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

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# 7: Transition from School: Leaving Education

## **1. Introduction**

Compared with that of the 1960s and 1970s, over the past few decades, the de-industrialization of western European economies, the globalization of work, and the expansion of women's employment have transformed the context of youth transitions. With the aim of increasing the flexibility of employment practices, neoliberal policies have generated precarious and insecure working conditions; especially for new entrants into labour markets (du Bois-Reymond, 2009a). Education policies have also been influenced by these neoliberal trends, and a focus on individual school performance, as well as on pupil and parental responsibility, has taken precedence over the idea that states should provide equal opportunities. In many countries, young people are now pressured to improve their credentials and increase their "market value". Education is treated more and more as a commodity that young people have to compete for and maximize in order to increase their chances during transition to the labour market.

The pathways that young people pursue at the end of their educational trajectories reflect both the constraints produced by insecure labour market conditions and the pressure to invest in credentials that will enhance personal "market value". On the one hand, young people feel the need to prolong their studies beyond their compulsory training (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997). On the other, they are also pressured to start working and gain financial independence from their families. Some combine their studies with part-time work (see Chapter 6), while others choose to leave school altogether. Those who leave the education system without a diploma or with only a minimum diploma are at great risk of exclusion from the labour market (Wolbers et al., 2001). Furthermore, previous studies of youth transitions have shown that leaving education is not necessarily definitive, as young people might return to school or experience cyclical movements between different statuses of employment, unemployment or training, and this has been interpreted

as demonstrating the complexity of youth transitions today (McDonald, 1998, Wyn and Dwyer, 1999).

Nevertheless, it is precisely the mechanisms behind the prolongation and complexity that need more scrutiny if we are to discover who is able to prolong transition and how, who is able to cope with a complex transition and how, or who experiences a smooth transition and why. This chapter endeavours to understand school-to-work transitions in their full complexity, drawing on the experience of vocational and academic track students when leaving school, and examining their practices of prolongation and combination. First, institutional settings and structural conditions in both cities are described. Thus far, we have only discussed the education system in terms of the initial stratification point, the labour market structure in terms of student employment, and student finance measures in terms of their impact on young people's transition decisions. In this section, we will begin analysing the education systems; this time in terms of its relationship to the labour market, including an overview of the structure of the labour market in both settings. The second section concentrates on the negotiations young people make when leaving school. This chapter focuses on the critical decisions made at the end of education, the so-called "transition point". However, the aim is to contextualize this decision in light of the previous trajectories of young people discussed in the preceding chapters, to illustrate that transitions are not taking place in one point time. The TIES survey is analysed to present the outflows from each educational trajectory into three different transition activities: dropping out from (post) secondary school without a diploma; leaving school after attaining a secondary school diploma, and; proceeding to further study. Finally the qualitative interviews further explore the motivations of the respondents and mechanisms behind each transition practice; especially how the respondents' negotiate with structural constraints when trying to achieve their objectives pursuing distinct trajectories.

## **2. Institutional Structures**

In this section, we will describe the institutional context of transition in Amsterdam and Strasbourg. We will concentrate on three structures: education systems, with respect to further study opportunities as well as the signalling effect of diplomas in the labour market; labour market conditions, particularly those for youth and for entry, and; welfare arrangements, including social security measures, policy initiatives to stimulate youth employment, and the scholarship regimes enabling further study.

### **2.1. Educational Credentials and Labour Market**

As discussed in Chapter 4, the educational trajectory of the young people shapes their labour market chances as well as their further study options. Hence, whether or not a student pursues a vocational or academic trajectory structures the

conditions of their transition outcome. Additionally, the characteristics of vocational or academic trajectories vary across settings and have different implications in transition to labour market or further study.

Occupational specificity is an essential characteristic of the educational trajectory for labour market transition. Previous studies have argued that the degree of occupational specificity in education systems plays a vital role in facilitating smooth labour market incorporation (Raffe, 2003, Bol and Van De Werfhorst, 2012). Occupational specificity is mainly discussed with respect to vocational training, as academic education is perceived to be more scientific and general. However, in higher education, and especially with the growing popularity of tertiary colleges, occupational specificity has also become a significant feature differentiating education systems.

As discussed in Chapter 5, Dutch vocational training provides occupational skills that are recognized by employers (Mueller and Gangl, 2003). This is also true for tertiary education; young people can access vocational colleges (HBO) where they attend intensive periods of internships and acquire specific skills in their area of their study. However, in France, school-based vocational training is more general, with short periods of internship (Maurice, 1986, Powell et al., 2009). Students have the opportunity to attend apprenticeships in upper secondary education and acquire a CAP diploma. However, increasingly, school-based vocational training leading to a BEP diploma is deemed more prestigious as it provides access to professional lycées; also the gateway to higher education (Duru-Bellat and Kieffer, 2008, Powell et al., 2009). In tertiary education, vocational colleges are well established and provide a BTS diploma, though they require only meagre internship periods compared to the vocational colleges in the Netherlands (HBO). An exception is a form of vocational college (*BTS en alternance*) where young people combine two days of training in school with three days of work with an employer who is prepared to pay their education costs and provide a minimum income (Eckert, 2005). According to Eckert, this form of training has proved very efficient as it usually facilitated a smooth incorporation into the labour market with the same employer.

Previous studies have repeatedly shown that these conditions have implications for the transition outcomes of young people (Andersen and Werfhorst, 2010, Mueller and Gangl, 2003). Zdrojewski et al. have argued that, in France, vocational graduates are at higher risk of employers judging them based on their diplomas rather than their skills (Zdrojewski et al., 2008). In countries like the Netherlands, where there is greater skill transparency, those with vocational diplomas benefit from specific skills gained in vocational education, while those who drop out of vocational training without a diploma form the most vulnerable group during labour market entry (Iannelli and Raffe, 2007, van der Velden and Wolbers, 2007).

As shown in Chapter 5, a student's educational trajectory also determines the further study options available to them as a graduate. While the students in the academic track in both settings gained direct access to higher education institutions once they acquired a diploma, the higher education institution that they were able to attend depended on their initial trajectory. Due to increasing credentialism in the Dutch and French labour markets, young graduates from vocational streams also feel it necessary to access higher education in order to secure a position. Over the last few decades, the chances of secondary school graduates being able to enter higher occupational levels have diminished considerably (Wolbers et al., 2001).

Another feature of education systems vital when making a transition into further study (or otherwise) is the availability of student finance and scholarships for disadvantaged youth. Financial concerns can create pressure on young people to refrain from further study opportunities or even to drop out of school. As previously discussed, both the Netherlands and France provide financial assistance to students who access higher education. As empirical analysis will now show, these arrangements are critical in shaping young people's decisions to access tertiary education or drop out before acquiring a diploma.

## 2.2. Labour Market Structure

Since the beginning of the 1980s, the Dutch labour market has become more flexible as employment protection legislation has weakened, redundancy procedures have been relaxed and part-time jobs have increased in number (Delsen and Poutsma, 2005). Youth unemployment in the Netherlands has gradually been decreasing over the past few years and had fallen to 7.4% by 2010. While increasing flexibility measures were significant in battling youth unemployment (Remery et al., 2002), they also resulted in more precarious working conditions, especially among those with lower qualifications (de Vries and Wolbers, 2005, Wolbers, 2008a). Less-qualified young people are now more likely to be offered a temporary contract in their first jobs, compared to graduates of tertiary education, who were offered permanent contracts more often (Wolbers, 2008a). Furthermore, those on temporary contracts are more likely to fall back into unemployment, which shows that flexible arrangements do not really constitute a “stepping stone” into stable careers (p.98)

In France, there have also been efforts to increase labour market flexibility (Zdrojewski et al., 2008). However, modifications in employment protection legislation have reinforced the insider-outsider divide by making it easier for employers to hire young people, but also to fire them (Zdrojewski et al., 2008). The French government has adopted active labour market measures to decrease youth unemployment for those between 16-30, subsidizing employment in the public sector, promoting training programs in the private sector and reducing the cost of employment for private employers. Over the period, there has been a particular

increase in hiring on temporary contracts via employment agencies. As a result, recent studies have shown that school-to-work transition has become smoother over the last decade. In fact, despite the differences in their unemployment rates, an internationally comparative study by Wolbers (2007) found that young people in the Netherlands and in France are incorporated into the labour market at a similar pace.

Indeed, analysing the Generation Survey, Zdrojewski (2011) found that more than 50% of school leavers in France entered their first job within 3 months of leaving education. However, this was not the case for all students; it took women and young people from a migrant background a longer time to find their first job, and those with lower qualifications also suffered from longer unemployment periods compared to those with a tertiary qualification. Furthermore, similar to the Netherlands, the risk of having a temporary contract has also increased in France over the decades; for highly educated graduates there is a lower likelihood of getting a temporary contract compared to those with lower qualifications. In terms of job stability, those with higher diplomas or vocational degrees are less likely to become unemployed after their first job, compared to those with only lower or general education.

In both countries, the descendants of immigrants are found to have more difficulty in accessing employment. In the Netherlands, descendants of immigrants from Morocco and Turkey suffer difficulty in accessing high-status jobs; even compared to those with the same qualifications (Tesser and Dronkers, 2007). Young people with immigrant parents are also more likely to fall into unemployment after having entered a first significant job, compared to the children of native-born parents (*ibid*). In France, Meurs et al. have shown that young people with immigrant parents have more difficulty entering the labour market, even after controlling for qualifications (Meurs, 2005). Analyzing the Generation Survey (2004), Brinbaum and Guegnard (Brinbaum and Guegnard, 2011) showed that together with descendants of immigrants Turkey, together with young people of Maghreb-ian and African origin, experience higher unemployment less and less smooth transitions (“access rapide emploi” p.10) compared to children of natives and Portuguese immigrants who fared smoother transitions. They concluded that the social background the parents correlates strongly with the educational and occupational trajectories of the young people.

This overview of the previous studies underlines that, in both countries, flexibility measures in the labour market have been instrumental in combating youth unemployment to a certain extent, while also leading to precarious employment and careers, especially among those with lower educational attainment (Blossfeld, 2008). Furthermore, even after controlling for educational level, the descendants of immigrants seem to be in a more disadvantaged position (Brinbaum and Guegnard, 2011, Brinbaum and Guégnard, 2010, Tesser and Dronkers, 2007).

Turning to the trends in the settings under study, unemployment rates in both Amsterdam and Strasbourg are lower compared to national averages. In the 2003-06 period, in Amsterdam the unemployment rate was 7.9% among men and 6.5% among women. Eurostat reported that, from 1999-2002, the unemployment rate for men was 9.4% and 9.8% for women. (Eurostat, 2010) Even though the unemployment rate in Strasbourg is higher than that in Amsterdam, both cities form vibrant economic regions of the Netherlands and France respectively. If we look at the dominant economic sectors, Amsterdam provides a typical post-industrial economy with the service sector being the largest, followed by finance, health and care, media, ICT and knowledge (Nell and Rath, 2009). This distribution is also reflected in the occupational choices of the interview respondents. In a recent study, Pasztor (2010) has shown that business studies courses have become popular among native-born descendants of immigrants from Turkey because they connect easily with opportunities in the labour market. In Strasbourg as well, services form the largest sector, followed by education, health, and administration (Strasbourggeois, 2009). However, the wider Alsace region is in a transition to a post-industrial economy and its manufacturing industry still provides jobs. In both settings, immigrants from Turkey and their descendants form an economically active group, as discussed in Chapter 4. In terms of entrepreneurship, in Amsterdam owner-managers are dispersed over many small size businesses such as snack bars, restaurants, grocery stores, and dry-cleaners (Kloosterman, 2001). In Strasbourg, in addition to these establishments, the construction sector has become a niche for immigrants from Turkey, and they predominate both as workers and as owners. This is in contrast to the Netherlands, where the construction sector is a protected niche for native-born groups (Rath, 2002).

Thus, especially in Strasbourg, immigrant entrepreneurs from Turkey and their establishments provide a source of employment, though mostly for low status jobs. Such jobs can be vital for descendants of immigrants, especially in cases of early school exit or low credentials. However, from the interviews it is clear that, when it comes to larger corporate sectors in which higher qualifications are required, valuable contacts are scarce for the descendants of immigrants from Turkey. Now, we will examine the effects of these conditions for the descendants of immigrants during their transitions.

### 2.3. Welfare Arrangements and Youth Support Policies

According to Esping-Andersen's classification of welfare regimes, the Netherlands and France are grouped within the same category of conservative-corporatist regimes, in which labour market participation forms the basis for social security measures (Moreno-Fuentes and Bruquetas-Callejo, 2011). Following from Esping-Andersen's model, Walther (Walther, 2006) made an effort to create a typology for youth transition regimes, classifying both countries again under the "employment logic," by which those who are included in standard work relations are granted high

social insurance. In the Netherlands, young people are entitled to social security without having worked or paid enough contributions. The Dutch government provides assistance to young people over 18 who do not have sufficient means, based on family income and household status. Since 2006, young people can receive unemployment benefit without having worked for two years of uninterrupted duration. There is no minimum age limit to receive unemployment benefit. Anyone who has been employed for 26 weeks out of 36 is eligible, which is around 70% of their former salary, for up to 3 months. Young people can also benefit from disability benefits. Disability benefits are available to those registered as disabled before the age of 18 and remaining so. Only 1% of the Dutch youth depends on unemployment benefit while 2.6% depends on disability benefits. (Altinyelken et al., 2010). In France, unemployment benefit is only paid to those who have lost their jobs after having worked for a certain period of time, and the short-term period is four months out of eight. Similar to the Netherlands, the amount of payment and the duration of the benefit are dependent on previous employment history. The claimants initially get 85% of their income and it decreases cumulatively by 17% every four months (Mellottee et al., 2010). Disability benefits in France are provided only to those who have been injured at work (ibid).

Another welfare arrangement for youth transitions are policies aimed at incorporating young people into the labour market. Since the 1980s, both the Dutch and French governments have taken initiatives to create employment for young people by subsidizing jobs. The French government is more active in this field due to high youth unemployment rates. On the local level, initiatives such as the *Mission Locales* and PAIO are promoted to provide reception, orientation and information to young people. 45% of French young people have made use of these agencies, and, in 2004, 440,000 of them found a job. Most of the clientele of these agencies have been under-qualified youth. These projects were especially effective in neighbourhoods where the majority of residents are of migrant background. In the Netherlands, such projects have not been as widespread, though steps have been taken to incorporate more disabled workers into the labour market. Recently, young people were included in the scheme of subsidized labour for the long-term unemployed (WIW), which succeeded in incorporating disadvantaged youth into the labour market (Muysken and Rutten, 2002).

The present study did not specifically focus on young people who benefited from such initiatives, and there were hardly any respondents who benefited from employment schemes, though some respondents did receive unemployment benefits.

### **3. Making the Transition: Three Educational Trajectories**

In Chapter 5, we discussed the early educational stratification processes in the Netherlands and France. In the Netherlands, stratification takes place at the

beginning of secondary education, around the age of 12, whereas, in France, it occurs in the beginning of upper secondary education at age 15. After this initial tracking, vocational and academic students follow distinct pathways.

In the coming section, the transition processes from school to different activities will be analysed by following three different groups of respondents: The first is composed of early school leavers who dropped out of secondary education without a basic diploma. In Amsterdam, this group is formed by those who dropped out of education before acquiring a MBO level two (n-2) certificate or HAVO or VWO diplomas. In Strasbourg, this group is composed of those who left vocational training without a CAP or BEP diploma or lyceum without a *baccalauréat* diploma. The second group of respondents had successfully finished their (upper) secondary education, either vocational or academic, and had left education. The third group of respondents consists of those who had accessed higher education, from either academic or vocational tracks, and had exited with or without a diploma.

These three groups have been defined based on the institutionally designed trajectories determined by educational streams. This is because these educational streams do not simply provide young people with diplomas but also instil them with different forms of capital, dispositions and logics over their trajectories which are crucial for their transitions. Hence, young people are not necessarily limited by the initial composition of their parents' capital. The fields of vocational education and of academic training value and support the development of distinct symbolic capital. These groups also allow comparison of how trajectories and development of the different forms of capital vary between Amsterdam and Strasbourg.

### 3.1. 'Early School Leavers': Leaving Secondary Education without a Diploma

#### 3.1.1. Descriptive Analysis from the TIES Survey

In the Netherlands, since the enforcement of the qualification law in 2007, the Dutch government has required young people to attain (at minimum) a basic qualification (*startkwalificatie*) to increase their chances of acquiring stable employment. A basic qualification is considered as completing two years of a post-secondary vocational training diploma (MBO n-2) or obtaining a scientific or a general-academic secondary school diploma (VWO and HAVO). Those who drop out before attaining these levels are called "early school leavers". The proportion of early school leavers has fallen to 9% in the last decade, but unemployment rates among these early drop-outs are still twice as high compared to those with a basic qualification or more (CBS, 2010). As a result, young people are encouraged to stay in school until the age of 18. The children of immigrants are represented in greater numbers among the early school leavers. A study by Kalmijn and Kraaykamp (Kalmijn and Kraaykamp, 2003) has shown that, even after controlling for compositional factors such as parental background, the children of immigrants

were three times more likely to drop out of secondary education, while the comparison group had a tendency to experience downward mobility to lower tracks.

In France, recent education reforms have aimed to ensure that 80% of students attain at least a *baccalauréat*, and have set a lyceum diploma as a minimum level. Those who cannot achieve this are encouraged to attain at least a vocational degree (CAP or BEP) (Altinyelken et al., 2010). Similarly, recent studies in France showed that young people with a vocational degree were more likely to secure employment compared to those who dropped out of school after college (Duru-Bellat, 2000). The chances of finding employment also increased with each additional year of education in France (ibid).

Figures 8 and 9 in the Appendix III illustrate the outflows of educational trajectories according to the TIES data for Amsterdam and Strasbourg respectively. These two figures are different from Figures 6 and 7 (in Chapter 5) in that they illustrate the outflows from each educational level to the next destination. Hence the numbers display how the students are distributed from each educational level. First of all, among the respondents with immigrant parents from Turkey, we see that, of those who entered the VMBO, 18% left school before enrolling in MBO, 78% accessed MBO, 2% entered in to HAVO and the rest of 2% was still studying. Among those who enrolled in MBO, 17% left education without an MBO diploma and 33% with an MBO diploma (at least N-2). In the comparison group of young people with Dutch parents, only 5% left without an MBO diploma and 39% with an MBO diploma (again at least MBO N-2).

In Strasbourg, 8% of respondents with immigrant parents from Turkey left school after lower secondary education (*collège*) and, among those who enrolled in vocational track, 18% left without a CAP or a BEP diploma. There were no respondents from the comparison group who dropped out of this level without a diploma. In the academic track, in Strasbourg, 10% of *lycée générale* or *technologique* students dropped out without qualifications, while, 6% left education with a *bac générale* diploma and 25% with a *bac tech.* diploma. Compared to Strasbourg of those descendants of immigrants from Turkey in academic tracks, in Amsterdam, only a very small number of students left these streams most early school leavers were from the vocational track (MBO or VMBO).

Next, Tables 21 and 22 illustrate the activity distribution by education level for those who left education (Appendix III). In this section we only focus on those who left education from VMBO or *collège*. Table 21 shows that despite the low education levels, the male descendants of Turkish immigrants (and all the males in the comparison group) who held solely VMBO diplomas were active in the labour market at the time of the survey by 75%. However, among the female descendants of Turkish immigrants, the statuses were more diverse; 34% were active in the

labour market, 45% were looking after their family, 3% was inactive in the labour market and 17% were unemployed but looking for a job. According to Table 22 (Appendix III) in Strasbourg among the male native born descendants of immigrants 56% were active in the labour market at the time of the survey while 28% were unemployed and looking for a job. Again female descendants of immigrants from Turkey are less active, only 41% of the *collège* leavers were working at the time of the interview.

### 3.1.2. Qualitative Interviews with 'Early School Leavers'

The quantitative analysis has shown that a considerable proportion of the sample group left school before attaining a minimum diploma in both cities. In Strasbourg, the majority of this group was composed of women (64%), while in Amsterdam they were distributed almost equally among men (49%) and women (51%). In this section, the profiles and experiences of these young people will be presented to provide further insight into their trajectories. While these profiles should not be generalized, they provide an invaluable understanding of the complexities of transition processes.

In both settings, young people who dropped out without a basic diploma fell into low-skilled employment. Here, gendered pathways become clearly visible in the occupational choices of young people (Gaskell, 1992). In both Amsterdam and Strasbourg, young men chose occupations that were physically demanding or in which men predominated. In Amsterdam the most popular jobs were at the airport as cleaners or baggage handlers, or elsewhere as security guards or taxi drivers. In Strasbourg, I was unfortunately unable to access male respondents who did not have a vocational degree. However, even those with vocational degrees worked in low-skilled jobs, such as in construction or assembly, as will be discussed in the next section. Among the young women, some worked as cleaners in the airport, as sales assistants in stores or restaurants, while others become homemakers caring for children. Previous studies have underlined the role of choice of study field in reproducing inequalities if young people follow the occupations of parents (Van De Werfhorst and Luijkx, 2010)}. This was certainly the case for young men in Strasbourg, as family and peers provided job contacts. However, in Amsterdam, the patterns were more mixed as the fathers' jobs were less available and most of the unskilled jobs were in the upcoming service sector.

Şakir was a male respondent from Amsterdam. Although his case cannot be generalized, it provides hints as to the dynamics of dropping out, and how young people's careers evolve afterwards. Şakir's father arrived in the Netherlands in the later 1970s at the age of 18 together with Şakir's grandfather. Both his father and grandfather initially worked in the manufacturing sector, but his grandfather returned to Turkey in the 1980s. Şakir was born and raised in Amsterdam. He went to a neighbourhood primary school. He scored fairly well on the CITO exam, but

was advised to take the vocational track, which he followed in one of most problematic secondary schools in Amsterdam, where there were issues of student criminality. After finishing his lower secondary degree, he decided to attend a post-secondary vocational school (MBO) in the technical area. He loved cars and wanted to start his own garage. However, in MBO, he got into a conflict with his class mentor. Şakir accused his teacher of being a ‘racist’, and suggested that no students with a Turkish background could succeed in his course. The escalation of the conflict led to Şakir’s expulsion from school. Subsequently, he attended other training programs, which he couldn’t persevere with, and eventually dropped out of school altogether.

ŞAKIR: First I went to administration studies. I mean, no Turkish boy tells me that they study administration to acquire an occupation; we all go there for the girls. So I didn’t really follow my studies, you know, and then dropped out. Then I decided to try an MBO in commerce. I thought I could manage that. However, the class was full of Moroccans. And, you know, since I was little, I have not been able to get along with Moroccans ever. So, again, I was involved in a conflict and eventually got expelled. And that was it. I left school.

Even though Şakir acknowledged the importance of studying, and tried his chances in various institutions, he lacked a clear goal. The majority of respondents, including those who were early school leavers, emphasized the value of having a diploma in order to find a “good job”. Paul Willis’s landmark study on working class boys (Willis, 1977) showed how “lads” reactionary attitudes to education led to their exclusion from school. Most of these boys relied on their fathers contacts in the manufacturing sectors. With post-industrial transformations, working class youth start to develop a more instrumental approach towards schooling (Weis, 1990). Brown argued that the majority of the students are actually “ordinary kids” who are working class but who do not have reactionary attitudes towards school (Brown, 1987). Lehmann has found that these students did not praise school values the way middle class students did, yet accepted the necessity of a diploma for obtaining a decent labour market position (Lehmann, 2004, Lehmann, 2007).

This kind of attitude towards schooling is interpreted as a form of ‘instrumental approach’, which bears the risk of dropout when the students do not perceive school as beneficial for employment (Longwell-Grice, 2003, Macleod, 2009). Throughout Şakir’s educational ventures, he was working in part-time jobs, as he had since age 16, in order to pay for his expenses, as his parents had limited resources. When he was first expelled, he was working in the baggage section of the airport, and had already been promoted. Hence, he did not see much point in pursuing his studies. Each time he dropped out of school, he continued in this job on a full-time basis. His regular student employment thus also facilitated a feeling of easy accessibility to jobs, as well as a smooth transition to an income and a full-time job. However, Şakir soon became disenchanted with the jobs’ difficult

working conditions and considerable physical effort. He also experienced conflict with his colleagues at work. One of his friends then introduced him to the idea of working as a security guard. First he was insecure about taking up the job since he did not have a basic post-secondary vocational diploma (MBO n-2). His friend reassured him that, as a guard, “you don’t do much”. He applied and acquired the post.

Şakir expressed mixed feelings about his occupation, saying, “our job is not a job really; you basically do nothing.” Yet he also argued that he is “his own boss”, and that one actually needs to have social and language skills to be a successful security guard. According to Macleod, for most early school leavers, praising work experience over education was a common strategy to preserve their self-esteem (Macleod, 2009). Şakir highlighting that he has been working almost uninterruptedly for eight years counterbalances his low self-confidence and reinforces his optimism for future goals.

At the time of the interview, Şakir was working long hours, seven days a week, in order to obtain a permanent contract, and also to build up some savings. He wanted to get married and dreamed of starting his own security-guard company. In fact, Şakir mentioned entrepreneurship several times and viewed his current occupational status as transient. When asked about returning to school, he stressed that, while this was always an option in the Netherlands, it was one closed to him. He suspected that the only drawback of not having a MBO diploma would be the difficulty of getting a bank loan when starting his own business. Hence, he had decided to develop his work experience and save start-up money for his own company. In fact, starting a company was a common ambition among all respondents, especially those who did not have high hopes of occupational mobility, but also among those with higher qualifications, perhaps due to having successful entrepreneurs in the family, or just aspiring to be their own bosses.

Clearly, Şakir wasn’t able to develop much job-specific capital through out his educational trajectory as he dropped out of MBO without even conducting his internships properly. However, his early exposure to work and occupational tasks helped him develop a certain cultural capital, which helped him “market” himself better in interviews, and also on the shop floor.

Female respondents also fell into low-skilled employment if they left school without a diploma. However, they were also likely not find employment and become homemakers. Defne was a female respondent from Amsterdam. Defne's mother had come to Amsterdam as a child with her parents and married Defne’s father, who was from her hometown. The marriage did not last, however, and they divorced just after Defne graduated from lower secondary school (VMBO) at the age of 17. Torn between two parents, Defne decided that the best way to avoid this

conflict and establish her own independence was to get married. As she put it; “You know, there is no living on your own or with your boyfriend for us (when saying this she also includes me referring to general practices among Turkish communities). So I decided to get married.” Since she was not dating anyone at the time, it was an arranged marriage. Her husband was from her parents' hometown in Turkey. As a result, she dropped out of school and went to get married in Turkey. However, to be able to bring her husband into the Netherlands, Defne had to earn an income that could support both parties. Legislation to discourage overseas marriage (CBS, 2012) thus obliged Defne to start working. With her husband, she worked in various low-skilled jobs, with her husband mostly earning illegally, until they were able to rent their own house and buy furniture. They worked in factory jobs away from Amsterdam, in flower shops and factories, and in the airports as cleaners.

Over time, her husband improved his language skills and started his own company with another relative as handymen. As soon as his company prospered, she took a break from precarious jobs and became pregnant with her son. After two years, her husband was able to acquire a mortgage from the bank to buy their own house. In the new neighbourhood, Defne met a Dutch neighbour, who informed Defne about a job opportunity in a Turkish bank for a desk clerk who spoke both Turkish and Dutch. Defne applied and got the post. She highlighted that she would never have been able to get an equivalent position in a Dutch bank without a full MBO diploma.

For the Turkish bank, Defne's lack of credentials was not an obstacle, as they were willing to provide on-the-job training. Thanks to the help of a colleague, Defne received training and learned to handle basic transactions and administrative duties. After her “dirty and heavy jobs”, Defne really enjoyed working in the bank. However, after the recent economic crisis, the bank had modified her contract and she started working part time. Afraid of losing her position, Defne was concerned that she wouldn't be able to get a job in a Dutch bank in a similar position since she didn't have a vocational degree. As result, she had decided to go back to school and start vocational training.

DEFNE: I have made up my mind. I have also told my husband that I cannot go back to cleaning or other jobs like that, you know. He also supports me. I want to start an MBO in banking and insurance.

Both Şakir and Defne's experiences are suggestive of the general conditions of young people without minimum credentials in the Dutch labour market. Lacking the necessary credentials or the forms of capital gained in school and internships, both tried to develop skills through their jobs. For both, social contacts were instrumental. While Şakir relied on his close circle of friends, Defne's move to a

more mixed neighbourhood and Dutch neighbour facilitated a bridging effect from unskilled to skilled labour. Both of their experiences will come into sharper relief when juxtaposed with those who left education with an MBO diploma in the next section.

Another important aspect of Defne's transition was the role played by marital decisions. For Defne, the decision to get married did not grow from an inclination to commit to domestic roles (Gaskell, 1992), but rather was seen as a way out of the household to gain independence. In fact, her wish to get married almost forced her into the labour market and into jobs which she did not enjoy. Nevertheless, her action did entail a form of romanticizing of her new home over the parental home. All of the respondents who were married articulated their marriage decision as their own choice, even in the cases of arranged marriages, while they admitted the risks of ending up with the wrong partner. Even Defne, whose parents' were an example of a failed arranged marriage, chose a similar pathway.

Similarly, in Strasbourg, female respondents who dropped out of education without a vocational degree mostly resorted to domestic roles, even if they wanted to be active in the labour market. Ayse dropped out of school before acquiring her BEP due to the headscarf ban in France. Both in the Netherlands and France, there has been an increase in Islamophobic rhetoric in politics, and especially in the media. However, France has taken this hostile discourse one step further; in 2004, it introduced a structural barrier to the education of young women wearing headscarves in French state schools (Hargreaves, 2007). As with any other headscarf ban, including the one in Turkey, this has led to discriminatory practices against women, as only headscarf-wearing Muslim girls are excluded, while Muslim boys not carrying any obvious religious symbols continue their education without interruption. Fatmagül was one of the girls who refused to take off her headscarf and decided to continue her studies from home. Feeling alienated at home and having lost contact with her peers, she couldn't complete her coursework and eventually quit school. She then met a Turkish boy from her parents' village. After one year of long-distance dating online, they got married. Her husband started working with her father in the construction sites. Lacking any sort of work experience, Fatmagül felt stuck at home doing domestic work while she actively looked for low-skilled work. After her negative experience at school, she was not very optimistic about finding a job. At the time of the survey, she was hoping to start working as cleaner in a doctor's office, whom she had heard was not negative about young women wearing headscarves. For Fatmagül, marriage constituted a transition from home to greater independence. Like other young women who dropped out without qualifications, she was actively looking for work, but the options in the labour market for the unqualified were meagre and mostly undesirable.

Another interesting case in Strasbourg was Ayla, which was discussed in the Chapter 5 with regards to the difficulties of adjusting to the school habitus. He was a remarkable student, and, after secondary school (*collège*), was advised by her teachers to attend the most prestigious lyceum in the centre of Strasbourg and to follow the scientific track. However, after spending most of her education in segregated neighbourhood (*quartier*) schools, Ayla could not adjust to the habitus of the new school, where most of the students were very competitive and ambitious. Approaching her last year in high school, Ayla's grades dropped gradually and she failed her oral *baccalauréat* exam. She then went on a summer vacation in Turkey, where she met a Turkish boy with whom she fell in love. The boy was studying in a Turkish University and they kept their contact online. When she returned to France, she decided to enrol in her school again to prepare for the *baccalauréat* exam. However, this time she was put in a classroom with new students and, as the eldest in her classroom, she felt even more out of place. Shortly afterwards, she decided to drop out altogether, get married and move to Turkey. Her parents were disappointed about her decision to leave school but in the end they also agreed to her decision to marry. She got married at the age of eighteen in Turkey, where she stayed around one year. Ayla accepts that, if she hadn't met her husband, she could have worked harder at her education, but says she was already very disappointed and eager to leave school.

AYLA: Let me say it this way; around the time I felt most detached from school, I met him. It just coincided. It was a time I was getting discouraged from studying and my grades were falling. Then I met him, and I got even more confused. Then we started chatting and I just didn't care anymore. Maybe if I hadn't met him, I could have pulled myself together, but, yeah, this was the way it was supposed to be I guess. I was only seventeen.

After the wedding, the couple returned to France. Ayla and her husband had two children in the space of three years, and she didn't look for a job, staying home to take care of the kids instead. Ayla's husband found a job with the help of her family, and he also learnt some French. Ayla is planning on going back to school and she has modified her dream to become a doctor to getting a chemistry degree in order to become a teacher. She says her husband strongly supports her decision, and she has already signed up to take her *baccalauréat* exam.

In Strasbourg, there was only one there were no male interview respondents who left school without a diploma. Nevertheless, some conclusions can be drawn by taking into consideration respondents from different education backgrounds. Previous studies have claimed that, in countries such as the Netherlands where vocational degrees are occupation-specific, early school leavers are in a more vulnerable position compared to those in countries like France, where training is more often provided on the job. Indeed, in the Netherlands, vocational graduates

do seek work in their areas of study, and those who drop out usually fall into low-skilled employment, as in the case of Şakir or Defne. However, in France, respondents who were vocational graduates did not work in their areas of studies. The majority of these students resorted to low-skilled work, and did not rely on their diplomas. As a result, we can easily expect this outcome for people without even a vocational degree.

The interviews confirm that lack of a clear career pathway, conflicts with teachers or peers (Macleod, 2009) having troubles in adjusting to the habitus in a (Lehmann, 2007), and problems in the parental home (Luyten, 2003) all resulted in students losing their motivation to study and eventually leaving school. In France, the headscarf ban in secondary schools created an additional barrier for girls that didn't exist in the Netherlands.

Not surprisingly, most of these young people resorted to low-skilled jobs, through which they tried to develop forms of capital to help them pursue their careers. These profiles also highlight the ambiguity about when transitions begin and end. While, for Şakir, returning to school was not an option, for Defne, Fatmagül, and Ayla, it was still a hope to improve their chances in the labour market.

Finally, especially for young women who left school without a diploma, getting married and following domestic roles was a widespread transition pathway. This has been documented in youth transitions before, with domestic roles seen as sources of status, independence and control (Wallace, 1987). In this study, young women who dropped out of school without a degree saw marriage as a transition pathway, and this demonstrates how the norms and values of their parents, their surroundings, their social disadvantage and their traditional gender roles intersected. The descendants of immigrants do not enjoy the advantage of having middle class parents who could guide them through conflicts at school or provide encouragement in cases where they encounter obstacles or distractions on the road. Most immigrant parents do support the education of their children and have high aspirations for them, but do not or cannot provide instrumental assistance. Most descendants of immigrants thus walk the education pathway alone, unless older or wiser siblings or peers accompany them. However, once they lose their belief in their own chances of success, it is easier for them and their parents to resort back to a long-established habitus—in Bourdieu's words, the fish go back to water. In that water, marriage is still perceived as a valid transition option. Yet this is not to say that marriage is only common among female early school leavers of Turkish descent. Irrespective of education level, marriage is still considered the most common and acceptable form of cohabitation or establishing a family among the native-born descendants of immigrants from Turkey. Recent European studies have underlined that this group is more likely to enter matrimony, and at an earlier age, compared to their peers with native-born parents (Milewski and Hamel, 2010).

### 3.2. Entering the Labour Market with a Post-Secondary Diploma

#### 3.2.1. Descriptive Analysis from the TIES Survey

In this section, we will review the conditions of young people who finished their upper-secondary studies at the intersections of entering labour market or accessing higher education.

According to Figure 8 ( Appendix III). among the MBO students, 28% were still studying at the time of the survey, 33% had graduated with an MBO diploma, 17% had dropped out without an MBO diploma, and 22% had enrolled in tertiary vocational colleges (HBO). Among the comparison group, dropout rates were significantly lower; only 5% dropped out without an MBO diploma while 43% accessed tertiary education. As expected, continuation into tertiary education is higher among the descendants of immigrants from Turkey in academic tracks; 58% of those graduating from the general academic track (HAVO) accessed HBO, while 26% making a transition to HAVO to MBO. 70% of those graduating from the scientific academic track (VWO) accessed university and 21% accessed HBO among the sample of native-born descendants of immigrants from Turkey.

In Strasbourg (Figure 9), of the native-born descendants of immigrants from Turkey who were tracked into the vocational upper secondary education, 13% were still studying at the time of the survey, 18% dropped out without a degree CAP or BEP diploma, 37% graduated with a CAP or BEP diploma, 26% accessed a professional lyceum and another 6% enrolled in either a general or technical lyceum. However, attending a lyceum did not guarantee participation in higher education. Among those who accessed professional lyceum, 25% left school after obtaining *baccalauréat* and 11% dropped out without a diploma. Students from the general and technological lyceums accessed tertiary education in higher numbers. The numbers 1,2 and 3 indicate the higher education institutions where the *baccalauréat* holders can (technically) enrol into. 1 is the preparation classes and for *grands école*. 2 stands for the non-selective universities and 3 stands for the tertiary vocational education for two years leading to BTS or DUT diplomas. In line with the institutional design, the majority of general lyceum students with immigrant parents from Turkey (60%) accessed universities, 14% accessed while of those in technical lyceums preferred vocational tertiary education. Only the graduates of general lyceums went into the highly selective universities (*grandes écoles*) but these were a very small minority among both the native-born descendants of immigrants from Turkey(4%) and the comparison group(9%). Furthermore, in Strasbourg, more students from the academic track left education after upper secondary level (lyceum) compared to Amsterdam. 25% of the *bac. tech.* holders and 6% of *bac. general* holders left education completely after receiving their lyceum diplomas.

In line with the institutional design of the education systems in both settings, the

majority of respondents in the vocational tracks left school after receiving their diploma, while the majority of academic students enrolled in some form of higher education. Nevertheless, a small but significant proportion of vocational students also managed to access higher education through indirect routes. If we construe the decision to attend higher education as one of the possible transition pathways for secondary school graduates, for those who left education the outcomes are more diverse. In the Netherlands the minimum qualification to enter the labour market is perceived as either having a HAVO /VWO or a MBO (N-2) diploma so if we group them together and look at their activities; Table 21 (Appendix III) shows that, in Amsterdam, the majority of post-secondary vocational or upper secondary education graduates (HAVO/VWO/MBO>out) were active in the labour market at the time of the survey, though there was a significant gender difference; only 57% of the female descendants of immigrants from Turkey were active compared to 75% of the males. In Table 22 (Appendix p III) distinction between CAP or BEP graduates and *baccalauréat* holders is made due to their differential positions in the French education system. The table shows that, in Strasbourg, 92% of all *baccalauréat* holders among male respondents with immigrant were active in the labour market compared to 58% of the females. Among the comparison group 75% of the male and 64% of the females were active. Also among the CAP/ BEP diploma holders 89% of the male native-born descendants of immigrants were active in the labour market compared to 64% of the females. In both settings female respondents with Turkish immigrant parents with or without vocational degrees were highly present among the home makers; 14% of CAP/ BEP holders in Strasbourg and 19% of the MBO holders in Amsterdam were homemakers looking after home and children.

### 3.2.2. Qualitative Interviews with Post-Secondary Graduates

This section will concentrate on the differential transition experience of vocational students or graduates of secondary education in Amsterdam and Strasbourg. The Dutch vocational training system provides school-based training supplemented by extended periods of internship through which young people gain occupation-specific skills. Our qualitative interviews illustrate that this occupational specificity creates a transparency where by young people feel more confident and knowledgeable about the returns of their training in the labour market (Hamilton, 1994). During their internships, students develop an understanding of the functions they are going to execute in the workplace and the skills necessary for their jobs. Most respondents found this useful as they lacked occupation-specific advice and cultural capital at home that would help them choose the right occupation.

Most respondents in the vocational track in Amsterdam received training for jobs in the service sector, such as banking and insurance, administration, IT or business. Hardly any of the parents were able to provide assistance in these sectors, except for the cleaning jobs, which they actually wanted their children to avoid. As a

result, most vocational graduates relied on their areas of study and the contacts they had built over their internships and student jobs. Even though this apparently limited their flexibility in choosing jobs, the education system itself provided horizontal channels by which students could change their focus during schooling. In fact, having changed subjects was a common experience among vocational graduate respondents. For example, Kuzey had chosen to study accounting and management in post-secondary vocational training (MBO), but, after his internship, decided that he didn't want to spend the rest of his life behind a computer making calculations. As a result, he switched to training as a security guard whereby he could work outdoors and with more flexible working conditions. After graduation, he directly entered the labour market.

The extended internship is not only helpful for getting to know one's occupation and what awaits in the labour market, but also for developing certain forms of capital and resources instrumental for labour market transitions.

Gülden (aged 25) was the seventh child of an immigrant family from Turkey living in Amsterdam. As the youngest, she was the only sibling born in the Netherlands. Her father was retired from his manufacturing job while her mother had never been employed. Neither of her parents spoke good Dutch. Advised to choose the vocational track, Gülden pursued senior secondary vocational training in banking and insurance, taking two internships, both of 6 months. Throughout her studies and her internship, she developed both cultural capital relevant to her occupation and social capital; her second employer, a corporate bank, offered her a job as a bank clerk while she was still studying. Two weeks after graduation, she started working there full-time. Gülden worked there for four years, but was never offered a permanent contract. With the economic crisis, rather than offering her a stable position the bank decided to make her redundant, together with hundreds of other (low-ranking) employees. Before she lost her job, her bank recommended her to a corporate Turkish Bank based in Amsterdam. She has now been employed there for over two years. She was even happier about her second job as she had gained new skills and had a higher position. She still does not hold a permanent contract, but is optimistic about attaining one. Gülden had achieved the highest qualification in her family, and her older brothers and sisters had only meagre education. She never considered prolonging her studies into higher education.

INTERVIEWER: what do you think about labour market opportunities in the Netherlands?

GÜLDEN: Let me tell you this. I studied MBO, but I can find a job much more easily than an HBO graduate. Really! Because [HBO graduates] are more expensive. For the same job, [employers] have to pay them more. That's why it's faster for an MBO graduate to find a job.

The majority of respondents from the vocational track in Amsterdam found jobs in

the area of their studies. Hakan studied banking and insurance, and, following his first internship, he was offered an extension in his contract as a summer job. In the end, he ended up working for the insurance company for a year during his studies. Nevin studied accounting and wanted to make some extra money while she was in school. Yet she was neither satisfied with her scholarship nor with working in part-time jobs (*bijbaans*) that she deemed unprofitable for her career. After her first internship, she proposed her employer fund a dual study, whereby she combined four days of work with one of study. Nevin highlighted that interns don't simply learn "the job" during work experience, but also;

NEVIN: You learn how to manage your relations with people; your manners, your time management.

Indeed, the significance of internship experience has led to stiff competition among students to get these positions, and in which schools could not always be influential. Meryem, who was able to secure an apprenticeship in an accounting bureau through his parents' connections highlights that "you have to start searching very early—like six months in advance—otherwise you can't get a position, and, without a position, you will be in trouble in school."

For most young people, while accessing jobs was one story, sticking at them was another. At the time of the interviews, those who had already graduated from vocational courses had little difficulty finding jobs in their areas of study, though they were either soon laid off or decided to switch job once or more. They all highlighted the difficulty of getting a permanent contract, but, since they had only been in the labour market for one or two years, they were also optimistic about future opportunities.

Unlike in the Netherlands, in France, vocational educational is less occupation-specific and is dominated by an "education logic" (Powell et al., 2009). The skills required for jobs are usually gained at the work place and, as a result, educational credentials and occupations are not clearly linked (Hannan et al., 1997). This creates a lack of transparency about the returns of educational diplomas for students. As a result, in France, most respondents who received vocational diplomas did not rely on their qualifications to access employment, but ended up working in various unskilled jobs. Most of these young people acquired school-based vocational diplomas (BEP), rather than apprenticeship based certificates (CAP). Some could not find jobs in their areas of study, while others didn't even search for such jobs. Most male vocational students received training in manual trades, such as auto mechanics, maintenance work, plumbing and technical repair, etc., while females studied accountancy or administration, and one even focused on sewing. Hence, the occupational choices in Strasbourg were strongly gendered. In Amsterdam, by contrast, we see more convergence with most vocational students targeting positions in the business or finance sectors in insurance companies or banks.

Nevertheless, security work was favoured by boys, and some girls worked as doctor's assistants or day care workers. In Strasbourg among the boys, the majority started working on assembly lines, construction sites or in the market place as sales persons. These were the kind of jobs that they could easily access via family members or by registering in the employment office (*interim*). In contrast, those who left school after attaining a lyceum diploma (*baccalauréat*) worked in stores as sales assistants, bus drivers or did other jobs, mostly in the service sector. While in Amsterdam students talked about their "lack of interest in studying" or "preferring work to studying", in Strasbourg, the financial obligation to work was mentioned more often. This was also partly due to the lack of student employment opportunities in Strasbourg or the difficulty of combining school and work, which forced many students to pursue employment rather than further study. Some students did not even consider further training as a viable option as they wanted to start working and gain an income as soon as possible. These students had already started working as children in family businesses, such as market stalls, bazaars or construction sites.

In Strasbourg, Selahattin left education after acquiring the vocational diploma (BEP). He was the youngest child of a migrant family from Turkey. He was again the only child to be born in France, and his other siblings were all working in low-skilled jobs. He received a BEP diploma in plumbing, achieving the highest qualification in his family. In fact, Selahattin had grades above average, but higher education never crossed his mind. He wanted to earn an income, get his driving license, his car and become financially independent. However, after graduation, he never worked as a plumber, but started working as a street vendor in the market together with his brother. After four years in the market, he concluded that street stalls were not as profitable as before, so they closed their stand and he started working in the assembly line. He found his jobs through employment agencies (*interim*), and he changed employment constantly, never acquiring a permanent contract. Recently, he had been injured in his job and was on sick leave for one year after an operation on his spine. He was planning on returning to work in the factory. His future motivation was to acquire a stable labour market position, get married and build a family. Selahattin was 29 at the time of the interview, and had been working since he left school at age 17.

Similarly, Cengiz, Behzat and Kader had all finished vocational training and acquired their BEPs in (variously) plumbing, lathery, sewing and accountancy. However, they had never worked in the area of their studies, mostly resorting to unskilled jobs. Cengiz dropped out of *bac tech.*, despite his high grades, thinking he had his own trade, but then worked as a courier driver and later in the assembly line in an automobile factory. Ismail received a CAP diploma in welding, but worked as a street vendor in the market. Kader took up vocational training in sewing and received a BEP, but, since the hosiery factories were far away from her

house, she ended up working as a sales assistant in a store and later as a cleaner.

The quantitative analysis of TIES survey showed that dropout rates were much lower in Amsterdam among academic and general track students compared to Strasbourg where in as 13.6% of the respondents with Turkish immigrant parents left education after academic lyceum (with or without *bac* diploma). Hence some of the respondents in Strasbourg left education after academic secondary education, while we didn't have any respondents in Amsterdam who left school after academic track. This could be explained by the perceived adequacy of a *baccalauréat* when leaving education. Nevertheless, the real advantages of a *baccalauréat* were highly disputed by respondents. Both academic and vocational students claimed that a *baccalauréat* diploma “means nothing on its own”, as it provided only general education without any professional orientation. In fact these young people also did low-skilled jobs in the service sector.

Nevertheless, the fact that a *baccalauréat* didn't provide occupational skills on its own didn't motivate students to pursue their studies into higher education either. This had to do with the problem of transparency of educational returns in the labour market. In Strasbourg, Engin left education after having received a *bac tech*. Engin's mother had come to Strasbourg at the age of twelve, and received some language training. She spoke good French and worked in the parliament as a cleaner. His father had joined her after their marriage and became a butcher. The family lived in the suburbs of Strasbourg, where the schools had a bad reputation. In order to encourage their children's education, Engin's parents sent him to a private school outside the neighbourhood. Yet after attaining a technical *baccalauréat* diploma, Engin did not want to go to University. He argued that the University didn't provide any occupational skills or experience relevant to the labour market. Instead, he wanted to enrol in tertiary vocational school in the form of an apprenticeship (BTS *en alternance*).

ENGIN: I have never wanted to go to University because you can't build any experience there. Then there is BTS. There is one public one. I didn't want that either because there you only go to school. Again, you don't work, you don't make money or build any experience. I had to make money, you know. I wanted to work and build some experience. That's why I have tried BTS *en alternance*. I have sent my CV to lots of employers; people we know, acquaintances, family, friends. I have also looked on the Internet; [I found] nothing. Then I looked for a job.

Unlike university or other forms of vocational tertiary training, BTS *en alternance* combines two days of training in school with three days of working for an employer. Most students who access this training develop relevant job experience in the area of their studies and mostly end up staying with the same employer to experience a smooth labour market entry. However, this new form of BTS is highly selective. Students are expected to find an employer who agrees to finance their studies in return for cheaper labour costs. The employers then pay the students a

minimum income (*smique*). Engin made several applications to companies and schools to help find him an employer, but wasn't successful. He then decided to start working in a clothing store. One year later, Engin again tried to find an employer for the training. In two years, he made over 100 applications for this apprenticeship. In the end he gave up on the idea of further study. At the time of the interview, he planned on saving money and starting his own business.

In contrast, academic track students in Amsterdam felt more secure about the returns of higher education in the labour market. In fact, the decision to go to university or vocational tertiary education seemed rather straightforward and even those respondents who attended vocational tertiary education already aspired to access university. In the next section we will discuss in detail the motivations of students in accessing higher education.

### 3.3. Accessing Higher Education: To Graduate with a Degree or Drop Out?

#### 3.3.1. Descriptive Analysis from the TIES Survey

The native born descendants of immigrants who participated in the TIES survey were a young population; the mean age of the sample was 24 in both Amsterdam and Strasbourg. In contrast, the comparison group sample was older, with a mean age of 28 in Amsterdam and 26 in Strasbourg. Because the descendants of immigrants were younger, most of the respondents in this group who prolonged their studies into higher education were still studying at the time of the survey.

According to Figure 8 (Appendix III), among the native-born descendants of immigrants from Turkey in Amsterdam, 42% were still studying in (HBO) while 47% were still at university at the time of the survey. As a result it is hard to report the completion rates for all respondents. 30% of those who accessed HBO, finished with a diploma, 10% continued into university and 18% dropped out without a diploma. 47% graduated from university and 6% dropped out. Among the comparison group 38% were still in school and 58% left education with a university diploma.

Figure 9 (Appendix III) illustrates that, in Strasbourg too, the majority of descendants of immigrants from Turkey in tertiary vocational training (50%) and university (46%) were still studying at the time of the survey. Among those who attended university, 37% graduated with a degree and 15% dropped out without. 38% of BTS students graduated with a diploma, while 12% dropped out with no degree. All the rest were still in school.

When we look at the activities of native-born descendants of immigrants from Turkey who had left higher education, Table 21 (Appendix III) shows that, in Amsterdam, 20% of the male graduates of both HBO and University reported being unemployed. However it is hard to make a conclusion from these trends

numbers since case numbers were very small; the majority of the descendants of immigrants from Turkey were either still studying or young new entrants into labour market, while the comparison group had been in the labour market for a longer period of time. According to Table 22 (Appendix III) in Strasbourg, more than 80% of all higher education diploma holders from all groups and gender were active in the labour market, which shows higher labour market participation compared to lower education levels.

### 3.3.2. Qualitative Interviews with Higher Education Students

In terms of accessing higher education, academic track students experienced a rather smooth decision making process in Amsterdam. Through early stratification, most respondents had been prepared and conditioned to enter their assigned higher education track without further consideration (HAVO students go to HBO and VWO students go to University). However, as we have discussed in the previous section, due to a lack of transparency about the benefits of higher education in France, for some academic track students in Strasbourg, accessing higher education was not as straightforward. Nevertheless, a considerable amount of *baccalauréat* holders accessed universities or higher vocational institutions.

The second difference between the systems lies in the entry requirements of higher education institutions. As discussed in Chapter 5, in the Netherlands, the higher education institution accessed is determined by early educational tracking; general-academic track (HAVO) students gain direct access to vocational colleges (HBO) and scientific-academic track students can directly access Universities. In contrast, in France, any *baccalauréat* holder gains the right to access both (non-selective) public universities and (semi-selective) vocational colleges and programs (STS, IUT, etc.). However, this selectivity also takes place among the institutions, as most prestigious universities (*grandes écoles*) are private and require entry exams and two years of preparation. Only one respondent had succeeded in entering these highly prestigious universities.

Additionally, due to increasing credentialism, many higher education students felt the need to prolong their studies by conducting postgraduate training, such as Masters degrees. Institutional bridges are created between schools, so graduates of vocational tertiary education can access academic universities (pre-Masters in the Netherlands and *license professionnelle* in France). In both settings, respondents followed these bridge years to increase their degrees with the aim of improving their future labour market careers.

The educational pathways of Bulut and Zeynep are excellent examples of this last condition in Amsterdam and Strasbourg, respectively, as both studied first in vocational colleges, then in universities. Bulut, from Amsterdam, studied two additional years to acquire an MA degree in finance after graduating from

vocational college (HBO) in business administration. She received full support from her parents, who not only paid her study costs but also provided an ideal working environment, in which she had her own room and meals were organized according to her study schedule. Both of Bulut's parents arrived in the Netherlands at the age of twelve and were schooled in Dutch. Being conscious of increasing credentialism, they supported Bulut by all means at their disposal. After acquiring her HBO degree, Bulut enrolled in a university. First she had to do a pre-Masters year, in which she had to take additional courses in philosophy, maths and English. English was the most difficult subject for her, and she had to pay for private classes. In the end, she successfully completed the program and acquired her MA degree. However, Bulut highlighted throughout the interview that she also benefited a lot from her internship experience during HBO and her interaction with her classmates.

During school, Bulut had two significant internships and experience of working part-time at a bank for almost a year. During her HBO, Bulut did an internship in a prestigious Dutch private bank—a position she attained through “a well-off” classmate whose father was a well-respected dentist. She later obtained a part-time position at ABN-AMRO during her MA studies, and thinks her previous internship experience was instrumental in this:

INTERVIEWER: What do you think about your work experience as a student?

BULUT: I think where you work as a student or where you do your internship matters a lot. I think they gave me this job at ABN because I had worked at the private bank. Because once, the head of the department came to visit the workers there, and he almost never talks to the students. He approached me and said "Hey you were the girl who did an internship at that private bank?" I remember it well, because it is very difficult to enter that place.

After her graduation, she took a break for couple of months and then looked for a position. Four months later, she was contacted by a head hunter, who arranged a temporary post for her in the finance department of a corporate firm in a city close to Amsterdam. She took this opportunity to build some work experience, commuting two hours every day. Six months later, both Bulut and the company were pleased with her performance, and she was offered a position in one of their branches in Amsterdam. After two years of working, Bulut received a permanent contract from the firm, which she happily accepted.

In Strasbourg, Zeynep studied IT management in tertiary vocational school (BTS). Her subject choice had been totally coincidental; she had started studying accountancy like her older sister, as she was encouraged by her father and sister, but realised she disliked the subject. She then decided to try IT because this was the only training which still had space for a new student. She really liked the training and pursued it further. She was attending a public school (not a BTS *en alternance*),

where she conducted very short periods of internships. Nevertheless, her last placement offered her a job in her last year, after two months of traineeship. Zeynep's father had come to France at a young age, attending school and developing language and cultural capital. He advised Zeynep to pursue her studies into university rather than entering the labour market. He provided full emotional and financial support for her to access a *license professional* and Zeynep successfully managed to achieve her bachelor degree. After graduation, Zeynep looked for a job for six months, and was eventually offered a post in the public sector at one of her former internships. She accepted the offer and had been working there for over a year. Recently she had been given a permanent position (*embouché*).

Both Zeynep and Bulut had parents who arrived in the Netherlands and France around the age of twelve and received education in the host countries. Both parents had language capital but also information capital about the education system and how the labour market functions. Furthermore, while pursuing the tertiary vocational track, both Zeynep and Bulut were able to conduct internships and develop cultural and social capital that eventuated in smooth labour market transitions. Bulut's work experience was much more substantial than Zeynep's, and hence her income and her contract were also quite prestigious. However, even Zeynep's meagre internship experience proved to be very instrumental in establishing contacts. In fact, for other respondents, other apprenticeships also facilitated smooth labour market transitions. Selin and Gönül both pursued BTS *en alternance* and initially had difficulty finding a viable employer for their training. Both of them initially had Turkish employers whom they accessed via their family connections. However, both of their agreements failed and they had to look for another employer. Eventually, they both found French employers and their DUAL study lead to smooth transitions into work within the same company.

Thus, while for academic students like Zeynep and Bulut, the decision to pursue higher education was more or less a given, for vocational students, it was less straightforward. Compared to academic track students, vocational graduates followed a longer trajectory. Having received a vocational degree, they were not only concerned with the costs or time involved in studying, but they were also missing out on earning an income by not entering the labour market (Giroux, 1983). As a result, prolonging their education for another four years required various support mechanisms and opportunity structures that allowed for the extension of their education.

In both settings, parental support proved critical in facilitating higher education success. However, not all parents possessed similar forms of capital, and first generation immigrants were especially alienated from the realities of the education systems and labour markets. This is not to say these parents did not encourage or support their children's education; as they saw their children's future in the host societies, they encouraged their children into education by advising them "not to be

like us” (Coenen, 2001).

As a result, some vocational students were pushed by their parents to extend their studies into higher education, while others had to struggle against their parents to do so. In both cases, parents were unable to provide practical assistance or give advice about educational choices. Some parent, however, gave emotional or financial support to their children to succeed in higher education. In fact, such support created the right environment for further study, since economic concerns about delaying full-time employment formed solid barriers to it. Serkan’s parents exemplified such support and he was able to extend his studies into tertiary vocational education. Serkan's mother had arrived in the Netherlands at the age of 12, had been to vocational school, and had gained a good command of Dutch. Serkan’s father was from her parent’s village, and together the couple started their own successful dry-cleaning business. Serkan's parents had always been very supportive of their children. Serkan's older brother didn't want to extend his studies; after getting his vocational degree, he started working in the family business by opening his own branch. Serkan obtained an MBO degree in sports and physical education. His dream was to become a professional football player. He mentioned that his mother would come to all his games and he always felt he had his parents’ backing in all his decisions. However, after a few unfortunate high-risk injuries followed by serious operations, Serkan concluded that there was no future for him in professional football. Then he made a substantial change and decided to attend tertiary vocational education (HBO) in business economics.

SERKAN: I went through two serious operations on my knee. Then I decided that I didn't have a future in football. School is more important for me. You improve [ontwikkelen] yourself. You meet different people. When you tell people you are studying in HBO, they look at you differently. You know, with respect. I decided to do HBO in business economics. It's more prestigious, you know; when you get a job they give you a car and so on. It's cool.

Serkan not only attributed employment value to tertiary education (Lehmann, 2009), but also praised the status and prestige that a higher education diploma brought with it. He already planned on pursuing his studies into university, which is even more reputable. His efforts were welcomed by his parents. Serkan highlighted that he had a part-time job as a gym instructor and paid for his own study costs. However, he also mentioned that his father was ready to pay for anything as long as he was willing to study. Even though his parents could not help Serkan with his course or studies, they still created a safe environment for him.

In Strasbourg, since combining work and study was not a feasible option, financial obligations and lack of parental support pressured students when accessing higher education. Behzat’s case has been discussed in the previous chapter. After attaining his vocational degree, first he went to professional lyceum and then accessed vocational tertiary education but eventually dropped out because he had to work

while studying. Behzat's father had arrived in Strasbourg as a guestworker. He had meagre education and worked in factories until his retirement. Behzat was the family's youngest child, and his parents were already retired and at home by the time Behzat went to school. Behzat's father was not very supportive of his decision to undertake further study. On the contrary, Behzat felt he was expected to start working full time as soon as possible. As a result, he felt obliged to at least earn his own pocket money but it was very hard for him to maintain the two activities, and he eventually dropped out of school and started working full-time in the factories. During the interview, Behzat was quite regretful and angry about his dropping out because after quitting BTS, Behzat managed to find a job through his internship, and his boss hired him despite the fact that he did not acquire the BTS diploma. Even though he acquired a permanent contract, Behzat was afraid that if the factory closed down he would not be able to find a job at the BTS level.

Also in Amsterdam, not all the students who accessed higher education training managed to complete their studies. For those who dropped out of tertiary vocational education, the obligation to pay back the student loans was a major demotivator. The risk of failure was exacerbated by the fear of inheriting a debt while delaying full-time employment. Türkan tried his luck on an HBO in business economics, but had too much difficulty with his course, deciding to drop out six months later as he didn't want to pay back big loans. Having a clear career goal or plan was another necessity for achievement in higher education. In Amsterdam, Emre was one of those students who experienced cyclical periods of employment, training and unemployment. He had already attended three different HBO courses, but hadn't lasted on any of them. In his MBO training, he studied trading and sales, but didn't enjoy working in that field either. He said that, during his internships, he had not worked in the area of his studies, but rather counted his work in the supermarket as internships, and hence that he didn't know what was awaiting him in the labour market. As a result, he ended up working mostly in unskilled jobs in the airport or supermarkets, or trying new training.

In Strasbourg too, lack of direction and motivation about future goals were problems haunting respondents. Fahri was advised to choose a vocational track (BEP), but, after attaining his degree, he attended academic lyceum. However, he didn't manage to pass his *baccalauréat* exams and dropped out. After a couple of months of idling, not knowing what to do, he found a job as a bus driver with the help of a family acquaintance. After seven months, he quit his job and decided to go back to school.

FAHRI: At first I was very excited to go back to school. I hated the job on the bus. Doing the same thing every day was so boring. Now that I am back to school, I am lost again. I just lack motivation. If you want to achieve something, you have to believe in it. The *baccalauréat* exam wasn't hard, but I just didn't believe in it. I just did it and it didn't work out.

Fahri suffered from lack of a motivation to study, as he was not sure what to do with his life once he got a diploma. This was also the problem of transparency mentioned earlier among the French students, many of whom had concerns about attending university.

There was one last transition trajectory that helped some students who were successful in higher education. Some vocational students who accessed higher education had a risk-averse attitude. Previous studies have illustrated risk averse behaviour regarding higher education, especially among the female descendants of immigrants from Turkey (Pasztor, 2009). However, this type of risk aversion was different from the ones applied in most studies (Van De Werfhorst and Hofstede, 2007); these students were not attempting downward mobility as they had already achieved upward social mobility compared to their parents. However, they did have a guaranteed or instrumental approach. Most of these respondents chose easier pathways to avoid the risk of failure, and considered it easier to “fall back on” a vocational degree in the case of failure. Şebnem had immigrant parents with a low education level. After college, despite her above average grades, she decided to attend vocational school, as she was more willing to start working than go to university. Her experience in vocational training was rewarding, and, together with her best friend, from a similar background, was advised by teachers to attend professional lyceum. Working with her peer proved to be a successful strategy for Şebnem, as it is for many other children of immigrants (Crul, 1999, Crul, 2000). Once they graduated from professional lyceum, they both decided to attend university. Şebnem was determined to stay low profile so she chose a subject (sociology), which was accessible but also easy to succeed in.

At university, Şebnem met her husband. He was also a child of an immigrant from Turkey, and was studying law. They decided to get married in their second year and Şebnem moved in with her husband’s mother. She started working part time in childcare centres alongside her studies in order to contribute to the family income. One year later, she had her first child. She mentioned that living with her husband’s mother had been very helpful, as her mother-in-law would take care of the child and do most of the domestic work. Her mother in-law was extremely helpful and caring towards the couple, and later also provided childcare. Şebnem managed to get her bachelor degree with two years delay, together with additional training she received in child care (*formation*). Hence she had studied, worked and had a family at the same time. She managed to accumulate significant experience in the education sector, and started working in a mixed school as a manager dealing with parents and children with a migrant background. Şebnem mentions that she never had high ambitions about higher education, but had just made sure that she had all the diplomas as she climbed the ladder. Şebnem’s case is not only an example of an extended educational career, but also shows the complexities of today’s transitions. She managed to combine her studies with work, marriage and child rearing.

However, in doing so, she relied heavily on family support. These resources are reminiscent of the forms of gendered capital discovered by Skeggs among working-class mothers (Skeggs, 2004a). Many mothers' altruistic behaviour facilitated a successful transition for the female descendants of immigrants. This is a distinct form of family support, whereby parents provide assistance in dealing with the difficulties of married life, domestic responsibilities and combining work with studies. Thus marriage continues to be valid cohabitation practice for native-born descendants of immigrants from Turkey, and is not necessarily an alternative to working or education where distinct combinations of all activities are facilitated by the extended family.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Previous studies have argued that youth transitions are becoming more extended, fragmented and complex in today's societies. In this chapter, we have tried to illustrate the struggles of the native born descendants of immigrants from Turkey during their transition from school to different forms of adulthood in Amsterdam and Strasbourg. In making this transition, young people are pressured by financial constraints and opportunity structures that either aggravate or improve their conditions.

As a result of tracking young people in Amsterdam and Strasbourg pursue different vocational and academic trajectories, which have implications for the development various forms of capital. In Amsterdam, the transparent value of qualifications encouraged the descendants of immigrants to prolong their studies into higher education. Flexible work arrangements also made it possible for young people from low income families to combine work with study and extend their schooling. Furthermore, long internships were crucial to these young people in building symbolic and cultural capital with regards to their future occupations. All respondents underlined the difference between what they had learned at school and what they experienced in the work place. A successful internship experience both led to the development of competences and cultural capital about employment practices, and also generated social capital, which was vital in accessing jobs. However, such gains are plausible only in the case of the right internship, relevant to the area of study. As access to internships has become more important, social capital embedded in the family has become crucial for accessing internships as well as jobs, as the experience of many respondents showed. As a result, young people who did not benefit from an instrumental internship experience—or, even worse, who dropped out of the vocational track without a diploma—had limited options such as unskilled or low-skilled service jobs or labour-intensive employment. While some of these young people became repeatedly unemployed, others built cultural capital through their work experience, establishing weak ties to find their way back into career tracks.

In Strasbourg, respondents also felt the need to extend their schooling into higher education due to increased credentialism in France. However, the transition environment was not as flexible as it was in Amsterdam. At the end of their compulsory education, young people in Strasbourg questioned whether to enter the labour market or go on to further study. Many felt pressured by financial constraints, combining their studies with work to ease their financial difficulties. Furthermore, weak transparency of the value of qualifications caused students to feel uncertain about accessing a university or higher vocational education. The majority of Strasbourg respondents attended vocational education through a school-based route to acquire a BEP diploma, which they deemed more prestigious than the apprenticeship track leading to CAP diploma. As a result, most vocational track students had only meagre periods of internship of up to five weeks across two years of training, compared to at least 6 months per year in Amsterdam. Most students in France did not see such a short internship as an important experience, especially in building cultural capital for the labour market, but they were very concerned to get credentials with which to enter the labour market. Most respondents with or without a vocational diploma ended up in low-skilled employment in manufacturing or the service sector, and such jobs hardly provided stable careers. Young people working in these jobs relied heavily on employment agencies which contracted them to temporary arrangements, making it difficult to achieve stability.

Comparing academic track students, in both settings, employment practices proved to be instrumental to young people developing different forms of capital, and especially social capital. In fact, highly educated respondents almost exclusively relied on the social capital that they had developed themselves throughout their studies or internships or work experience. Bourdieu defines social capital as the accumulation of actual or potential resources resulting from being a member of a collectivity of reciprocity (Bourdieu, 1985a) (p. 3). Furthermore, social capital depends on the existence of other forms of cultural and economic capital which help members of a group to recognize each other. Hence, other forms of resources, such as economic and cultural capital, could be converted into social capital through the strategies of individuals. For the respondents, it was mostly educational and cultural capital developed in schools which were converted into a form of social capital crucial for transition.

Furthermore, support mechanisms were also crucial, even when they are not in the form of middle-class knowledge of high culture. Economic capital was especially crucial in creating a comfort zone for young people to extend their studies without worrying about gaining an income. Emotional capital and practical help from parents in sharing daily responsibilities also helped respondents achieve a complex transition. Skeggs has highlighted the importance of the forms of capital that working-class mothers possess, which may not have an exchange value according to

Bourdieu (Skeggs, 2004c). In fact, even though Bourdieu does not emphasize them, such forms of what Reay calls emotional capital can still provide great advantage. As highlighted by Jones, for the youth transitions which young people consider the riskiest today, parental support has regained significant importance (Jones, 2009). Though significantly different from middle class parents' resources, such forms of capital were what most immigrant parents could provide and were effective.

Finally, the prevalence of marriage at an early age existed in parallel to other transition practices and added to the complexity of the picture. One example of the changing nature of youth transitions today has been defined as reversibility; linear transitions from school to work, or from parental home to marriage have changed (du Bois-Reymond, 1998). Marriage continues to be the most acceptable and common form of cohabitation and child-rearing for both the male and female native-born descendants of immigrants from Turkey in Europe (Milewski and Hamel, 2010). However, this does not imply that these young people's biographies are linear. As we have seen throughout the chapter, marriage can be seen as a pathway to leaving the parental home and gaining independence. Particularly for young women who fail at school or despair of finding a job, marriage can provide an alternative transition pathway. Yet many of these girls enter the labour market and some of them go back to school. Others manage to combine marriage and children with school and part-time work with the help of parents or extended family. As a result, transitions continue to be complex and combined, and marriage is also part of this story.