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### Soulmates: Reinvention of ethnic identification among higher educated second generation Moroccan and Turkish Dutch

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# 3. Research design.

## Mixing Methods

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### *How was the study conducted?*

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*How you collect data affects which phenomena you will see, how, where, and when you will view them, and what sense you will make of them.* (Charmaz 2006: 15, italics in original)

Clearly, for a researcher, is not only important to choose methods that match the purpose of your research, but also to carefully explain your methodological approach so the reader can follow how you come to draw certain conclusions. This is what this chapter is about: explaining how I researched the identifications of second generation Moroccan and Turkish Dutch and showing the steps that brought me to the claims I make in this book.

I first discuss the overall approach (3.1). What methods did I use and how did I combine them? Why do I use a mixed methods design, and what are the (epistemological and ontological) challenges in doing so? Then, I discuss the two methods in separate sections. First, I describe the quantitative data collection (3.2) and then I explain my qualitative approach (3.3). As the latter is less structured than the quantitative approach, the descriptions of the qualitative data collection, analysis and reporting are more detailed. The chapter concludes with a summarizing section (3.4).

### **3.1 A mixed methods research design**

A research design is strongly connected to the purpose of the research. Different questions require different methodological approaches. If, for example, we want to compare education levels of various segments of the Dutch population in order to investigate whether ethnicity and gender influence education levels, we would probably choose a structured method that allows for the collection of large amounts of data. If we want to understand why and how gender influences one's educational trajectory, we might choose a less structured method to freely explore the complexities of a phenomenon and variations in experiences, which would only allow for data collection from a limited number of cases. Different methodological approaches fit different research aims.

This does not mean that a single research question cannot be answered by the use of various approaches. A research question might be researched from various angles or can be composed of sub-questions that can best be studied with diverse methods. When a design combines aspects of both quantitative and qualitative traditions, the study is called a 'mixed methods study'. When choosing a mixed methods study, obviously, one of the main considerations is whether a mixed methods approach will provide answers to the research questions. Other considerations are the resources available and the skills of the researcher. The general idea behind combining aspects from qualitative and quantitative research traditions in the same study is that these traditions have different characteristics and therefore have different strengths and weaknesses (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004).

### **Two incommensurable approaches?**

Combining methods from both traditions, however, is not straightforward. Some scholars regard the two research traditions as incompatible because they are rooted in different paradigms and are associated with different ontological and epistemological positions (see Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004; Bryman 2008: chapter 25; Niglas 2010). Quantitative methods are seen as inherently connected with an objectivist ontological and positivist epistemological position<sup>1</sup> and with a deductive approach, while qualitative methods are associated with a constructivist and interpretive position and an inductive approach. In other words, quantitative methods are generally used to describe or explain a social reality that is imagined to objectively exist outside individuals. Related to such a perspective is the positivist view that objective knowledge can be obtained through the gathering of facts (Bryman 2001: 12). Research participants are seen as 'vessels of answers' about objective facts that are 'out there', which can be disclosed by truthful, value free, and accurate communication (Holstein and Gubrium 1995). Positivist methodological approaches are modeled on the natural sciences and are characterized by standardization in order to minimize the influences of the interview context and the researcher, which are seen as 'distorting' or 'contaminating' the findings (Holstein and Gubrium 1995: 8; Fontana and Frey 2005; Silverman 2006). The interpretivist epistemology is found at the other end and is associated with qualitative methods and the qualitative research tradition (Bryman 2001). Interpretivism departs from a constructivist view, in which the world is seen as continuously re-created by individuals and focuses on the ways in which individuals interpret the world. A consequence of the constructivist perspective is that the findings obtained through an interview are regarded to be (partly) the result of the interview itself, because what is said and how it is said is the result of the specific interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee. This epistemological perspective seems to imply that data produced through an interview does not say anything

beyond the interview itself (Silverman 2006). I will further reflect on this theme in section 3.3 when I discuss the qualitative part of my study.

Although these ‘purist’ descriptions of what is seen as the quantitative and the qualitative research traditions suggest that quantitative and qualitative approaches are incompatible, I agree with those who argue that the relation between methods and these polarized paradigms is not as deterministic as the ‘purists’ suggest (Bryman 2001; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004; Niglas 2010). Firstly, using a structured survey is not necessarily based on an objectivist and positivist perspective, nor do unstructured observations always reflect a constructivist and interpretivist stance. In fact, before structured survey research came to dominate sociological empirical approaches after the Second World War, qualitative and quantitative approaches were often used in tandem in the same study (Fontana and Frey 2005). Secondly, data-analysis of qualitative data can also be approached in more structured ways, and can even involve counting the occurrence of certain words or themes. At the same time, data-analysis of quantitative data can very well be approached in more explorative ways, searching for meaning instead of merely confirming or falsifying a predefined hypothesis (Russell Bernard 2011: 337); the analysis in Chapter 5 forms an example. Structured and unstructured approaches can be mixed in various stages of the research, and apparently, structured data collection does not preclude less structured analyses and vice versa. Thirdly, the idea that quantitative methods strictly rely on numbers and statistical methods and qualitative methods only on words and interpretative methods is too simplistic. Structured surveys are based on words and language too, and the particular phrasings of survey questions and answers strongly affect the validity of the research. Furthermore, surveys sometimes contain open-ended questions. On the other hand, descriptions of findings from interpretivist, qualitative analyses, can contain ‘quasi-quantitative’ elements such as ‘many’, ‘often’ or ‘some’, which are used to (implicitly) indicate the significance of a result (Bryman 2001: 439). Apparently, both the connection between method and paradigm and the rigid distinction between quantitative and qualitative methods are somewhat overstated. My study illustrates these points by showing that the statistical use of survey data can also be used in a more explorative and interpretative way, and can contribute to deconstruction (or ‘de-essentialization’) of concepts such as identity and culture.

Although the distinction between qualitative and quantitative methods is less rigid than often presented, methods that are more or less structured have divergent characteristics, which make them connect with different research goals (see for example Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004). More structured approaches allow for studying larger numbers of subjects, which makes these methods suitable for generalizations to whole populations. At the same time, the collected data is limited to variables that are pre-defined by the researcher and to the

researcher's formulation of the questions and answers. This entails the risk of overlooking relevant parts of the phenomena studied and makes structured approaches generally more suitable to test clearly defined hypotheses rather than to generate new ones. The standardization of procedures for data collection and analytical instruments makes reporting on structured approaches relatively straightforward. In less-structured approaches, observations are not structured by such pre-defined templates. Such approaches entail the analysis of large amounts of less-structured data for a relatively small amount of subjects. This enables exploration of novel, complex, dynamic and interpretative processes, but limits the scope of broader predictions. The less-structured nature and the absence of detailed protocols make these approaches more complex to explain and justify. Another effect is that these approaches become more dependent on the individual researcher, which I believe increases the need for a thorough explanation and justification of the methodological approach. These divergent characteristics make that more and less structured approaches have complementary value.

Contributing to the increasing body of studies with a mixed methods design (see for example Niglas 2009; Creswell and Plano Clark 2011), my study presents another illustration of how qualitative and quantitative methods can be combined. In this chapter on the methodological approach, I describe the research design, clarifying which data I used for which explorations and explaining the added value of combining the two datasets. I also describe the various analyses and the underlying perspectives.

### **The mixed methods design of this study**

Combining two approaches does not automatically lead to a good research design. It is important to consider what is gained by combining different methods, the relationship between them, and how the design suits the purpose of the research (Niglas 2009). Greene, Caracelli and Graham (1989) present a useful typology of the purposes of combining different methods.<sup>ii</sup> These purposes for mixing are:

1. *Expansion*: increase the scope of the inquiry by using different methods for different themes;
2. *Clarification*: clarify (or illustrate or interpret) the results from one method with the results of the other method;<sup>iii</sup>
3. *Triangulation*: seek convergence of results from different methods on the same theme;
4. *Development*: develop one method based on the results from the other method;
5. *Initiation*: discover paradoxes, contradictions and fresh perspectives that (often unexpectedly) emerge from the combination of the methods.

When drafting a mixed methods design, numerous designs are possible, with design decisions on many levels, such as on the level of paradigm, strategy, data collection or data analysis (Niglas 2009). Mixing can occur to different extents at different levels or stages of the research, and mixed methods studies can have more sub-designs and approaches than just two. The main choices with regard to the combination of research aspects from quantitative (QN) and qualitative (QL) traditions in a mixed method study include (see e.g. Creswell and Plano Clark 2011; Leech and Onwuegbuzie 2009; Niglas 2009):

- Timing of different methods (parallel, sequential or embedded);
- Emphasis placed on the different methods (divided equally or with one of the approaches considered dominant);
- Focus (if they study the same or different parts of a phenomenon);
- Level of integration.

In my study, I used 'QN' data, gathered through a large-scale structured survey that was conducted among 1500 respondents with a Moroccan, Turkish and ethnic Dutch background, and 'QL' data, gathered through a small number of semi-structured, in-depth interviews with university educated second generation Moroccan and Turkish Dutch. Before I discuss the data collection and the analysis of these two datasets in the next sections (3.2 and 3.3), in this current section, I describe the overall research design. I start with a brief explanation of the emergence of the research topic and design.

I started my research with the analysis of the survey data, instead of the QL data, for a very practical reason: these data were already available when I started my project. In fact, I initially focused on the explanation of social mobility and its relation with the social context and identifications. The data seemed highly useful for this purpose, as they contained many details about educational trajectories, familial backgrounds, social contexts and identifications of a large numbers of second generation individuals, which enabled the exploration of associations between the various factors. Because I was not only interested in mere correlations, but also in understanding processes of social mobility as experienced by individuals, I used a less-structured approach that allowed to me learn more about the complexities of people's experiences and their trajectories. My choice to use in-depth interviews, instead of observations in more natural settings, for example, was based on my assessment of this method as a suitable way to explore my research theme, as well as the limited time available and my lack of training in ethnographic methods. Aiming for triangulation, I conducted fifteen in-depth interviews to explore the same theme from a different angle. I tried to understand what made second generation individuals socially mobile and how this trajectory related to social contexts and identifications. In the analysis phase, I became more and more triggered by the data on identification. In the survey data, I noticed that the respondents' answers to questions about ethnic

identification were not associated with cultural practices in the way I initially expected (see chapter 5). Likewise, in the in-depth interviews, what fascinated me most were topics related to identifications and the development thereof. When participants reflected on their positions in various social contexts and their ethnic and national identifications, their accounts were full of ambiguities, emotions and shifting positions (called 'narrative shifting', see Holstein and Gubrium 1995: 55), which kept intriguing me (see chapter 6). That is how my purpose shifted from explaining social mobility to understanding processes of ethnic identification.

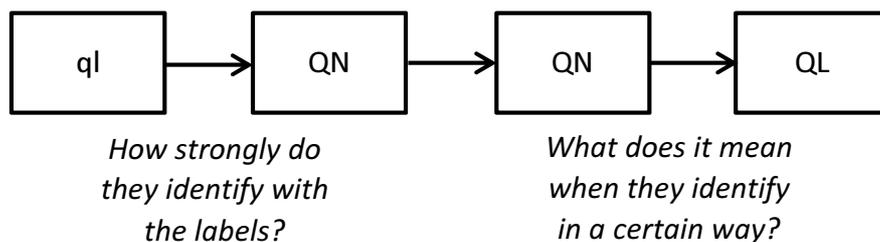
The phases of the *data collection* can be sketched as follows. (I do not use an arrow between the two parts, which would suggest a relation. Although the two data collections were conducted sequentially, they were set up as independent, parallel tracks, and the QN phase did not significantly shape or inform the subsequent QL phase).

**Data-  
collection:**



This scheme does not reflect the entire set-up of the research. In the phase of the *data analysis*, the two data sources were used in various compositions, with various aims. For chapter 5, which explores how strongly the second generation identifies with the ethnic and national labels, as well as the meaning of these identifications, the datasets are used in the following way (note that the use of upper and lower case reflects the emphasis placed on the different methods):

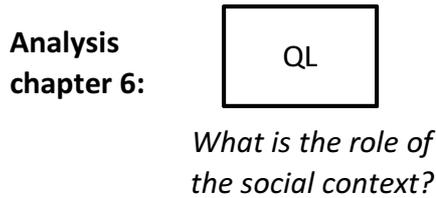
**Analysis  
chapter 5:**



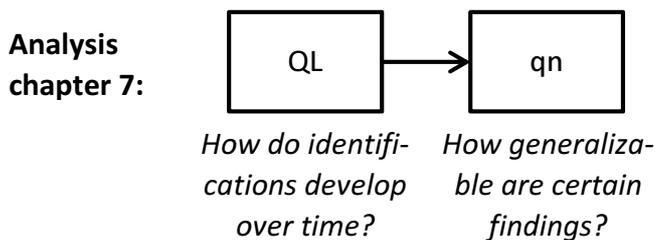
The ways that participants expressed their affiliation with the ethnic labels in the in-depth interviews triggered the analysis of the survey data. The survey data teaches us how many second generation individuals express their affiliation with the ethnic and national labels and if differences exist between various categories of respondents. Furthermore, an explorative statistical analysis of the survey data shows that the strength of identification with the ethnic labels cannot be explained by a broader co-ethnic orientation regarding certain practices and attitudes. Data from the in-depth interviews helps us understand why this is the case, as various participants describe their ethnic and Dutch identification in

various ways, referring to factors beyond the available variables of the survey data. We can say that the approach of chapter 5 consists of a chain of triangulating and clarifying steps, leading to a conclusion in which the findings of the various qualitative and quantitative steps are highly integrated.

Chapter 6, which focuses on the contextuality of identifications, is entirely based on the data of the in-depth interviews.



Chapter 7 deals with the temporal aspect of social contexts and identifications. It primarily relies on the data of the in-depth interviews. On some occasions, the findings are backed up with results from the survey data to indicate the generalizability of certain findings. The purpose of mixing is again for clarification.



### 3.2 Collection and use of the survey data

The survey data I used were collected in 2006 and 2007, in the context of the international TIES project. This project focused on The Integration of the European Second Generation (hence TIES) and was coordinated by the Institute of Migration and Ethnic Studies (IMES) of the University of Amsterdam and the Dutch Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (NIDI). The project studied the incorporation of children of immigrants, who were born and educated in their countries of residence, in fifteen cities in eight European countries. For the Netherlands, the TIES project is the first large-scale study focusing specifically on second generation youths (Crul and Heering 2008). The Dutch part of the survey was conducted face-to-face among 1505 respondents aged between 18 and 35 years, in the cities of Amsterdam and Rotterdam. The respondents were equally spread over three ethnic categories: second generation Moroccan Dutch, second

generation Turkish Dutch (at least one parent born in Morocco or Turkey) and a control group of ethnic Dutch (both parents born in the Netherlands).

The aim of the Dutch survey was to get statistically representative information on second generation Turks and Moroccans in Amsterdam and Rotterdam (Groenewold 2008). First, from the 167 neighborhoods in the two cities, 47 were sampled, using the systematic selection method to get an optimal spread of the sample over neighborhoods with different concentrations of second generation Moroccan and Turkish Dutch. The selection of neighborhoods included both neighborhoods with high and low percentages of second generation Moroccan and Turkish Dutch. Based on the concentration of second generation residents in the various neighborhoods, 5000 addresses were sampled from these neighborhoods using the municipal population registers. Ethnic Dutch respondents were sampled from the same neighborhoods in similar numbers as the second generation respondents. This led to a net effective sample size of 1505 persons from different addresses. The overall response rate was 30 percent; it was slightly higher for the ethnic Dutch than for the Moroccan and Turkish Dutch. Low response rates are common for respondents that are young and have immigrant backgrounds, and non-response bias seems slight in terms of the characteristics that were compared. (For further information on the methodology and the broader project, see: Crul and Heering 2008; Groenewold 2008; Crul, Schneider and Lelie 2012; and the webpage of the TIES project: [www.tiesproject.eu](http://www.tiesproject.eu)).

The use of the statistical data in this book illustrates that statistical analysis of structured data is not necessarily based on an objectivist and positivist perspective, nor does it necessarily focus on testing strictly defined hypotheses. In chapter 5, statistical analyses are used to deconstruct an objectivist and groupist conception of identification by showing that identification with an ethnic label does not necessarily reflect a specific coherent cultural content. In chapter 7, quantitative data help us reveal the intersectional character of education level and ethnic background, nuancing the groupist idea that Moroccan and Turkish Dutch are more conservative than ethnic Dutch. However, the data is also used in more objectivist ways, for example in Ch4, where I present a descriptive comparison of Moroccan and Turkish Dutch's sociocultural practices, and in chapter 7, where I present the demographic characteristics of the respondents' social networks.

### **3.3. Conduction and analysis of the in-depth interviews**

Description of the qualitative data collection and analysis is much less straightforward than the description and the justification of the quantitative

approach. Not only is the approach less structured, but there is also a lack of standard guidelines for reporting about qualitative approaches and even for evaluating the quality of a study (Guba and Lincoln 2005). Whereas the quality of quantitative findings is defined in well-formulated, commonly agreed-upon criteria of reliability and validity, and standard statistical tools are developed for the analysis of quantitative data, there is no full agreement on the criteria for evaluating research in the qualitative tradition (Bryman 2001: 270; Silverman 2006).

I agree with the view that producing valid knowledge is not about uncovering 'the truth', but obtaining and presenting findings that are credible (Silverman 2006: 281). According to Riessman, it comes down to the question: Why should we believe it? Why should we believe the story of the research participant, and why should we believe the story of the researcher? (2008: 184). We could say that the main criterion of good research is credibility, regardless of the method. Although in my experience, many researchers working with qualitative approaches reject terminology that is applied in the quantitative tradition, I agree with Silverman (2006) that we can evaluate the credibility of qualitative research using the same core criteria as in quantitative research: validity and reliability. I would say that research findings are credible when they are likely to accurately represent the social phenomena to which they refer; in other words: when they are *valid* (see Hammersley 1990 in Silverman 2006: 289). Therefore, it is important to show that these findings are not accidental results, solely shaped by the circumstances of their production. In other words: the findings need to be *reliable* (see Kirk and Miller 1986 in Silverman 2006: 282). In order to judge the reliability of the findings, it is crucial that the research process is *transparent*, that it is clear how the data were obtained and how the conclusions are developed from the data through processes of interpretation (Silverman 2006: 282). As Riessman explains: good research is credible or persuasive when the researcher demonstrates that 'the data are genuine, and analytical interpretations of them are plausible, reasonable, and convincing' and when the researcher's theoretical claims 'are supported with evidence from informants' accounts, negative cases are included, and alternative interpretations are considered' (2008: 191). This transparency is particularly important for less-structured approaches, in which findings are more strongly shaped by circumstances and by the decisions and the personality of the researcher.

Thus, a sound methodological description should provide the transparency that contributes to the credibility of the findings and help convince the reader of the validity of the claims made by the researcher. The report of a scientific study should be transparent in how the final claims are developed, based on a 'trail of evidence', consisting of data, analyses and interpretations (Riessman 2008: 188). In the empirical chapters 5 through 7, I show how the conclusions of this research

are tied to the empirical data. In this section, I discuss how I approached the collection and analysis of the qualitative data.

### **Data collection phase**

I describe successively the selection of the participants, the interview and the processing of the interviews.

#### *Selection of the participants*

I conducted fifteen interviews with socially mobile second generation Moroccan and Turkish Dutch men and women. The criteria for selection were that they were born in the Netherlands from parents (at least one) who migrated from Morocco or Turkey to the Netherlands, or that they arrived here with their parents at a very young age, before they entered the educational system. In addition, they had to have graduated from university and have jobs that matched their education level at the time of the interview. As I intended for them to reflect on their trajectory of mobility, I selected people who were not at the very beginning of their professional careers and were over 30 years old. In the end, two male participants with Moroccan backgrounds did not fit these criteria, as one came to the Netherlands at a later age, and one did not attend university but graduated from higher vocational training (*HBO*); however, as they nevertheless contributed to my findings, I did not exclude them. Although my initial plan was to include participants who were 'ethnic Dutch climbers' as well, in the end I decided against this due to time constraints and because other studies provided substantial information on ethnic Dutch climbers that proved relevant for my study (see Brands 1992 and Matthys 2010).

Eleven of the in-depth interviews were conducted with Moroccan Dutch (of which four were female) and four with Turkish Dutch (two female and two male) (see table 3.1). One participant had a mixed ethnic background; one of her parents was born in Morocco, and the other parent migrated from Poland. I conducted four of the interviews in 2006, for a project I had previously started on the theme of ethnic identification, and the rest were conducted in 2011.<sup>iv</sup> All participants were in their thirties and early forties at the time of the interview. This meant that they were born shortly after (or before) their families migrated to the Netherlands, which makes them what I call members of the 'early' second generation. Some were in relationships (mostly married), and others were single. Some had children. They lived all over the Netherlands and grew up all over the Netherlands, in cities as well as in villages. They went to university and had jobs that matched their education levels. Several worked as consultants in various branches, some ran companies they (co-) owned, one worked in the medical field, and others worked as researchers, technical engineers, and teachers. All participants spoke Dutch fluently. Most of the participants did not have any accent that revealed their immigrant backgrounds. As mentioned in the first chapter, nearly all

participants had a – in my view – ‘professional’ appearance. They were dressed according to standard business codes, radiated confidence and reflexivity and formulated their thoughts with a certain ease and determination. Although nearly all participants call themselves Muslims, their level of religiosity seemed to vary. It seemed to me that for three of them, their religiosity was more important emotionally and for providing practical guidelines than for the rest. To protect the anonymity of participants, I do not connect the various personal characteristics with each other and do not create detailed profiles of the individual participants. I furthermore use pseudonyms and altered some factual details.

**Table 3.1 Interview participants (pseudonyms; ethnic backgrounds and gender)<sup>1</sup>**

Participants (pseudonyms)	Mor/Tur Dutch	Gender (m/f)	Participants (pseudonyms)	Mor/Tur Dutch	Gender (m/f)
1. Bouchra	M	f	9. Yunus	M	m
2. Hicham	M	m	10. Imane	M	f
3. Mustapha	M	m	11. Berkant	T	m
4. Ahmed	M	m	12. Nathalie	M <sup>2</sup>	f
5. Said	M	m	13. Aysel	T	f
6. Masud	M	m	14. Adem	T	m
7. Hind	M	f	15. Esra	T	f
8. Karim	M	m			

1) In chronological order of the interviews

2) Mixed ethnic background (her father was born in Morocco, her mother in Poland)

To avoid selecting participants *based on* their ethnic identifications and thus selecting on the dependent variable, I did not use organizations with ethnic signatures as starting points for recruiting. I recruited most participants via my own (primarily ethnic Dutch) private network, covering various professional branches and various parts of the Netherlands. I recruited a few participants via my professional academic network. As participation was voluntary, a certain bias could not be completely avoided. In explaining their willingness to participate, most participants mentioned the importance of contributing to the Dutch debate, to have their voices heard and to challenge negative stereotypes. This implies that some bias exists towards a certain social involvement. This bias makes it hard to assess how representative the sample is for the early second generation university educated Moroccan and Turkish Dutch. However, the aim of this part of the study is not to present findings that are representative for all second generation Moroccan and Turkish Dutch climbers, but to explore mechanisms as they occur; at least among some.

As I explained before, what we learn from less-structured methods differs from what we learn from structured methods. Again, this means that qualitative studies should not be measured against the same yardsticks as quantitative

studies; their significance should not be evaluated according to their statistical inference and the representativity of the sample (Small 2009). Flyvberg (2004: 424) argues that the aim for generalization is overrated as a source of scientific progress, and that even purely descriptive studies can equally well provide important scientific contributions. He argues that the description itself is the result of the study and it is up to the reader to draw his own conclusions – which is why most studies contain a substantial element of narrative (2004: 430). Although this sounds more open than what Small presents as an aim of qualitative studies, ‘logical inference’ (2009: 22), these two views might be rather similar after all. How I interpret ‘logical inference’, is that the findings, based on the particular sample or case of the study, are presented in such a way that the particular mechanism or process uncovered is credible, and as such forms a model or inspiration for enhancing understanding of other instances or cases. This means that bias (which cannot be avoided in any study) is not to be controlled for, but needs to be understood (2009: 14). Furthermore, this means that it is fruitful to regard unstructured approaches with relatively small amounts of participants or cases as ‘multiple-case studies’ rather than ‘small-sample studies’ (2009: 24). This formulation focuses on the richness and the complementarity of the data, rather than on limitations concerning statistical significance. Unsurprisingly, there is no recipe for determining the amount of subjects that need to be included in a qualitative study. The number of participants or cases in qualitative studies strongly varies, ranging from 1 or 2 in some narrative studies, to 20-30, or even many more, in studies based on grounded theory (Creswell 2007: 126). In trying to understand a specific phenomenon, or certain human experiences as they make sense to those who live it, 10-20 interviews, or even less, might suffice (Dukes 1984: 200; Bleienberg 2013: 10-11).

I consider the fifteen interviews that I conducted to be valuable in exposing particular mechanisms that take place among (some) ethnic minority climbers; mechanisms that are important to take notice of and further explore. As I expose the relevance of ethnicity and the articulations of ethnic and national identifications among some early second generation Moroccan and Turkish Dutch climbers, I reveal mechanisms that very likely have broader social relevance and are likely to apply to others in similar situations. Throughout the book I point to parallels among the interview participants, to parallels between the survey data and the interview data, and to parallels between the results and theories or other empirical studies, which all suggest that the mechanisms that I reveal have (at least some) social importance beyond the individual cases. Apart from that, it is up to the reader to recognize parallels, to explore the broader meanings of the findings and to apply them to other cases.

### *The interview*

The interviews lasted between one and four hours; most lasted between 1.5 and two hours. They were all in Dutch. The interviews were semi-structured, in the sense that in every interview a few selected main themes were discussed. I had an interview guide at hand, with a detailed list of possible themes and probes, which functioned as a fallback and which I did not (rigorously) follow. A translated, English version of the guide is included in Appendix A. I let parts of the interview flow freely, especially at the beginning, when they spoke about their personal and educational trajectory and the various social contexts they moved in, responding to the themes as they came up in the interaction between the participant and me, the interviewer.

Following Holstein and Gubrium (1995), I see an interview as an ‘active interview’, as something that is created in a particular setting and is the result of a situated interaction between the interviewer and the research participant. The idea of the ‘active interview’ strikes a balance between the social construction of the interview and substantial information (p. 4-5). Rather than seeing a participant like a ‘vessel of answers’ that merely need to be accessed in a neutral way (p. 7), Holstein and Gubrium regard a participant as possessing a ‘stock of knowledge’, which cannot be objectively accessed (p. 30). The knowledge is inevitably presented in selective and creative ways through the interview (p. 30). As Riessman describes it: the participant’s narrative is ‘selective and perspectival, reflecting the power of memory to remember, forget, neglect, and amplify moments in the stream of experience’, rather than a story that merely reflects a ‘pre-existing self’ (2008: 29). However, as Holstein and Gubrium contend, the situated character of the narrative does not mean that the interview does not provide substantive information about relatively enduring local conditions and ‘experiential materials’ (p. 16-17). The narrative is not created from scratch during the interview, nor is the respondent making things up (p. 28). Instead, a story is created that is ‘true to life’ – faithful to subjectively meaningful experience (p. 28). However, to interpret the meaning of the participant’s words, we should not only look at *what* is said, but also *how* it is said. We should attend to both the substantive and the processual aspects to show ‘how what is being said relates to the experiences and lives being studied’ (p. 80). Apparently, in this view, a more positivist concern with ‘obtaining information about chronology, events, settings and behaviors’ (Charmaz 2006: 32) is combined with a more interpretivist interest to elicit ‘the participant’s definitions of terms, situations, and events and try to tap his or her assumptions, implicit meanings, and tacit rules’ (ibid.). To assess what the participants’ words mean, we should consider the context of how the narrative came into being. I do this by carefully describing the interviews and the analytical steps, reflecting on my personal role as interviewer and researcher during the interviews and the interpretive process.

To avoid placing an emphasis on ethnic identity from the start of the interview (and because I was originally primarily focused on their processes of social mobility), I introduced the interview as focusing on the trajectories of social mobility among children of immigrant parents, including the personal experience of being socially mobile and how social mobility shapes and is shaped by interactions with social others. I first let the participants describe their educational trajectory chronologically, including familial background and trajectories of siblings, focusing on social environments and the role that social others played when they made important decisions (such as choosing a certain school or education level). This provided quite a detailed picture of the composition of the various social contexts they moved in (in characteristics of gender, class and ethnic background) and how they experienced their social relations and positions in these various contexts, without the participants interpreting these situations through the lens of ethnic identification. By focusing on the process of social mobility instead of ethnic and national identifications in the initial stage of the interview, I follow one of Fox and Jones' suggestions to avoid the trap of unwillingly applying an ethnic lens (see section 2.2). They propose focusing on the 'everyday' as a means to explore practices beyond ethnic practices. Focusing on trajectories of social mobility had a similar effect. When we discussed the theme of feeling 'Moroccan', 'Turkish' and 'Dutch' later in the interview, many (partly 'factual') details had already been discussed, which we could then use to reflect on expressions of ethnic identification. (Later, in the analysis, coding of experiences that had been formulated in terms of 'feeling different' and 'feeling similar' and 'feeling normal' also helped me interpret the role of ethnic, Dutch and other identifications in their experiences.) I have to admit that throughout all of the interviews, I felt uneasy about asking about their feelings of being Moroccan, Turkish and Dutch and about ethnic backgrounds and the role of ethnicity. I feared that this focus made me contribute to a discourse that presupposed the relevance of ethnicity for individuals with an ethnic minority background, and I therefore wanted to avoid the impression that I myself assume that ethnicity is always greatly relevant. However, the participants' responses to these questions were insightful. As I will show in the coming chapters, in some responses participants did not problematize these questions at all, whereas in other responses they challenged the underlying views.

I experienced high levels of rapport with most participants. In my interview reports, I described nearly all interviews as *'plezierig'* (pleasant/comfortable). In a few cases (all with Turkish Dutch participants), during the prelude and the closing of the interview, the participant's attitude was slightly more formal than I experienced in the other cases. This also contrasted with the openness during the interview itself and made me feel slightly uncomfortable. At times, participants seemed to be in a more 'defensive' mode, particularly when they (implicitly or explicitly) reacted to certain discourses they experience in their

daily lives. I hardly ever felt that the participant's criticism was directed towards me. Only in one interview, the respondent criticized my focus on people who-can-be-considered-successful and expressed her cynicism about the general impact of studies like mine. As a person, I generally feel uncomfortable with probing into themes that a participant feels uneasy or sad talking about, which I then usually evade in the rest of the conversation. However, during the interviews I slowly grew more comfortable in sympathetically expressing my interest for such 'difficult' topics (for example memories about experiencing bullying and what this meant for the participant), which frequently led to very personal and exceptional interview moments.

In many of the interviews, I felt that my own educational and professional background contributed to the mutual rapport. Depending on the participant, I more or less explicitly mentioned my background in Applied Physics or my previous experiences as a management consultant, which sometimes formed a shared characteristic and seemed to contribute to the personal connection. In only a few cases, I felt that my gender played a role and enhanced the rapport with other female participants, when we discussed the theme of being a gender minority in educational or professional settings. I did not feel that it influenced the interaction with other (male or female) participants. I do not know how the fact that I did not share their ethnic background affected the situation. I can imagine that this made the participants hold back in telling negative experiences, as they might have wanted to portray an extra positive image to challenge stereotypes that are related to their ethnic category. This effect seemed limited, as participants often did reflect in what seemed to be quite an honest way on relationships with co-ethnics and also mentioned disagreements and struggles. When I introduced myself in the beginning of the interview, I almost always mentioned my previous research projects on radicalization and added that I changed research topics because I was uncomfortable with the tendentious and negative presumptions of the theme of radicalization, and that I am convinced of the importance of a more open and unbiased attitude. In hindsight, I realized why I mentioned this. Gubruim and Holstein explain that any interview introduction shapes the direction of the interview and serves as a 'signpost to guide active respondents through the open terrain of their experience' (1995: 41). I realized that with this introduction, I tried to distance myself from the widespread, negative stereotypical ideas about Muslims, Moroccans and Turks and to show my awareness of the biased nature of certain views. With this 'signpost', I tried to avoid having the research participants feel the need to convince me of the incorrectness of these biased views, which would hopefully lead to increased rapport and a more nuanced interview.

### *Immediate processing of the interview*

All interviews were recorded on audiotape, except for one, in which the participant objected to the recording. In that case, I took detailed notes during the interview, including literal sentences that I found intriguing. Based on my notes, I created a full transcription immediately after the interview. For all interviews, immediately after the interview, I took notes about the interview setting, about how I experienced the flow of the interview and the rapport with the participant, and my hunches about the main takeaways of the interview.

### **Data analysis phase**

As I argued before, to enhance the credibility of the research findings, it is important to show how the claims I make in this book relate to the empirical data. Although chapter 5 to 7 are entirely devoted to the presentation of the argument based on the empirical data, in this section I describe the analytical steps I took to come to the findings and to develop the themes as discussed in this book, based on the data of the in-depth interviews. I believe that it is important to also include the more initial, explorative analytical phases, as these are crucial steps in the process of meaning-making, in the interpretation of the data. I kept a research log, in which I kept track of my analytical steps, as well as the considerations and confusions I had along the way. Such a log not only helped me to retrace my analytical steps, but, like Riessman suggested (2008: 191), it also fostered my reflexivity and awareness about how the research was done and the impact of my decisions. The challenge here is to give an overview that both elucidates the process and is concise. I start with the transcription phase, proceed to the explorative stage of open coding and memo writing, and conclude with a description of the main analyses.

### *Transcriptions*

However straightforward it sounds to make a transcription, ‘the “same” stretch of talk can be transcribed very differently’ (Riessman 2008: 29). As we saw, in order to interpret the participants’ narratives, we need to attend to the narrative context, the ‘how’ of the interview. It is therefore valuable to have transcripts display the interaction, rhythms of speech and non-verbal aspects. In the transcripts, I included my own speech, including my questions, probes and audible reactions. As suggested by Gillham (2005), I did not include ‘paralinguistic’ features of speech unless they contributed to the understanding of the words spoken. Whenever that was case I included this in the transcription, for example, when someone hesitated (‘um... um...’), said something with EMPHASIS, paused (‘(...)’) or when we laughed (‘(both laughing)’). Contrary to Gillham’s suggestion, I did include personal speech repetitions, such as ‘you know’, because I often interpreted such phrases as expressions of certain emotions, such as unease or agitation. Once in a while I omitted small parts of the interviews that contained elaborations on themes that were not directly relevant

to my study. I transcribed all interviews myself, as I agree with the view that transcription is an interpretive practice (Gillham 2005, Riessman 2008) and because of the limited number of interviews. After the transcriptions, I listened to the interview again, checking the transcript, while taking notes on the paralinguistic aspects that seemed to reflect a certain stance or emotion that I missed during the initial transcription. I also added my interpretations, using the qualitative data analysis software MaxQDA.<sup>v</sup> An example of a brief interpretive note, called a 'memo' in MaxQDA, is the memo I attached to Karim's words about his disappointingly low secondary school advice:

Memo: These sentences already radiate frustration. (He returns to this theme later in the interview). And that he mentions that in the end his graduation was 'with honors' sounds like a redress, illustrating how ridiculous the previous advice was. It sounds like 'I told you so!' (Memo dd. 13 August 2012, translation MS)

Several times I improved the transcriptions, every time including more details on the 'how' of the interviews. My research log reads:

Log entry: Again, I worked on improving the transcripts, including more detail on HOW things are said... hesitations, emphasis, persuasion, repetition, reformulation, to get a better feel for what the participant means with his words, to reveal the interaction with what I say, or with what (the participant seems to assume) I think, or with what others might think (discourses), etc, etc. (Log entry dd. 8 August 2012, translation MS)

#### *Exploring the data: starting with open coding and memo writing*

As I did not want to force any structure upon the data by using preconceived categories, I started with a bottom up approach, conform the principles of Grounded Theory as described by Corbin and Strauss (2008). I started with the process of 'open coding', assigning codes to text segments, reflecting the theme, the meaning or emotions of the participant's words. I also sometimes coded more processual aspects, such as instances of reflexivity. For most of the codes, I created a memo about the idea the specific code reflected. I preferred the slightly less detailed way of coding demonstrated by Corbin and Strauss to the more detailed way of coding demonstrated by Charmaz (2006). The coding resulted in 120 codes and nearly 1800 coded segments. (The same segment could be coded in more than one way).

How to make sense of these codes? I divided the codes into four main categories: a category that related to the theme of 'Arrear and success' (with codes such as 'incapability of parents to give practical support', 'intrinsic drive and ambition', 'definitions of successful'), one that related to 'identification, ethnicity and social relations' ('being Dutch, Moroccan, Turkish', 'internalization of prejudice', 'being addressed as...'), one that related coded segments to different life phases

(‘description of family background’, ‘description of university period’), and a category with ‘other’ codes, such as codes about the interview process. Within the four main themes, I organized the codes into two levels, grouping codes that were related to the same theme. The next step was to try and come up with a broader description, framework or theory. How did the codes ‘work together’? What are the relationships between the codes? Inspired by one of the creative approaches for ‘making meaning’ presented by Hunter et al., the ‘quilt’, described by Jacelon (Hunter et al. 2002: 395), I printed out the second level of the codes, and I physically moved them around on a large sheet. I grouped the codes that were similar in meaning or theme and explored how the various themes connected to each other, trying to piece together a diagram that reflected a coherent argument. This sorting exercise invited me to play with the data but did not lead to an unambiguous, coherent, innovative diagram and argument. (While searching for coherent arguments and trends in the data, I tried to be open for variations and negative examples, as suggested by Charmaz (2006: 102) and Corbin and Strauss (2008: 84)).

What turned out to be most useful in furthering the meaning making process were the numerous memos I wrote. In the total project, I wrote 521 memos, which were attached to a certain code or specific text segment, or both. I followed the approach of Corbin, who leads the reader through a detailed example of qualitative data analysis based on the memos she took, rather than on the code structure she developed (Corbin and Strauss 2008) (see also Charmaz: Chapter 4 on memo writing). Corbin shows that the process of qualitative analysis lies in the process of memo writing, which ‘forces the analyst to think about the data’ (Corbin and Strauss 2008: 118). I found that extensive memo writing indeed not only served to store and order my thoughts and considerations, but also strongly enhanced my insight by helping me to disentangle complexities in the data and to further my thinking on issues I did not understand right away. The following memo, assigned to a specific interview segment and connected to the codes ‘reluctant to use ethnicity/ethnic explanations’ and ‘being Dutch, Moroccan, Turkish’, illustrates how I used the writing of a memo when I was confused:

Memo: Suddenly, here she seems very resistant to categorization in ethnic categories. Why? I feel it fits her cynical outlook on the world. Why then does her resistance surprise me? That is because earlier in the interview she did talk about not-being-Dutch, and being-Turkish herself. So, she does employ such categorizing language herself. But now it suddenly frustrates her. I think she might be afraid that such approaches are not constructive – that they too strongly reflect the exclusivist thinking of the dominant discourse. Either way, she is critical every time – in reaction to nearly everything happening in the Netherlands, and to nearly everything I say. (Memo dd. 28 September 2012, translation MS)

I used memos to record my thoughts during the reading of the interviews. I used them not only for describing the ideas behind the codes I was developing, but also for explaining why I found certain expressions intriguing, what I found surprising and what confirmed my hunches, and how participants' experiences or interpretations paralleled or contradicted each other. For another example of a reflection, see the following memo, which is connected to a segment of another interview and to the code 'being Dutch, Moroccan, Turkish':

Memo: I find this an intriguing anecdote....: She says she feels Dutch, but also that she 'knows' that she is 'darker' [note that she is *not* noticeably darker skinned than most ethnic Dutch], even though she is 'not aware' of this (in other words: she does not primarily feel Moroccan herself). She illustrates this with the example that when she is abroad she 'accidentally' refers to herself as Dutch. When people react surprised when they hear she is Dutch, she corrects herself and tells them she is 'actually Moroccan'. She does not problematize this anecdote or her interpretation.

I find this remarkable because nearly all participants, and most other Moroccan and Turkish Dutch I know, emphasize they 'are Dutch' (often in combination with being Moroccan or Turkish), although they are often not seen as Dutch. What accounts for this difference? As I see it, this respondent seems to have internalized the exclusivist discourse in a way that she seems to agree with the view that she is not Dutch. (...) Another participant mentions a contrasting experience: that particularly when she is abroad she can present herself as Dutch without being continuously questioned. . (Memo dd. 31 July 2012, translation MS)

### *Advancing the analysis*

Three analytical steps advanced my thinking on the themes and arguments in the data. The first was combining all memos that were connected to the codes within the main theme 'identification, ethnicity and social relations'; seventy at that stage. This collection of reflections formed the basis for a document in which I described various mechanisms and concepts that emerged from the interviews (using labels such as 'practices of in- and exclusion', 'process of developing pride', 'the role of social others' and 'classification resistance'), which I discussed in various phases with various colleagues.

The second step was an analysis of the social contexts, inspired by Corbin and Strauss (2008: chapter 10 'Analyzing data for Context'). Per interview, I created an overview of the various contexts that were mentioned in the interview (such as family (parents and siblings), neighborhood, local co-ethnic community, primary school, secondary school, university, work, partner, peers) and how the participant spoke about these contexts. How were these social contexts described? How did the participant feel in these contexts? How were the relationships with the various people? How did the participant position him or herself? Obviously, social contexts differed per life phase, but how participants seemed to position

themselves also showed development. This overview further advanced the document with themes and mechanisms emerging from the data.

This approach shows why I got stuck when making the diagram to develop my themes, using the grounded theory approach in the way that I did. Grounded theory approaches invite the use of text segments in decontextualized ways (Mishler 1999: 23). By treating text segments as separate entities, it is easy to lose narrative aspects of the interview. The sequence and patterning of various parts in the interview are lost, including suggestions of stability and variety over time and between contexts within an individual's narrative (ibid.). Narrative analysis seems more appropriate – or at least a valuable complementary method. Rather than (solely) thematically coding segments and fracturing the data, narrative analysis focuses on larger segments to attempt to keep the 'story' intact, to interpret sequences, and to attend to the interaction at the interview setting (Riessman 2008). The idea of narrative analysis led me to pay more attention to developments and mechanisms, as well as arguments constructed by the participant, looking for words that indicated a specific relation between two parts of a narrative (since, due, when, because, results in) and for words that were indicative of temporality and change (initially, gradually, current, 'now I feel...', 'this has become...', 'I have learnt'), as proposed by Corbin and Strauss (2008: 83). It also opened up the possibility to focus on the ambiguities within interviews. When do participants (seem to) contradict themselves, and why might they have done so? As chapter 6 and 7 show, this attention to ambiguities and temporal aspects appeared very valuable for the further crystallization of my findings.

The third analysis, in which I employed the ideas of narrative analysis, focused on 'processes'. Again, I was particularly inspired by the ideas of Corbin and Strauss, who present 'the paradigm': a perspective to help the researcher identify the role of context and link context to process and outcome (2008: 89). The paradigm identifies three components of a process: conditions, interactions and emotions, and consequences. In the transcripts, I tried to identify such narrative chains (again by particularly paying attention to words such as since, due, when, and because), which I coded 'response'. I wrote a memo on every such process/chain, outlining the specific conditions (triggers, context, causes) and the responses (emotions, actions, reactions, results or aimed results) for every separate chain. I focused on processes that related to issues of identification and social interaction with others. These chains consisted of at least two steps, but they could also contain up to five steps. Per interview, I coded between 12 and 51 text segments, which I finally categorized (and re-categorized) into three categories that emerged from the data:

1. 'Netherlands': 181 segments, relating to interactions with ethnic Dutch and to the Dutch discourses,

2. 'Co-ethnics': 102 segments, relating to parents, the local co-ethnic community, the abstract co-ethnic community,
3. 'Friends': 29 segments that I identified as processes relating to people who are considered friends, regardless of their ethnicity, and to partners.

Per category I considered the various actors, triggers, effects and reactions. This led to detailed descriptions about the range of interactions and responses in different interactional contexts, which formed the basis for chapter 6.

#### *A more structured approach for chapter 5*

The analysis of the qualitative data for chapter 5 was more straightforward. Based on the outcomes of the statistical analyses, I analyzed how the participants described their identification as Moroccan or Turkish or Dutch. I retrieved the 48 text segments that were coded 'being Dutch, Moroccan, Turkish' and as such were related to descriptions of 'feeling Dutch, Moroccan or Turkish'. Based on the phrasings of these descriptions, I developed thematic subcodes, such as 'language', 'attitudes' or 'bond with the country'. Next, I analyzed when these themes were mentioned: to describe feeling more Dutch, less Dutch, more Moroccan, less Moroccan, more Turkish, or less Turkish. I furthermore looked into the combinations of these themes per participant, and I considered if the use of these themes noticeably varied between the Moroccan and Turkish Dutch and between men and women.

#### **Reporting phase**

Because the data used for the analyses not only contained the substantive 'whats' of the interview, but also the processual 'hows', the credibility of the research is enhanced by providing precise, verbatim quotes and extensive information on the setting and the broader context in the interview (see also Bryman 2001: 272-278). However, it appeared that in practice such elaborate presentation of the underlying data needs to be balanced with the aim of conciseness and readability. Therefore, in the end, I have stripped many quotes of the dialogical interaction and I somewhat shortened the translated quotes to make them more readable. I have only done so when I thought this would not distort their meaning in a relevant way. In the instances that I felt that my questions or reactions significantly contributed to the phrasing of the participants and are relevant for interpreting the quotes, I included them. Hence, throughout the book, two kinds of quotes are used, with and without the dialogical interaction. I translated the quotes myself and these have been checked by a native-speaking English editor. In an attempt to preserve the original character of the quotes, phrases that were rather uncommon or not very smooth in Dutch have been translated into phrases that are also rather uncommon or not very smooth in English. Out of respect for the participants and because I thought this would not affect the meaning of the quotes, I corrected the occasional language mistakes that occurred during the interviews. I connected nearly all quotes to the pseudonyms, except for a few

quotes that I deemed relatively sensitive and that did not need the personal context to be understood.

### 3.4 Summary

The combination of large-scale survey data and a limited number of in-depth interviews made me benefit from the complementary advantages of more structured and less structured methods. Contrary to the purist view that such 'quantitative' and 'qualitative' methods are essentially connected to incompatible ontological and epistemological perspectives, I argued that these methods are not rigidly determined by these perspectives, nor are they fundamentally incompatible. Instead, as my mixed methods research design illustrates, methods and perspectives can be mixed and combined in various ways. Both the data from the survey and the in-depth interviews were used within the constructivist perspective that I adopted. The exploration of ethnic and national identifications – including, as we will see, the deconstruction of essentialist notions of ethnic identity – relies on a combination of statistical analyses of the survey data and less structured analyses of the interview data. Nevertheless, I described the quantitative data collection according to the standards that are common in positivist research traditions; for example I did not reflect on the how the context of the data collection might influence the findings. The reason is that I was not involved in the collection of the survey data and that I based my description on the reports of others.

Whereas I described the data collection and the analysis of the structured data in a rather straightforward way, my description of the less-structured method was less straightforward. Less-structured, or 'qualitative', approaches by definition lack high levels of standardization. The entire approach is less straightforward, due to the complexity of the data, the dependency on the context and on the decisions and perspectives of the researcher (more so than in structured approaches), and because of the lack of agreed-on guidelines for a sound data collection, analysis and reporting. As the credibility of a study strongly depends on its transparency, this complexity increases the need for a detailed presentation of the 'chain of evidence' by the researcher, showing how the research findings follow from the data. This is why the description of the qualitative approach is much more elaborate than that of the quantitative approach and includes discussions of the interview setting, my role as an interviewer, my perspective on the interview-data as empirical evidence, the processes of making sense of the data, and my decisions regarding the reporting.

In my approach regarding the in-depth interviews, I attend both to the *what* and the *how*. Following Holstein and Gubrium, I see a participant's narrative as the

result of the interaction between the interviewer and the participant in a particular context. At the same time, I believe that the narrative has meaning beyond the interview and reflects a subjectively meaningful experience. However, if we want to understand the meaning (the *what*), we need to look at the circumstances of the production (the *how*). With this balance between the content and the process, I occupy a middle ground between a positivist and interpretivist perspective.