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Does Culture Explain? Understanding Differences in School Attainment between Iberian and Turkish Youth in the Netherlands

Flip Lindo

Any assessment of the socioeconomic position of a migrant group will inevitably be based on a comparison, either implicit or explicit. Usually the social performance of immigrants is measured against the standards of mainstream society. Inherent in such a comparison is an expectation that generations born and reared in the host society should 'ideally' conform to mainstream standards. If they do not, something is wrong.

Society, however, is many-layered, and one might ask whether it is realistic to expect all migrant groups, coming as they do from different strata in their societies of origin, to all adapt at an equal pace (see Steinberg 1989). In real life there is considerable variation in the speed at which migrant groups become incorporated into the host society, in the routes they choose in their efforts to achieve social mobility and in the positions they occupy, at least initially, in the stratified system. Theories that try to account for these divergent paths and outcomes have highlighted contextual factors, as well as individual- and group-level factors, as possible determinants. Such theoretical arguments are often tied to central pairs of concepts – 'culture and society', for instance, or 'agency and structure'. The mutually exclusive use of such concepts lies at the root of the normative discussions that are likely to accompany any observation made about the differential success of migrant groups in daily life. Many of the claims made in such discussions can be traced to two opposing normative positions. These might be described, by way of caricature, as *blaming the victim* and *blaming the system*.

In many analyses of the success of some migrant groups compared to others, a distinction between *culture* and *structure* still plays a major role (for an extended discussion, see Lindo 1996). The culture of a given group is frequently presented as an explanation for success, with emphasis on certain properties deemed typical for the group in question: a family orientation, a sober life style, perseverance, a self-denying attitude, ability to

formulate and live up to long-term goals and high ambitions for the children's educational careers.¹ Such qualities – often emphasized selectively because they resemble the ideals of the mainstream (Zhou 1997: 994) – symbolize an immigrant group's capacity to surmount problems and obstacles on its own, thus underlining its moral worth. Often without explicitly saying so, such a moral narrative passes judgement on less successful groups. In the process of incorporation into the receiving society, *their* culture has evidently failed to support them.

A recent theoretical framework, developed especially to make sense of the differing paths and outcomes in the incorporation processes of second-generation migrants, is the *segmented assimilation theory* (Portes 1995, Portes and Zhou 1993). This approach calls attention both to societal factors such as discrimination and the hourglass economy and to more group-specific factors such as a proliferation of transnational activities and the mechanisms of social control within migrant communities. The way in which societal and group-specific factors interact may influence, among other things, the potential for the emergence of an *adversarial frame of mind* among migrant children raised in the host society (Portes 1997). Some proponents of the segmented assimilation theory claim that their approach diverges from other models by assuming that the specific determinants by themselves are of minimal importance. They emphasize instead the *interrelation* between contextual determinants and the determinants 'intrinsic' to the migrant group (Zhou 1997). If we try to analyse this interrelation more concretely within specific cases, however, we run into problems on how to conceptualize such determinants. The question arises, for instance, as to whether contextual determinants should always be understood as 'structure' and group determinants as 'culture' (that is, as frames of mind, orientations and other ideational constructs).

This study focuses on the interaction between individual-level, group-level and societal factors, and on some of the conceptual problems that come with this type of analysis. It contains an explicit comparison, an analysis of the differences in school success between (and to a lesser degree within) two specific groups of 'Mediterranean' migrants in the Netherlands. The analysis is based on largely qualitative research involving the children of Turkish migrants and the children of Iberian (Portuguese and Spanish) migrants. The research, conducted from 1989 to 1993, uncovered marked differences between these two groups in terms of the overall school performance of their offspring (Lindo and Pennings 1992). Portuguese and Spanish youth turned out to be quite successful in education, while most of their Turkish peers performed rather poorly.² In this type of comparative analyses, any divergence in school performance is usually brought into connection with one or more conspicuous differences in the social and cultural resources the children's families have at their disposal, their migration histories, or the social positions they occupy in the receiving country.

Let us now have a look at some of these factors, which can be sought at individual, group and societal levels. We can identify both differences and similarities between the two groups.

Migration and incorporation

Both Turkish and Iberian immigrants belonged to the category of 'guest workers' (*gastarbeiders*) from Mediterranean countries who, in the booming economy of the 1960s and 1970s, found employment in unskilled jobs in heavy industry (metals and textiles) which the Dutch labour force was no longer willing to perform. Both the Iberian and Turkish labour migrants began arriving in the Netherlands in the second half of the 1960s. Only males, mainly aged 20 to 30, migrated in that period. Until the 1970s, most Iberian and Turkish migrants used similar channels to get to the Netherlands: they came on employment contracts, or otherwise as 'tourists', sometimes on the invitation of a relative or friend already in the host country.

Another similarity was that neither group came to the Netherlands with the intention of staying and building a future there. The idea of staying only temporarily, to earn the wherewithal for a better future back home within a relatively short time, was not relinquished when the migrants later decided to send for their families. The fact that their children would grow up and take root in Dutch society was a consequence of this family reunification that had scarcely been thought through initially. Contrary to the facts, the image of the Mediterranean immigrant as an 'international commuter' persisted for a long time in Dutch society – partly because the migrants themselves saw no cause to dispute it. Until the late 1970s, government policy was founded on that assumption too. Only later did it become clear that, whatever the intentions of the first generation, Mediterranean migrants and their families were there to stay. Any policy changes by the authorities continued to approach the different Mediterranean groups in more or less the same fashion.

On arrival, the Iberian and Turkish migrants – that is, the males who came first – exhibited only minor differences in education and vocational skills, as shown in Table 10.1. In the *female* first generations, by contrast, the differences in educational profile between the Iberians and the Turks were far more pronounced. Spanish and Portuguese women of the first generation had enjoyed significantly more education in their home country than Turkish women. While the differential between men and women in the Iberian group was marginal, a wide gap existed between the Turkish men and women. As I will emphasize later, this contrast is crucial to understanding the differences in educational behaviour between the two groups of children.

The survey data also reveals other dissimilarities between the two groups. I will note the most important ones here. First of all, there is a difference in

Table 10.1 Educational levels of Turkish and Iberian first-generation migrants upon arrival in the Netherlands, and of the Dutch native population in the comparable age category, in percentages

	Turkish		Iberian		Dutch	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
no or unfinished						
primary school	17	60	28	29	0	0
primary school	74	40	57	60	26	37
junior vocational						
or general						
secondary school	6	0	13	9	30	36
senior vocational						
or general						
secondary school	3	0	1	2	23	19
higher professional/						
university education	0	0	1	0	22	7
total (= 100%)	391	244	231	216	305	309

*The figures on the Iberian first generation were collected in the 1989 study (Lindo and Pennings 1992), and they apply to the parents of the questioned youth. Since the qualitative research among the Turkish youth was not accompanied by a survey as in the Iberian group, quantitative data on the Turkish first generation have been drawn from the 1988 survey Social Position and Use of Provisions by ISEO, Erasmus University, which distinguished a similar age category of Turkish first-generation migrants. The data on the native Dutch population have been taken from the same survey (Ankersmit *et al.* 1989: 141; Lindo and Pennings 1992: 11–15).

the scale and duration of the migration process. The comparatively meagre school results of Turkish youth in the Netherlands can partly be accounted for by the ongoing immigration from Turkey. The Turkish population in the Netherlands is much larger than the Portuguese and Spanish ones. Whereas Iberian immigration came to a halt in the 1970s, and the communities that remained grew little after that point, the Turkish group continued to grow exponentially well into the 1990s as a result of family reunification and (partly illegal) chain migration. Most Portuguese and Spanish immigrants had long been reunited with their families by that time.

In line with this demographic trend, a larger proportion of Turkish young people than Iberian ones were having to break off their education in their homeland to start a school career in the Netherlands at a relatively late age and without any command of the Dutch language. Obviously this was detrimental to their educational performance. Even if we leave them aside, though, the evidence shows that the Turkish children who begin their school careers in the Netherlands reach only a marginally better position than the 'in-between generation'. Their attainment is hence significantly lower than that of their Portuguese and Spanish peers as shown in

Table 10.2 (Lindo 1996: 145). In the 1970s and 1980s, major shifts in the Dutch economy rendered many labour migrants jobless. Although the first-generation Turks, Spaniards and Portuguese had occupied similar types of jobs in the beginning, the Turkish were harder hit by the closures of traditional industries and they had more difficulties in recovering from unemployment. The reason is not entirely clear. One difference may be that Iberian first-generation migrants had more success in obtaining Dutch training certificates than their Turkish coworkers. Although those who secured such qualifications saw their job levels increase only marginally, this may have just shielded them from unemployment (Lindo and Pennings 1992: 29–31).

Even so, the educational underachievement of Turkish young people cannot be explained by the unemployment of their fathers. The survey data indicate that children in Turkish families dependent on benefit have an educational profile practically identical to that of their Turkish peers whose fathers have jobs (Lindo 1996: 132). By the same token, the children of Iberian fathers with Dutch training certificates do no better at school

Table 10.2 Educational level attained by Turkish and Iberian migrants' children who finished their education in the Netherlands, in percentages, 1989 and 1991

	Turkish						Iberian		
	Older than 6			6 or Younger					
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
no education or primary school	54	70	62	43	55	49	18	19	19
junior vocational or general									
secondary school	34	22	28	39	36	38	48	35	42
senior vocational or general									
secondary school	10	9	9	18	9	13	39	35	33
higher									
professional/university education	1	0	1	0	0	0	3	10	7
total (= 100%)	174	199	373	61	56	117	60	62	122

Notes: Turkish children are distinguished into two categories based on their age of arrival in the Netherlands: those who presumably began their education in the Netherlands ('6 or younger') and those who had presumably started school in Turkey ('older than 6'). The Iberian figures are not broken down by age of arrival; only 18 per cent of the Iberian sample arrived after age 6, compared to 76 per cent of the Turkish sample.

Source: Roelandt *et al.* 1992.

than those whose fathers had no Dutch qualifications (Lindo and Pennings 1992: 29–31).

Any variable impact of (intended or unintended) racism and discrimination on the social position of Iberian or Turkish migrant families is difficult to assess. At the bottom of the labour market, where competition among poorly educated youths for the few decent jobs is especially fierce, it is possible that Turkish young people, more than their Iberian peers, suffer from negative stereotyping in Dutch society. But we are dealing here with education. Research into how the expectations and behaviour of teaching staff may affect the educational careers of migrant children (the large majority of whom are Moroccan or Turkish) has produced contradictory findings (Tesser and van Praag 1995; Tesser and Veenman 1997). There is little conclusive evidence that racism in the school context accounts for differences in achievement between minority groups, either in the Netherlands or in any other Western European country (Fase 1994).

Not all schools are of the same quality, of course, and the presumed negative effects of high concentrations of minority pupils in schools often receive particular notice. Although no conclusions can be drawn from survey material, my qualitative research suggests that a higher proportion of Turkish children than Iberian ones are enrolled in so-called 'black schools', schools with large percentages or even a majority of migrant children. However, research on whether such schools affect educational attainment is not conclusive (Tesser and van Praag 1995: 223–301). The question remains as to why Portuguese and Spanish children avoid 'black schools' more than Turkish children do. Parents and children in the Netherlands are basically free to choose between schools. There are few financial impediments, nor do formal restrictions exist as to the location of the school. Iberian children, however, do seem better able to overcome social and structural obstacles to attending 'whiter' schools, such as distance from home or inadequate family knowledge about the Dutch education system. I shall address this and other questions in my analysis below, when I take a closer look at the behavioural patterns in the families and communities in question.

In my introduction I have noted that various factors at the level of the individual, the group and the host society can affect the social mobility of immigrant groups. Such factors may prove to have some bearing on the educational opportunities of Iberian and Turkish youth in the Netherlands. They may also account for some of the differences in their educational profiles. Yet if we make an overall comparison of the Iberian and Turkish first generations on the basis of their socioeconomic backgrounds and the extent of their incorporation into the Dutch economy, we find more similarities than differences. From a distance there are many resemblances in terms of the education and skills that the family heads brought from their country of origin, in their initial migration histories, and in the positions

they were allocated in the Dutch economy. It also seems unlikely that the current enormous gap in educational attainment between Iberian and Turkish children can be explained by other allocation processes in the host society, such as racism or school environment.³

Of course there are differences between the two groups as well, and small differences may add up to a greater divergence in the next generation (Zhou 1997). One question I address in this chapter is how to interpret such relatively small differences (such as the differential education levels of the first-generation women) in ways that can help us understand the wide educational divergence of the second generation.

The qualitative research

The analysis below is based on a qualitative study of children from 94 Portuguese, Spanish and Turkish migrant families in the Netherlands, conducted between 1990 and 1993.⁴ During the children's school careers, the family heads had all been employed in the same sector and at the same level (most had cleaning jobs in the transport sector). Because I wanted my informants to be able to look back on a major part of their educational career, I chose adolescents and young adults aged 16 to 27. One should bear in mind that some of the school careers had been completed several years earlier (with varying degrees of success).

Viewed from a microlevel perspective, the similarities between the groups predominate at first glance. Both Iberian and Turkish parents were reported to have stressed the importance of education for their children, and their manifesto was clearly heartfelt: 'My children have to go to school. Otherwise they will end up doing the same kind of job I do.' Or, 'I say to them, "Look at me. Do you want to clean toilets later too?" But they have to decide for themselves!' The children confirmed the sincerity of these good intentions, but also pointed to the parents' ignorance in matters of education. This was another similarity between Iberian and Turkish parents: they were constantly aware of their ignorance, a condition that made it difficult for them to formulate more specific aspirations for their children's careers. Notwithstanding their generally positive attitude, their ignorance fostered a certain ambivalence towards Dutch education. Because of the parents' lack of knowledge of Dutch education (and of Dutch society in general), in some respects the children were delegated responsibility for their own future at a relatively early age.

The diverging educational careers of Iberian and Turkish migrants' children did not correspond to positive versus negative educational attitudes. Apart from the general pronouncements on the importance of education heard in both groups, I could detect no particular group-level 'folk theory of success' among the families of the relatively successful Portuguese and Spanish children, analogous to that recorded by Gibson (1987) in the folk

sayings of Californian Sikhs that stress the value of formal education. Nor could I identify any overt parental educational strategies (Bhachu 1985; Ogbu 1987). No overt or covert pressure was exercised on children to achieve in school, as has been reported in studies on social mobility patterns in Asian families (see, for example, Pieke 1989). As mentioned above, both the Turkish and the Iberian immigrants to the Netherlands were reluctant settlers and they certainly did not go there with their children's educational opportunities in mind.

Behavioural patterns in families

Any causal analysis of the differential educational profiles of migrant children should also look at patterns of behaviour in areas not directly related to education. These may have unintended effects on the children's school performance. Such interaction patterns can be sought both in the relations *within* families and in the relations *between* those families and their ethnic communities. Is it meaningful, for a deeper understanding of the observed divergence in school careers, to designate such behavioural patterns as 'culture'? I will address this question in the final section of this chapter. At this point I will briefly introduce the behavioural patterns I have in mind.⁵

In Turkish, more than in Iberian families, implicit and explicit rules of behaviour seem to operate which act as impediments to a successful school career. Families in both groups may be classified under the general category of 'command households' (du Bois-Reymond 1992). In this household type, the mother mediates between her children and her husband, an authoritarian father. Portuguese and Spanish mothers, however, appear more successful in conveying their children's aspirations to their husbands and more adept at supporting their children at key junctures in their school careers. In other words, they occupy a more strategic position in this respect than the Turkish mothers do. More often than not, the Iberian mothers' interest is first aroused *after* one of their children turns out to do well in school. They then begin following their child's educational accomplishments more keenly. Mothers show pride in their children's school success in a general and emotional way, while fathers observe it more from a distance, evaluating the children's achievements in terms of objectives. While they often react positively to good results, they may question the benefits of schooling when their child is doing poorly, accentuating the negative aspects of long school careers. Such behaviour betrays the absence of any 'traditional' orientation to an educational career. The crux simply appears to be that the role of the mother in the Iberian families, and her function as a link to the world outside the ethnic group, give her more latitude for action than is generally granted to Turkish mothers. I found Iberian mothers to be more likely to carry on contacts with people like Dutch neighbours and coworkers. Such acquaintances furnish them at an

early stage with basic information about the Dutch educational system. This better equips the Iberian mothers to defend their children's interests vis-à-vis their husbands, and to support their children when they ask for things to facilitate their integration into the school environment (acceptable clothing, permission to take part in social events, money for school outings, books, even computers). Through their contacts in the outside world, Iberian mothers are also in a position to get basic advice about the quality of different schools. They can then act as a sounding board for their children in decisions affecting their educational careers. This may partly explain why Iberian pupils more often go to predominantly ethnic Dutch schools.⁶

Turkish mothers have a less influential position, especially in matters outside the home. This is reflected in quantitative data, that show that they are significantly less likely than Iberian mothers to have finished primary school, and that their participation in employment is very low indeed. That of the Iberian mothers is above the national average (Lindo and Pennings 1992: 11–23). A matter in which Turkish mothers do have an important say is the age of marriage and the choice of their children's marriage partners. Women and girls are thought to be safer if they stay at home and do not mingle too much in the outside world. The younger Turkish girls get married, the greater the chance they will still be virgins. Boys that get married are at less risk of going off the rails than unmarried schoolgoers. Many of my respondents were hence subjected to strong social pressure to marry before they turned 18. In the eyes of the Turkish parents, marriage was the best way to safeguard their children from the dangers of adolescence in Dutch society. But adolescence is also the period in which young people are in school, and as I have argued elsewhere (Lindo 1996: 50–8), the preoccupation with early marriage seriously interferes with the school careers of Turkish adolescents.

For boys, marriage does not mean deliverance from parental authority. They continue to be dependent on the head of the family, even after they have children of their own, and they are expected to contribute to the income of the enlarged family household. In many cases they transfer their income to the household head (their father) and are dependent on him for regular allowances and gifts. This can keep them from realizing their aspirations (Lindo 1996). With few exceptions, parents do not look positively on any plans their sons might have to proceed with daytime education after marriage.

A daughter is expected to wait until a candidate presents himself (or is presented by his family) to her parents. The parents then decide whether the suitor is acceptable; if so, the daughter has little leeway to withstand their pressure to accept. Girls sometimes have their own reasons for marrying early. In theory, they are then subordinated to their spouse's family, but in practice many men who marry migrants' daughters come over from

Turkey to start a household in the Netherlands, and thus have no immediate kin in the vicinity. Several Turkish girls told me that the prospect of having a relatively independent household without much meddling from in-laws was a comparatively attractive one. The new family would likely settle near the girl's parents and may count on help from them. At the same time, as a married woman she anticipates having a more independent position in her family of origin than she did as an unwed daughter. Some girls are so eager to escape from a situation of dependence and confinement that they are prepared to accept a complete stranger, even if his views on women's freedom of action are unknown. In any ambition to gain more independence from their parents, a decision to go for more schooling is ultimately seen by many Turkish young people as a high-risk investment whose yields are too uncertain and too distant. In the vast majority of cases in my research, marriage means the end of a school career, for girls and boys alike.

As in Turkish families, marriage in Portuguese and Spanish families is seen by both parents and children as the most important event in the life cycle. But the children themselves choose when to get married and marriage signifies full independence from their parents. In their behaviour towards their children, Iberian parents show a continual awareness of that future independence. In Turkish families, by contrast, the parents' goals are taken for granted even after the children are married. In Iberian families, parents are likely to climb down after a conflict with one of their children, fearing lasting estrangement. Turkish adolescents are the ones who conform to their parents' agenda, not because they agree with the content of the underlying norms, but out of fear that pressure from the migrant community will compel their parents to impose severe sanctions. The situation might lead to a total break with their parents, and for most of them that is an unbearable, even unimaginable prospect.

Community and migrant networks

These patterned differences in expectations and behaviour within families broadly coincide with group boundaries. On closer inspection, though, interesting differences emerge between different families within the ethnic groups, while some patterns also overlap group boundaries. Among the Turkish families I studied, some parents manifested a more lenient attitude towards the dangers their children might encounter in Dutch society, and in this respect they showed more resemblance to the Iberian families. Without exception, these Turkish families were 'atypical' for their ethnic group in one other way: they lived largely *outside* networks of family and covillagers. This provides a clue to a variable that could be crucial to understanding the *overall* differences in patterned behaviour (and hence in school attainment) between the Turkish and Iberian populations. The networks

that Turkish and Iberian migrant families participate in are different in character. Turkish networks exercise effective social control to uphold the norms from their villages of origin. Although networks of Iberian migrants also apply social control, it is far less rigid. Such differences can be traced to differences in the migration histories of the two groups.

As I have observed, Turkish immigration to the Netherlands, far more than that from the Iberian peninsula, has been characterized by a steady influx of migrants. The fact that Turkey's economic development has lagged behind that of other European emigration countries is in large part responsible for this ongoing migration. This chain migration, however, is not entirely due to macrostructural forces. Behaviours inherent in the kinship system and the household cycle in the communities of origin have also played a key structuring role in the Turkish migration pattern. Migration is often made possible by the migrant's family of orientation. Those who stay behind in Turkey have, both in their own view and in that of their migrant relatives, a legitimate stake in the undertaking (Engelbrektsen 1978; Schiffauer 1991).

One consequence of this migration pattern is that Turkish families have not built their communities in the Netherlands from scratch, but often had ready-established connections upon arrival (Böcker 1994; Engelbrektsen 1978). A large number of tightly knit communities of former covillagers (or migrants from clusters of neighbouring villages) have come into being. Many such communities also have strong ties to communities elsewhere in the Netherlands and Western Europe. Most importantly, they still maintain ties with their villages and regions of origin in Turkey. Membership in these communities is ascribed and it is very difficult to withdraw oneself or one's family from them. The nature of the relationship between family and community makes social control very effective indeed. Social control is the prime mechanism through which the behavioural patterns described above are consolidated. Because the communities of origin are so tightly linked to the local migrant communities, transgressions of norms by members of migrant families are immediately transmitted 'back home'. Sanctions for noncompliance with group norms can be harsh: a family's reputation can be destroyed, and this can have devastating social and economic consequences. Children normally go along with their parents' wishes not so much because they agree, but for fear of repercussions, and because they are educated to understand their parents' situation.

This constant surveillance by group members, and the virtual impossibility of evading the watchful eyes of the community, is accompanied by almost inescapable claims of reciprocity. Turkish immigrants often feel obliged to take up related newcomers and to allow their kindred in Turkey to share in the profits of migration. Many heads of family are absorbed by the question of how to fulfil all sorts of obligations towards kin. Parents expect their children to help in meeting such obligations, and in such

situations the children's own behaviour and ambitions can readily be interpreted as running counter to family interests. Community scrutiny also extends to the children's marriage: partners, age of marriage, and especially the abundance of the wedding and the gifts are all subject to evaluation, which in turn may enhance a family's prestige or damage its reputation. Many fathers perceive all such obligations as problematic, and that is recognized by their children. Everything is subordinated to the maintenance of norms and to the avoidance of loss of face.

In contrast to the Turkish population, Portuguese and Spanish families in the Netherlands are not grouped into relatively exclusive communities linked to regions and villages of origin. In part this derives from the scale and the genesis of the Iberian communities. The Spanish and Portuguese populations as a whole are far smaller than the Turkish population. Although the Portuguese, concentrated in tightly knit local communities in cities in the west of the country, display greater social cohesion than the Spanish, such communities are still too small and too diverse in origin to contain viable region- or village-based subsections. The members come from many parts of their home country. Chain migration has played no major role. Families formerly unknown to one another began organizing for various purposes, not in the least because there was a strongly felt need for a structural context for teaching the children Portuguese. This emergent community first experienced processes of fission and fusion as a result of political developments in Portugal. Region- and village-based ties never developed to the point where they dominated the community. This is why mechanisms of social control are less well developed among the Portuguese than among the Turks in the Netherlands. Sanctions such as loss of reputation in the local migrant community are unlikely to have repercussions in the communities of origin. The same applies to Spanish families. Iberian parents can thus deal more leniently with the aspirations of their children and the problems they encounter in Dutch society. Although young people in the Portuguese community especially are encouraged to mix with compatriots, friendships with Dutch peers (or age mates from other ethnic groups) are not discouraged. The personal networks of the Turkish youth are much more restricted. For girls, the limited opportunities to develop contacts outside their parents' social circle have been well documented (Rișvanoğlu *et al.* 1986; de Vries 1987). Although boys enjoy more freedom than their sisters, what struck me in my research was that only a few of them had developed stable friendships, even in their own surroundings, or were participating in peer groups that they valued for themselves. Parents welcome such relations for their children only if they are with people from their own region-based network. They are distrustful of friendships their children develop with Turkish peers from outside their moral community. As these local networks are often very limited in size, many young people have trouble finding peers to be friends within the areas where they live.⁷ The

exclusiveness of Turkish region- and village-based networks, and the approach taken there to ethnic difference, also limit the members' possibilities of developing affective relationships with Dutch people. The scarcity of durable contacts with Dutch society, and the lack of diversity in children's contacts with their Turkish school-age peers, results in a relative paucity of examples and role models for school behaviour.

The lack of positive, enduring relationships with people outside the Turkish community also makes it harder to put experiences with discrimination into perspective. Revealingly, both the Iberian and the Turkish young people I encountered who had cherished contacts, even one or two, with Dutch persons, were all able to take extremely insulting confrontations with racism and discrimination in their stride. Unlike the migrant young people who lacked such meaningful external relationships, they did not let such incidents affect their attitude towards Dutch society at large, nor their motivation to continue their schooling or their search for a good job (for an extended discussion, see Lindo 1996: 79–84).

Conclusion: does the concept of culture matter?

In a search for the influences that underlie behavioural patterns, the question of how to conceptualize such influences inevitably arises. It is obviously no solution just to call them 'culture' and leave it at that. Culture can be a hazardous tool in sociological analysis. In using culture as a guiding concept, one risks glossing over the ambiguities and variations that exist inside the group, as well as behavioural patterns that transcend the (not-so-neatly demarcated) boundaries. A second, more serious danger is reification. Cultural specificity is not an explanation; it *demand*s explanation. The cultural factor is not autonomous. To ascribe something to the domain of culture – for instance, to label certain identified behavioural patterns as traditions, attitudes or orientations carried across from the country of origin – can never be an explanation in itself. If processes and characteristics have been identified in the direct social environments of migrant young people which are seen as interfering with their educational careers, an observation such as 'culture plays a role' marks the beginning of the analysis rather than the conclusion. As I have used the culture concept here, it is in the first place an indicator to help us recognize behavioural patterns that seem specific to one group or another. The real work of interpreting and explaining their specificity starts from there. The approach should be both situational and diachronic.

The differences in behavioural patterns observed between the migrant communities studied here can definitely be linked to differences in kinship in the communities of origin. Let me take the differences in the position of the wife and mother as an example. In Spain and Portugal, relations with kin outside the nuclear family are bilateral and are relatively insignificant

in terms of obligations. The wife is closely involved in virtually all important decisions, also concerning matters outside the home. Submission to the husband's will is in many ways ritualistic (Collier 1997; Cutileiro 1971), and in the community of origin it is more highly emphasized in the public sphere, in the presence of non-kindred significant others, than inside the home. The position of Iberian mothers tends to gain strength in the immigration country, because almost all of them contribute to the family income. At the same time, the more ritualistic aspects of the subordination of wife to husband, as emphasized in the communities of origin, tend to lose their function, given the more relaxed social control in the immigration country.

The position of women in the patrilineal kinship system that functions in Turkish villages is far weaker. Within the home, they are not only dominated by their husband, but they are often subordinated to other in-laws too (see, for example, Delaney 1991). Their position tends to weaken further after migration as a consequence of the strong social control within the region-based migrant networks. Such control is bolstered by the dominant view in these networks that the temptations of Dutch society form a threat to a family's reputation. The same may be said of the pressure put on Turkish migrants' children to marry during adolescence. This custom from the communities of origin is maintained, and even reinforced, by the parents' fear of 'Dutchification' of the children.

The explanatory emphasis in this contribution has lain on fairly recent historical forces of migration and community formation. If we refer to the described group-specific behavioural patterns as culture, then this culture is transmitted by these historical forces in differential ways. In other words, in situations where the social cohesion of the migrant community is stronger and the ties back to the community of origin are better maintained, behavioural patterns originating in the latter communities tend to establish themselves in migrant families more firmly than in situations where the cohesion and home-country ties are less strong. Whether we call it culture or not, such a behavioural pattern should be viewed as a set of relations with a specifiable history, and not as an indigenous characteristic of the people involved. The behaviour of the Turkish migrants, in particular, is shaped and directed by processes of migration and community formation. Obviously these processes are themselves a partial product of group-specific behaviours in the communities of origin. They are not generated with the approval of all the actors; in fact, individuals have little influence on them. Most Turks did not make a conscious decision to participate in the local migrant community. They left Turkey under the auspices of kinship, and in the Netherlands they have remained part of the same network of kinspeople and covillagers. In the case of the Iberian migrants, the support of kin in the migration process was of less consequence than it was for most Turks. Yet there are also Turkish families with more individualistic migration histories,

and their direct social environments appear to be more integrated into Dutch society. They are far less extensively, if at all, incorporated into networks of family and covillagers. If we consider behavioural patterns such as these in the wider perspective of the historical relationship between the migrant group and the community of origin, that can help us explain behavioural differences both between and within groups.

Notwithstanding the importance of this wider historical viewpoint, processes like these should at the same time be analysed at the level of the actors and their direct environment. Considered this way, the question of whether group-specific interaction processes should be understood in terms of ideational constructs or of structural impediments and possibilities is inappropriate. From the standpoint of the actors studied here, these two dimensions cannot be considered in isolation from one another. The 'structural' relations of Turkish region-based networks are indescribable without their 'cultural' content in terms of reciprocity, ethnicity and social control (to give but a few examples). And the converse is equally true. As Goody (1992: 10) has argued, people

act and interact in ways that may allow one to discern beliefs, symbols and values, but these are intrinsic to their interaction; social action must include such a dimension and would be meaningless without it (...). Any more separable notion of a 'framework' emerges from the analytic perception of the observer rather than from the action perspective of the actor.⁸

The behavioural patterns which have been shown in this study to exert influence on educational attainment do not combine to produce a single unified attitude, either positive or negative, with respect to Dutch education or the benefits of learning in general. This may seem to be stating the obvious. After all, attitudes or orientations are never absolute, but always contain relative values and priorities. In the orientation of parents, education has its place in a ranking order of priorities, which is revealed in the choices they make at various moments, in various situations. My point here is that this orientation appears to be strongly bound up with and influenced by the context. For instance, if Turkish migrant families are not part of region-based networks, parents exert less pressure on their children to get married in adolescence. By implication, then, the negative orientation towards education – expressed in the priority other parents might give to marriage at the expense of school – is being imposed by the community.

A further point is that the social careers of Turkish young adults are almost never subject to just one of the described interaction patterns. It is the relative and combined impact of a number of these patterns that makes Turkish adolescents decide to abandon their educational career. From the children's perspective, it would not be reasonable to interpret the

considerations they make in such situations as a positive or negative educational orientation or strategy. And the same applies to their parents. From the point of view of individual parents, phenomena such as reciprocal obligations and social control are, at least in part, contextual effects that can influence their decisions in spite of themselves.

In the cases examined here, then, any assumption that Iberians and Turks hold contrasting attitudes towards education would not do justice to the observed interaction within the families and communities under study. Concepts like 'orientation' and 'attitude' can be misleading, because they imply that 'culture' is imprinted in the individual. Nonetheless, one can say that ambivalence towards education, which can be observed in both groups, is greater in the case of the Turkish parents. But this is the consequence of real dilemmas that parents encounter through their participation in village- and region-based networks. They are more likely than Iberian migrants to find themselves in situations where they have to set priorities that interfere with their children's education.

Are we to conclude that culture plays little or no role in the educational divergence between the groups studied? That depends on what we understand by culture. If we reserve the concept for the ideational domain only, it does not have much explanatory value. But culture cannot be explained away by 'class' or 'social position' either. It is best to view culture as a concept that makes us aware of the historical singularity of the interaction patterns we observe within the direct social environments of individuals. Ethnic groups are products of distinct histories, as Perlmann (1988) has put it. We should not view ideational and structural domains as mutually exclusive explanatory categories. People are not just victims or passive receptors of social, economic or other 'contextual' mechanisms, nor are they bearers of cultural traits or traditions that programme them to behave in predetermined ways. They are themselves agents in society, giving form to the social context they are part of, and moulding 'inherited' behavioural patterns (usually called 'culture') in the process. Understood in this way, culture does make a difference in the educational careers of Turkish and Iberian migrants' children.

Notes

1. See, for instance, Caplan *et al.* 1989, Gibson 1989, Gibson and Bhachu 1988, Modood 1991.
2. The data that uncovered the success of the Iberian school leavers were collected in 1989 in a small quantitative study (Lindo and Pennings 1992) among children of southern European migrants (Portuguese, Spanish and Yugoslav). A total of 131 Portuguese and 132 Spanish young people were questioned on topics that included the social position and migration history of their parents. The findings of that study, taken together with those of other research in which southern

- Europeans were represented as one category alongside other migrant groups (see, for example, van Langen and Jungbluth 1990), and with more 'circumstantial' statistical evidence relating to secondary school pupils, led the Dutch government in 1994 to conclude that southern European migrants have been successfully integrated into Dutch society. The data on the Turkish school leavers were collected in the 1991 migrant survey Social Position and Use of Provisions conducted by the ISEO of Erasmus University Rotterdam (see Table 10.2).
3. The allocating power of intended and unintended discrimination in the educational environment can be strongly influenced by the attitude the victim takes towards such occurrences. I will come back to this later on.
 4. With the children semi-structured interviews were held, most of them were interviewed more than once. The interviews were tape-recorded. Also, with most of the fathers and about half of the mothers conversations were held.
 5. These behavioural patterns are analysed more extensively in Lindo 1994, 1995, 1996 and 1997.
 6. Another reason is that southern European families are more likely than Turkish families to have moved outside areas with large migrant populations (Tesser and van Praag 1995).
 7. As a rule, networks of Turkish parents are multilocal, and they often extend not only back to the communities of origin but also to various cities in the Netherlands and other European countries that host covillagers and kinspeople. Children do develop warm friendships with cousins in other places, but those friendships can only be pursued at distant intervals.
 8. See also Foner 1997.
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