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

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English Summary

The current study aimed to explore the youth transition experience of native-born descendants of immigrants from Turkey living in Amsterdam and Strasbourg. These are young people who have been born and raised in Amsterdam and Strasbourg but whose parents have arrived in these cities or in the host countries as immigrants from Turkey. First of all, the study is inspired by the rich literature on transitions in youth sociology, which examines and embraces the complexity of youth transition experiences today (Furlong, 2009) and contributes to this literature by focusing on the descendants of immigrants, whose distinctiveness has been documented but not studied in depth. On the other, it applies the propositions and theoretical discussions of youth transition studies to the case of native-born descendants of immigrants and tries to bring an alternative perspective to the field of second-generation research by analysing youth transitions as an ongoing process, rather than as an outcome. It thus understands transitions, not as a singular event, but as an ongoing series of practices. This approach concurs with findings of previous studies that postulated that youth transitions today are both complex and intertwined, as young people shift back and forth between education and work (Furlong, 2009, Schoon and Silbereisen, 2009, Wyn and Dwyer, 1999). Furthermore studying transitions as processes requires taking up a retrospective approach and trace the transitions back to secondary school experiences (Raffe, 2009, Van De Werfhorst and Mijs, 2010). The quantitative and qualitative section of the study have pursued a retrospective approach to track the transitions back to secondary school and then follow the trajectories of the respondents through their distinct educational tracks, student employment, internships and into the labour market. This approach to transition as a process makes it hard to report any “final” outcome of the transitions of the respondents, who were between 20 and 30 years old at the time, and whose trajectories were (and still are) open to transformation.

Furthermore, by applying a comparative analysis, the study compares and contrasts both the institutions and the experience of young people across two distinct settings; Amsterdam and Strasbourg. In so doing, it explores how significant cross-national and cross-city differences in education systems and labour markets are in shaping the experience of descendants of immigrants (Crul et al., 2012, Van De Werfhorst and Mijs, 2010). The comparison of transitions in two European cities, Amsterdam and Strasbourg, drew attention to the role of macro-structural and especially institutional differences between these two settings in shaping the transition trajectories. The comparative mixed methods enabled both mapping and exploration of the dynamics of transitions in both settings in considerable detail. In the quantitative section of the research, the TIES survey, which was at the time the most elaborate and up-to-date city-level dataset available for both Amsterdam and Strasbourg, was utilized to achieve a robust comparison (Crul et al., 2012). In the

quantitative sections the cohorts of both native-born descendants of immigrants and their peers with native-born parents are identified and the latter group is utilized as a comparison group and a proxy for the general trends. The qualitative section concentrated exclusively on a subset of TIES respondents from both locations who were native-born and both of whose parents had arrived from Turkey. In-depth semi-structured interviews with 50 descendants of immigrants from Turkey were conducted to explore their individual experiences of and perspectives on their transition trajectories. As illustrated in chapter four, the respondents of this study had parents who had followed similar migration histories, the majority having arrived in the 1970s from the central and eastern Anatolian regions. The comparability of migration histories of the parents forms the starting point of the cross-country comparison. Nevertheless, the study illustrated that exposure to different national settings lead to differentiation of resources among both immigrant parents and their descendants. Considering both this heterogeneity and the primary concern of the study to explore individual experiences, it is also hard to identify the immigrants and their native-born descendants as a group; they neither form a homogenous collectivity nor organize around a “group” (Brubaker, 2004). The object of study here has thus been the experiences of youth transitions in distinct settings of the native-born descendants of immigrants from Turkey.

With regards to the findings of the study, the first structural difference between the two cities was the design of the education systems, especially with regard to early stratification. The way transitions develop cannot be examined without taking into account early tracking in education systems (Raffe, 2009, Van De Werfhorst and Mijs, 2010). According to the TIES Survey in both setting majority of the native-born descendants of immigrants from Turkey were tracked into the vocational track in Amsterdam (72%) and in Strasbourg (54%). Among the respondents only a minority (13% in Amsterdam and 8% in Strasbourg) later successfully managed to prolong their studies into higher education after being tracked into vocational education. While contemporary youth transitions are often described as “prolonged”, the descriptive findings from the TIES survey reveal that prolonging studies and to delay transition is not a straightforward activity in every setting as education systems which practice early stratification condition and limit how and the extent to which transition can be prolonged. Furthermore the qualitative interviews illustrated the role of the immigrant parents during education and early tracking via different forms of capital in the form of practical information that they have come to develop. In both settings, informed parents sent their kids to prestigious schools, hoping this strategy would help their children gain access to better education. According to the accounts of the respondents, in Amsterdam students’ early tracking decisions reflected their CITO score and their teachers’ advice, and neither the parents nor the respondents themselves played a significant role. In Strasbourg, however, the parents were able to influence the decision of the class council on whether their children could pursue an academic track. As a result

tracking decisions in Strasbourg were thus more amenable to parental demands and cultural capital, as well as the aspirations of the students. Hence transition processes in both settings were structured not only by the moment of transition but already conditioned by early streaming outcomes and the kind of role that the parents and significant other played during this processes.

Next chapter six argued that the transition between work and study has become complex and permeable since in both settings, but especially in Amsterdam, young people enter the labour market while they are still studying. The qualitative interviews showed that, through access to internships and relevant part-time work, young people were able to develop not only occupational skills but also cultural and social capital instrumental for smoothing their future transitions into the labour market. This was particularly crucial for those higher education students without access to social networks via their parents or family. In terms of internships, vocational track students in Amsterdam had more internship experience compared to those in Strasbourg. This was also the case for tertiary vocational education (HBO), where in Amsterdam students had extended periods of internships while in Strasbourg only one segment of tertiary vocational training provides such an opportunity (BTS *en Alternance*). In both settings, those students able to secure student jobs relevant to their studies benefited most from student employment as they had a positive impact on their CVs. However, work-study combinations did not always lead to positive outcomes. In Strasbourg, difficult working arrangements and demanding school hours made it difficult for students to work while studying. . Parental financial capital thus emerged as a crucial factor in whether or not education could be prolonged and how. In Strasbourg, those students whose parents could guarantee their children's school and personal expenses could choose not to work if they felt it would harm their academic studies. In Amsterdam, all students worked, irrespective of their parents' income level. However, financially supportive parents still enabled students to be selective about employment opportunities and hold out for jobs that would improve their employability and network of contacts.

Consistent with previous studies (Milewski and Hamel, 2010), my findings illustrate that marriage is the most common and preferred cohabitation practice among the native-born descendants of immigrants from Turkey both in Strasbourg and Amsterdam, and it played a crucial role in respondents' transition processes. The analysis of the marital patterns showed marriage provided an alternative pathway or added to the complexity of youth transitions. For the less-educated women respondents, who had limited options in the labour market or suffered from unemployment, marriage and building their own families provided an alternative pathway to leaving the parental home and gaining independence. For those who got married and built a family but continued their studies into higher education, the emotional and material support of their families, and especially of mothers who

took care of grandchildren or housework duties, proved crucial in managing their complex transitions. This finding is illustrative of the growing need for parental assistance in coping the growing individualization of risk and insecurity during youth transitions today (Jones, 2009).

When it comes to the transition patterns after leaving education current study focused on the degree of stability achieved in the labour market prior to the interview measured through whether respondents secured a permanent contract or acquired stable work arrangements for long periods. The TIES data on post-school transitions was analysed using an innovative descriptive method called latent class analysis (see chapter eight). The analysis resulted in a typology of six transition patterns; three active and three inactive. Among those active in the labour market, three latent classes of career were identified and named as; “early stable”, “stable”, and “shifting” transitions. Those in early stable transitions had the highest probability of achieving stable working arrangements in their first jobs. Those in stable transitions had a high likelihood of having changed jobs a few times before they stabilized in their current jobs. These two categories are reminiscent of the smooth and traditional transitions described in the literature (Evans, 2002, Plug and Bois-Reymond, 2006). Those who experienced shifting transitions had the least probability of securing permanent contracts and higher probability of unemployment or insecure or working arrangements. Shifting transitions paralleled the “shiffters” of Bradley and Devadason’s study (Bradley and Devadason, 2008), who experienced cyclical movements between work, study and other arrangements. Among the inactive respondents, a model with three latent classes was selected and the categories names as; “inactivity”, “stagnant transitions” and “in-transitions”. Respondents classified as inactive had the highest probability of being out of the labour market for the longest time and were unwilling to start working. Those with stagnant transitions had a higher likelihood of unemployment and for a longer period but were willing to enter the labour market. Those in the last, in-transition group had a higher likelihood of unemployment for shorter periods. The distribution of these transition typologies varied across settings. In Strasbourg shifting careers were more prevalent (37%) compared to Amsterdam (16.7%). Among the native-born descendants of immigrants from Turkey, there is a higher incidence of shifting careers compared to the comparison group in both cities, but again the proportion is higher in Strasbourg. Among the inactive profiles, native-born descendants of immigrants from Turkey are more present in both settings. The distribution of transition trajectories also varied according to respondents’ educational careers. The majority of the stable and smooth transition holders in Amsterdam and Strasbourg possessed tertiary diplomas. However, a considerable number of highly educated respondents demonstrated shifting status. Nevertheless, those respondents who dropped out of lower secondary education without a minimum diploma (a VMBO or *college* certificate) experience the highest rates of inactive or shifting transitions both in Amsterdam and Strasbourg. Age also turned

out to be a significant marker as the likelihood of having a stable career increased with age in both cities. Furthermore, when we compare across settings, we see that more people in Amsterdam acquired a stable career at a younger age than in Strasbourg.

As a result the findings of the study show that youth transitions are not singular events but an intertwined set of processes that shape future conditions and possibilities from an early age. The study has shown that native-born descendants of immigrants from Turkey also experienced complex and prolonged transitions. However, whether this prolongation and complexity ultimately lead to stable transitions depended both on the institutional structures and the different forms of capital that were available to young people through their families and the capital they have developed over time. With regard to complex transitions, Amsterdam provided young people with more opportunities for work-study combinations through which they could develop different forms of capital crucial for transitions. However, the findings do not justify recommending young people's early involvement in the labour market during their transitions, as it also proved detrimental for the studies of some students, especially in Strasbourg. Nevertheless, where students could not rely on their parents to provide the necessary forms of capital to assist their transitions, were able to develop resources via working in career-relevant jobs and this was more plausible in Amsterdam due to its more flexible work and study arrangements.

In order to understand the role of Turkish immigrant parents, as well as the resources available to respondents during their transitions, the study explored different forms and volumes of capital in relation to the structures that surround them. This approach has two advantages. Firstly, using forms of capital to understand social class composition helps to discern the crucial differences among immigrant parents, who may otherwise seem to share a similar class position. The current study has highlighted how the different forms of capital immigrant parents either bring to or develop in their new contexts of settlement allow them to assist their children's transition. Secondly, the symbolic value of a form of capital is defined in relation to the certain fields in which the social trajectories of immigrant parents' children are located. Understanding different forms of capital in close relation to fields could help us understand both what kind of resources could be of use to young people and their parents in the given conditions and also what their limitations are.

My findings contribute to debates in "second generation" research by incorporating insights from an increasing body of comparative research on the descendants of immigrants in Europe (Crul and Schneider 2010). However the study also highlighted the importance of careful operationalization of the "generation" concept. Even if the current study focused on a cohort of young people (between the ages of 20 to 30), two forms of parental generations were identified those who

had parents who immigrated and those who had grandparents who immigrated and the parents came as adolescents. This differentiation had implications for the different forms of capital possessed by the parents. Hence the current study suggests to employ the term generation with precaution and ideally after paying sufficient attention to birth cohorts, parents' time of arrival in the host countries as well as the social, economic and political conditions of the milieu. In that sense the choice of generation concept in the current study underlines that fact that these young people shared similar economic and social conditions but also had comparable motivations and concerns with regards to their transitions. With these concerns in mind describing them as a "generation in transition" emphasizes both the temporality of the concept itself and its relation to youth transitions.