her close friend. Once they got good grades in the vocational track and acquired a BEP diploma, they were advised to enter a vocational baccalauréat. Having got their *bac*, they decided to enrol in university. In fact, Şebnem's ambition to study further was influenced at every step by her risk-averse attitude; she was cautious about taking one step at a time and

climbing the ladder gradually by making sure each step was guaranteed and she received considerable support from her peers, teachers as well as family¹⁸.

While the postulation of “meritocratic selection” dominated the discourses of respondents in Amsterdam, in Strasbourg the merit argument was not as straightforward. Merit in this case was strongly linked to the perceptions and orientations of students, as well as school advice, rather than being solely based on the grades.

Another difference between the Dutch and French systems that influenced the decisions of the students was that, for some students at least, the academic tertiary track in Strasbourg didn’t ensure transparent occupational orientation. On the other hand, in Amsterdam, there was hardly any doubt that higher degrees would lead to better labour market outcomes, and this is partly because of the occupation-oriented nature of tertiary vocational colleges (Allen et al., 2007).

3.1. Merit and Cultural Capital of the Parents

Most respondents pointed to the concept of “merit” to explain their tracking decisions. Nevertheless, what merit actually is has been a subject of intense debate. Young has conceptualized merit as intelligence paired with effort (Luyten, 2004). However, subsequent studies have repeatedly showed that merit is neither free from social class nor by itself determinant in educational outcomes (Lauder et al., 2006). In a recent study of the children of immigrants living in the Netherlands, Van de Werfhorst and Tubergen (2007) illustrate that neither the students’ academic ability nor their tracking decisions are solely based on merit, but are rather dependent on the social class of the parents. As a result, even though the Amsterdam respondents felt that the tracking decisions were based on “merit”, this is not in fact independent of one’s parental background and home upbringing.

Bourdieu argues that one’s educational talent—“merit”—is “itself a product of an investment of time and cultural capital” rather than a “natural aptitude” (Bourdieu, 1985a) (p.47). This investment is provided within the family habitus over time, though “the scholastic yield from the educational action depends on the cultural capital previously invested by the family.” (ibid) (p.48). As a result, it matters a great deal what kind of cultural capital is invested in the family and how this capital is valued by the education system. It also requires the parents to spend time with their children in the family setting. Bourdieu talks about three forms of cultural capital; embodied, objectified and institutional. The most vital is the embodied form of capital, in which not only language but also certain behavioural patterns are incorporated into the body and mind of the children over time. This does not

¹⁸ Şebnem’s case will be revisited in Chapter 7 with regards to the support mechanisms that assisted her educational career.

require inculcation but can simply occur unconsciously. Academic diplomas or other cultural goods—the objectified state of cultural capital—are defined and valued only by their relation to cultural capital. For Bourdieu, the match between the cultural capital inculcated at home and what schools expect in terms of cultural capital in the classroom explains the ongoing reproduction of middle class advantage. This becomes evident in Deniz's account. Her first generation parents mobilized all their means to support her education, but fell short of providing appropriate family habitus compared to some of Deniz's classmates. In primary school, Deniz's teacher asked one of her French classmates to help her out with her homework. Deniz would go to her friend's home and spend some time with her and her mother.

DENIZ: During primary school, my teacher tried to help me improve my grades. The girl sitting next to me was the best student in the classroom. The teacher asked her parents, who were both French, whether I could visit their house after school, like twice a week for one or two hours, in order to do my homework. They accepted and so I went. It was completely different from our house. In our house when we came from school; we would wash our hands, wait for my father to come from work and we would have dinner altogether. Then everyone would sit down and do their homework. As much as we could, you know. But in my friend's house it was much different. First her mother would prepare something for us to eat, like a small snack. Then she would ask us about our day and what we have done in school. She would ask one question to her and then one question to me. Then she would ask us to show what we have done in school, like the stuff in our school bag. We would repeat the things we have done. This was not possible at our house. Plus I mean, they speak French, this is an incredible advantage.

Deniz's classmate and her French parents would perfectly fit Bourdieu's theory of middle classes' reproduction of advantage. Clearly, due to their migration background, the majority of immigrant parents from Turkey do not and cannot possess the same cultural capital as middle class Dutch or French parents. Even parents with high education levels, whose cultural capital might be highly valuable in the Turkish education system, experience a devaluation of their capital during migration.

Nevertheless, the question remains of how to understand the input of Deniz's parents or other immigrant parents in their children's education, and especially influencing their streaming decision. In both settings, some Turkish parents tried to support their children's education through a positive attitude towards education, by way of choosing the right school for their children and providing external support mechanisms via family networks or elder siblings (Crul, 2000).

The choice of school among the parents primarily relate to their place of residence. In both Amsterdam (Karsten, 1994, Karsten et al., 2003) and Strasbourg (Fabert and Raluy, 2002), a large proportion of immigrant families live in segregated

neighbourhoods and attend local schools which reflect this population balance. Such schools are seen as an extension of neighbourhood ghettoization since most parents send their children to a “nearby” school (Karsten et al., 2003). In Amsterdam, 11% of students go to a school where the majority of pupils come from a non-Dutch background (Booi et al., 2009). This percentage goes up to 37% in the old-west neighbourhoods, where most respondents resided (ibid). In Strasbourg also, most respondents and their families resided in majority-minority neighbourhoods (Fabert and Raluy, 2002). In France, education priority policies (*zone d'éducation prioritaire (ZEP)*) have been in force for almost 30 years in order to fight low schooling in deprived neighbourhoods. Yet these policies have not produced as many positive outcomes as expected (Mellottee et al., 2010). When it comes to choosing schools, in the Dutch context, parents are given the freedom to choose their children's school (Karsten, 1994). However this right also leads to an increased concentration of children of immigrants at particular schools, compounded as most native-born parents remove their children from schools with high numbers students with immigrant parents, leading to effective “segregation” (Karsten et al., 2006, Karsten et al., 2003). In France, by contrast, parents are required to send children to a school in the postcode area (Mellottee et al., 2010). However, this restriction leads to the formation of ghetto schools in the suburban neighbourhoods, while native parents find alternative ways to manipulate their children's school choice via course selection or by sending them to private schools (Zanten, 1997).

In line with these trends, one group of respondents' parents have developed a certain kind of cultural and linguistic capital by virtue of their earlier arrival in the Netherlands or France; these were the 1.5 generation parents introduced in Chapter 4. This extra time spent in local educational and/or occupational institutions has helped these parents develop what Bourdieu, in a more general description of cultural capital, calls “information capital” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p.119). Although most of these parents are still not able to fully assist their children with their homework, they have acquired a good proficiency in Dutch or French and they possess information capital distinguishes them from other parents with scarce language skills or scant conception of how schools or the labour market function.

The interviews showed that the common educational strategy of these parents was to send their children to prestigious schools with low number of descendants of immigrants. Affecting the choice of educational institution in this way also requires a certain amount of informational capital on the part of the parents. Hence, as documented by Karsten and his colleagues, by avoiding schools with a large population of children of immigrants, immigrant parents pursue a negative choice (Karsten et al., 2003). This study showed that while native-born parents tried to find schools that matched their home habitus, immigrant parents did not necessarily seek such a match, but rather tried to avoid segregated schools with bad

reputations, and selected schools with good reputations. Several examples of this experience were found among the qualitative interview respondents: Hakan's mother arrived in the Netherlands at the age of 12, received vocational training and was working as a bus driver. Before Hakan started schooling, both his mother and her aunts researched the best schools in Amsterdam. Gül's father, who came to the Netherlands at age 15 and studied here, sent her to a prestigious primary school in south Amsterdam. Both of Bulut's parents came to the Netherlands as 12-year-old children, and moved from west to east Amsterdam hoping to provide better educational opportunities for their children. In Strasbourg, Engin's mother arrived in Strasbourg at the age of 12, and Fahri's father at 14, and both families lived in suburban districts. Since they lived in segregated neighbourhoods in which the schools had a majority of children of immigrants, both parent sent their sons to private colleges. Veli's father arrived in Strasbourg at the age of 13 and received some vocational training, and made arrangements to move to a village near Strasbourg with a prestigious school when Veli started his secondary education.

While involvement of some parents in school choice was common across both settings, there were stark differences in their involvement in the streaming process at the first transition point. In Amsterdam, despite the effort they put into the choice of their children's school, hardly any of the first or 1.5 generation parents were involved in the streaming decision process. Having assured themselves that their children were in good schools, they displayed a rather conformist attitude towards the school's tracking decision. Gül's case illustrates what having 1.5 generation parents can provide, and also the limits of that cultural capital. Gül's father came to the Netherlands at the age of 15 and received some schooling here. He has good proficiency in Dutch, and he works as a driving instructor. Through his conversations with the clients he decided to send Gül to a good (catholic) primary school where she could develop good language skills in Dutch. As she highlighted in interview, she has a "posh" Dutch accent; "I speak Dutch like those Istanbulite girls in the Turkish-TV series; you know, like (imitates an upper-class Turkish accent)." In the CITO test, she received the highest score in her class, making her eligible for the scientific academic track (VWO). However her teachers advised her to choose the general academic track (HAVO) because she was too talkative and had an attention problem. In her account, she initially agrees with the teacher's opinion, but then highlights her and her parents' lack of awareness of the consequences of this decision:

GÜL: Actually, I had the capacity for VWO, but the teachers didn't see me as fit for it, you know, because they said that I had low concentration; I was too talkative. They were right. I am smart, but maybe I don't put my brain to good use (giggles). HAVO was so easy; I got all my exams by barely studying.

INTERVIEWER: How was your CITO test?

GÜL: It was the highest in my class. It was VWO. I mean, I could have done VWO,

but back then you didn't think of these things. I was 12 or 13, you know.

INTERVIEWER: How about your parents?

GÜL: Well, they were happy that I was studying at all. I would just stop by my parents at the end of each year. They weren't really (involved), you know.

Thus, despite their efforts with respect to her school choice, the prestige difference between HAVO and VWO went unnoticed by Gül's parents. As she mentions in her quote, Gül hardly needed to make an effort during HAVO and passed all her exams with ease. She was clearly eligible to study in the most prestigious scientific track. At the time of the interview, she was finishing her HBO degree and she was considering pursuing a pre-master and then an MA degree.

By contrast, in Strasbourg, in addition to intervening in their children's school choice, parents possessing information capital about the system were able to influence their children's decision. Selvi, Ümran and Sevgi all had 1.5 generation parents, who were well-acquainted with the higher prestige level of academic lyceum. Furkan and Veli were steered by their elder siblings or relatives into academic tracking. Once they had eligible grades from *collège*, family members were there to assist them towards the academic track. Sevgi, who was a vocational tertiary school (BTS) student at the time of the interview, almost complained of her father's assertiveness with regards to academic lyceum.

SEVGİ: I also have a twin brother, and, since we went to *collège*, it was never in question that we would have to do (*bac général*). My dad was obsessed about us going to university, and he knew the best way to go was through *général* (lyceum). He came here young, you know; he couldn't study because he couldn't speak French in the beginning. Now his French is great but he couldn't study enough. He has a good business and everything, but he wants us to study.

Sevgi's father provided full financial and emotional support for his children to achieve in higher education. Nevertheless, neither he nor the other supportive parents were informed for example about the preparation courses for the *grandes écoles*. Veli's father had sent him to a prestigious village secondary school, which provided all sorts of cultural and financial support that he could not. Veli's uncle assisted him by advising with external supplemental courses, and he ended up going to a general lyceum. After receiving his *bac général*, Veli went to university to study public administration, since this was what all of his friends were doing. He discussed his educational choices:

VELİ: Well, anybody can go to university. There is no problem there. As long as you have a bac diploma of course. But, you know, they have a hidden system. Of course, a university diploma is not bad; it shows that you have a certain level of education, as well as a certain cultural standing. But, you know, there are these schools where the statesman and MPs attend.

INTERVIEWER: You mean the grandes écoles?

VELİ: Yes, exactly. For example, in Strasbourg there is one famous one; ENA. I mean, for people like us, it is impossible to enter these (schools).

INTERVIEWER: Why? Veli: Well, our parents came here as immigrants. My grandfather came here first. My father was 13 when he came. He did vocational school here. He speaks very good French. He started his own business, and he achieved a lot. I mean, he does everything for his family and his kids. But it's my mum who was at home, raising us, and she speaks no French. I mean, at home we all speak Turkish. Yeah, we went to school, back and forth, but we achieved everything on our own. University is as much as we can achieve. For our kids, it will be different, since we know about these schools now. During lyceum, I wasn't even aware that they existed. After I found out, I considered trying, but then I thought it would be too difficult.

Bourdieu also refers to cultural capital as informational capital since it relates to having symbolic information about the rules of the field (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). We have seen that some immigrant parents do possess some cultural capital with respect to how the education system functions, even though the composition and magnitude of this capital is rather limited. However, as the following chapter will underline, some of these parents had also established good businesses, and hence were also rich in economic capital. This places them in the end of social space which is economic capital rich, but cultural capital poor. Furthermore, the role of parents with comparable levels of cultural capital varied significantly across settings based on the rules of the field; in Amsterdam, parents' role was limited to school selection, while in Strasbourg, the parents were more able to manipulate the orientations of their children and the decisions of the school during the streaming process at the end of college.

3.2. Institutional Actors: Teachers

Especially in the absence of parental cultural capital, some teachers played a significant role in overturning the educational destiny of the students in both settings. Hustinx (2002) has shown that children of immigrants are over-advised rather than under-advised. However, this was not the case for most respondents in this study, though some students did benefit from teachers' support.

In Amsterdam, during the bridge year, Serdar and Tugba were able to make a transition to VWO and HAVO respectively, thanks to the advice of their primary school teachers. Similarly, Hamdi had already been tracked by his teacher into a class of high-achieving children in his primary school, which helped him get better grades in the CITO test. Both İsmail and Serdar had first generation parents, who gave little assistance with their education. They both went to a neighbourhood school. While Serdar only had poor grades in primary school and had a very low CITO score, thanks to his teacher's over-advice and the efforts of his German

teacher in the *brugklas*, he was able to catch up with his courses and attend VWO. Serdar explains his early failure by his school's failure;

SERDAR: I think I went to a terrible primary school. Because of this, everything that I was supposed to learn in primary school my German teacher taught me in *brugklas*. I really owe it to him.

In Strasbourg, some teachers also intervened in the streaming decision. Both Deniz and Engin had grades that would qualify them for entry into the academic track, but their selection was declined by the class council. Deniz's history teacher intervened in the decision, saying the class council could send Deniz to the vocational track "only over her dead body". The teacher not only reversed the council decision, but also made sure that Deniz gained access to the most prestigious lyceum in Strasbourg by manipulating the choice of institution. In fact, the class council decision was made on the grounds that Deniz was a hard-working student who achieved only via immense effort in *collège*, and would struggle to manage in general lyceum. Deniz reported that she did have difficulty in lyceum, but in the end managed to graduate into tertiary vocational education (BTS). She was working as a successful businesswoman at the time of the survey. Similarly, Engin's teacher opposed the council's decision and arranged a lyceum for Engin to attend a preparation year in order to transfer to academic track.

The interviews generally showed that, rather than high achievers, those who had average grades suffered more from the system in the absence of parental assistance. In both settings, the systems had a tendency to discourage those who were average achievers. Family support could balance this effect, but where there was a lack of parental support, average students risked being under-advised into vocational tracks unless there was a teacher or other institutional actor on hand to support them.

3.3. Social Trajectories and Habitus

Educational stratification not only streams students into distinct educational training, but the institutional environments which young people enter can also either reproduce or modify their habitus. Bourdieu understands habitus as the major dynamic by which structure and agency are intertwined in reproducing social conditions. However, this doesn't mean it is closed to modification or upward mobility, as he explains:

Habitus is not the fate that some people read into it. Being a product of history, it is an *open system of dispositions* that is constantly subject to experiences, and therefore constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its structure. (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; p. 133)

Having said that, Bourdieu immediately argues that young people will be more inclined to reproduce rather than transcend (ibid). Furthermore, he also introduces the concept of social trajectory, throughout which young people's 'initial capital' is subject to change (Bourdieu, 1984) (p.111). Clearly, when students access an academic track will influence students with low-status parents, whose home environment will contrast with the one at school (Bourdieu and Clough, 1996). Describing her social relations, Cemre, a successful HBO student, relates her lack of affinity for other students with immigrant parents from Turkey to their attendance of MBO;

CEMRE: I think we grew apart. I mean, there is a difference now. Because most Turks here, they do MAVO (vocational track) and then they do MBO (post secondary vocational education). But those with HBO, they have a difference of "understanding"; how should I say it? A different world-view. We think more openly and they think more traditionally. About everything; work, relationships, education.

Cemre's higher education experience helped her develop linguistic and cultural capital valued in the Dutch labour market. She has internalized dispositions such as independence and reflexive thinking as well as linguistic capital; all vital for her upward mobility. Furthermore, Bourdieu discusses how one form of capital can be transformed into another as it reinforces itself (Bourdieu, 1985a). Students in higher education also get an opportunity to convert their educational capital into social capital as they interact with more students from the majority group. Native-born descendants of immigrants from Turkey are a majority in secondary and vocational schools in certain neighbourhoods, but their numbers shrink drastically as they progress into higher education. Once there, some build lasting contacts with young people with native-born parents.

In Strasbourg, Can had accessed an elite academic lyceum with the help of his teachers. He had developed good friendships in the school, and these were instrumental for him in accessing practical information about how to enter the *grandes écoles*. Most of his friends with high-status parents had accessed the preparatory classes for the *grandes écoles*, while Can himself made a direct transition into a non-selective bachelor program in the University of Strasbourg. Nevertheless, he sustained his contacts with his friends and, after gaining his BA, he applied to study information technology at a particular *grande école* in Paris where all his friends were also students.

While entering an environment dominated by Dutch or French students with native parents might have positive consequences for some respondents, for those who couldn't manage to adjust, it could also be detrimental. In Strasbourg, Ayla was a remarkable student throughout her primary and *collège* education. She even received a special prize at the mathematics Olympics. During her transition to lyceum, not only was she sent to the most prestigious institution, but was also in

the highest educational stream; the scientific track. However, Ayla found her new school environment disruptive, when it contrasted sharply with the congenial ambiance of her *collège*.

AYLA: It (friendship with classmates) was very difficult. Everyone was in competition with each other. Nobody cared about friendship. Everyone was concerned with their own thing. If they had something to ask, they would come and ask you. But when they were done with you, they would just leave. And when you have a question, they would pretend to want to explain, but they just wouldn't care. They wouldn't want you to be better than them, you see.

Most of the students in a scientific lyceum prepared for the *concours* to enter preparatory classes for the *grandes écoles* or medical school, and Ayla had difficulty accustoming herself to the competitive environment there. Ayla's alienation from her peers was soon reflected in her grades, she failed the baccalauréat examinations in her final year. As a result she abandoned her dream of becoming a doctor and dropped out without a diploma. Aged just 18, she decided to marry her boyfriend, even though her parents were upset with the shift in her educational career. Bourdieu likens the relationship between the agent and its habitus as that of a "fish in water" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992)(p. 145). Thus, in Ayla's case, the fish went back to its water and she ended up reproducing her initial habitus (Bourdieu and Clough, 1996).

3.4. Evaluation of Orientation since Initial Transition

This final section conveys respondents' reflections on their initial transitions. These were particularly related to the way in which their work and study orientations had evolved throughout their educational careers. Unlike in Strasbourg, in Amsterdam, students' orientations did not play a significant role in their initial transition. However, the extent to which they were in agreement with the initial tracking decision varied. The first group of vocational students agreed with their vocational streaming. These students praised working over studying and highlighted that students should not be forced to study harder tracks "above their level". These students were less likely to extend their studies into tertiary vocational training (HBO), and were more likely to leave school after vocational education. We can easily group these students in the same category with those in Strasbourg, whose clear orientation towards work was hardly modified even when they were successful in vocational training. They had a clear intention to start working as soon as they received their vocational diploma (BEP), and they made a smooth transition into labour market. These students had no particularly hostile attitude towards school; rather, they felt pressured to earn their own income and gain their financial independence. They needed this income to acquire a driving license or save for holiday money to visit Turkey. This may also have been due to the lack of student employment opportunities, which could release early pressure to earn an income and allow for a combination of work and study. For example, neither

İsmail nor Selahattin, who were both the youngest children of first generation parents, ever considered academic education, going straight to vocational school and then into labour market because they needed to make their own money. To reiterate; the young people in this first group did not have adversarial attitudes towards school. This disagrees with the findings of Willis (1977), who argued that working class children have hostile attitudes towards education, equating it with upper-class or “white” group values, and leading to the reproduction of their disadvantaged status. These arguments have been challenged by other researchers (Brown 1995; Weis 1990), who argue that even young people with working class background or work orientations understand that, in today’s knowledge economy, educational credentials have become a prerequisite for almost any kind of job. As a result, most youngsters made an effort to “get by” in school or with teachers and avoid any kind of conflict in order to graduate. Soner, an MBO student in Handel, talked about how he had never done his homework, had only gone to school when obliged to and even copied from other students during exams. Soner always had a student job, and he worked around 24 hours a week. He had a clear preference for working over studying. However, he emphasized that he always managed good relations with teachers: “Why would I mess with them (the teachers)? In the end, they are the ones who decide whether you will pass or fail.” This attitude was visible among respondents with vocational orientations such as Şakir, who experienced a conflict with his mentor leading to his expulsion from MBO.

The second group of vocational students in Amsterdam expressed feelings of disappointment with their low streaming. They blamed their low CITO scores on circumstances at the time of their transition, such as family issues, lack of awareness of the consequences of the streaming, and lack of interest in schooling as a child. These students also mentioned that they enjoyed studying. They underlined the significance of having more diplomas (the more the better). They were concerned that, since the MBO degree had become increasingly widespread, vocational training might no longer be sufficient to guarantee employment in the labour market. These students were also more likely to attend vocational tertiary colleges. Ercan had a 1.5 generation Turkish father and 1st generation mother who migrated to the Netherlands after marrying his father. He went to a neighbourhood school and achieved a very low CITO score and was advised into a vocational track. He highlighted that neither he nor his parents had been conscious of the implications of the CITO test. Once he finished his MBO degree, he took the opportunity to attend an HBO, but failed his course and continued on into the labour market. Similarly, in Strasbourg, those who were successful in their vocational studies pursued their education further, such as Şebnem, Cengiz and Behzat. Their cases will be discussed in detail in Chapter 7 regarding transitions from school, as not all of them managed to succeed.

Finally, for students who were streamed into the academic track, there were few regrets over their streaming decision. However, neither were the pathways of these students uniform, and two distinct groups of academic-track students can be discerned. The first had been identified as high achievers since primary school by their teachers. These students were either placed in classes for children with special talents (Hamdi in Amsterdam), skipped ahead a year (Can in Strasbourg), or got a degree in the mathematics competition for children (Ayla in Strasbourg), and were usually all strong in natural sciences and mathematics. These students had high grades and were directly advised by their teachers to enter the most prestigious tracks and schools in both settings. The second group of academic-track students had distinct trajectories in the different settings. In Amsterdam, these students were “placed in VWO” in bridge year, or through their teachers’ over-advice or assistance. In Strasbourg, these students selected the academic track with the support of parents, teachers, family members or significant others. In Amsterdam, respondents’ parents did not play a major role in the tracking decision and were only able to transfer to an academic track through teachers’ intervention. In Strasbourg, the aspiration level of the students and the parents was crucial for their streaming at the end of *collège*.

4. Conclusion

In this chapter, it was argued that young people experience their first transition in school at the time when they are stratified by the education system into different educational trajectories. Previous studies have shown that the tracking of the students has strong implications for their future transition conditions (Van De Werfhorst and Mijs, 2010).

Using TIES data, it has been shown that majority of native-born descendants of immigrants were streamed into vocational tracks in Amsterdam and Strasbourg, and only a minority managed to modify their initial track. Most respondents accessed the academic track during this initial transition in Strasbourg, while intra-trajectory movements were slightly higher in Amsterdam.

Next, in the qualitative interviews, we explored how native-born descendants of immigrants from Turkey reflect on the stratification process. In Amsterdam, students attributed streaming outcome to their national test scores, rather than their own motivation or their families’ preferences, and families seemed to have very little influence on the transition decision. In Strasbourg, however, the tracking decision was a result of both students’ grades and their own orientations. Some students who had eligible grades to access academic stream preferred to pursue a vocational track, and this decision was approved by the school authorities. The track choices of the students were partly because of low study motivation, but were also strongly related to their perception of French lyceums. These were discerned as lacking any occupational orientation, and thus unable to guarantee high returns

in either tertiary education or the labour market. In contrast, in the Netherlands, the prestige and high returns of academic education were transparent, and parents and family members who did become involved in the tracking of the students were able to have a positive influence.

The qualitative interviews revealed the educational aspirations of the students across both settings. As a result, we identified three groups of students; a small group of highly-motivated, straight-A students who had little difficulty accessing academic track; several work-oriented students who left school after vocational training without holding a grudge about their initial tracking decision; and a large group of students—the “ordinary kids” to borrow Brown’s (Brown, 1987) terminology—who had average grades and academic orientations but required support mechanisms to turn the systemic odds in their favour. In the majority of cases, these children were streamed into vocational tracks and were always told that they could “make it” in the future provided they “work hard”. In fact, in both settings, the systems had a tendency to discourage those who were average achievers rather than encouraging them; pulling them down rather than pushing them up. In cases where there was family support, this pull/push effect was balanced, but when there was a lack of parental support, the students risked being tracked into a less prestigious track unless there was positive input from a teacher or other institutional actor.

The next phase of transition takes place when vocational and academic students reach the end of their educational trajectories. They might pursue their studies into tertiary education, leave education and enter labour market or drop-out altogether without a diploma. This phase will be the focus of our transition from school chapter (chapter seven). However, after their initial transition to academic and vocational streams, students develop different motivations, cultural and educational capital, and often become active in the labour market via internships or student employment. In the following chapter, we will discuss how young people’s transition process is further shaped through involvement in student employment, which increases their financial standing and work experience. As a result, some students develop strong work-orientations and decide to enter the labour market after vocational education, while others, after succeeding in school, take steps to pursue their academic careers into higher education.