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

Slootman, M.W.

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## 7. Strangers and soulmates. Trajectories of identification and development of 'minority middle-class capital'

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*How do identifications develop over one's lifetime? What roles do difference and similarity play? And what is the role of co-educated co-ethnic peers? Can we say that a 'minority culture of mobility' is developing in the Netherlands?*

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As much as identifications are not static over different contexts, identifications are also not constant throughout one's life-course. This led to the separation of childhood and adult phases in the previous chapter. In this chapter, I will further explore how ethnic identification evolves throughout the life course and how this depends on social interactions and experiences of difference and sameness. I will show that the development of fitting ethnic and national identifications are not self-evident for all and are often preceded by a struggle. I will show that there is a trajectory of 'reinvention' of ethnic identification that is specific for the pioneering social climbers in this study, these climbers who are the first of their ethnic categories to reach higher education levels and middle-class positions. This phenomenon shows parallels with what is described elsewhere as a 'minority culture of mobility'.

Let us listen once more to Said:

Well, I think, when you look back... Yes, I think – reflecting on the period at elementary school – ...that you discover that you are actually different. In a negative way. Because I remember – Quite bizarre: sometimes I was not allowed to play at a friend's house. That's something that you don't understand at that moment. So, then you find out you are different. That is phase one. (...)

Then, let's say, this period at high school, where you, let's say, SEE the opportunities and seize them, and where you realize that you're talented. You know, that you say to yourself: 'This is GOOD for me'. It sounds weird – no, it doesn't – that at the age of

fourteen you notice the difference between you, the higher educated pupil, and the lower educated pupils of the school nearby. There is a huge difference, with those children smoking pot. So you notice THAT. This makes you realize: 'I want to stand out positively, I do not want to be like them'. So, basically – you then learn about your... identity – I don't know. But what you learn is indeed, in that secondary school period: no negative association with your own identity. That was a really fantastic period. What is important, is that – well – there I met with friends who did NOT see you as THE Moroccan, or whatever. You COULD play at their homes: sit... sleep over... you know... I enjoyed that period so much. Really great. Good memories. I did not feel different AT ALL. Of course, you realize you have a different background. But who cares?! You know: 'Enrichment.' Whatever.... – but that wasn't the focus. (...)

The funny thing is – at university you find out – Yes, there I DID relate more to, well, Moroccan Dutch students. This was kind of a change. In fact, your whole life you did not do that. There you meet soulmates [*lotgenoten*], higher educated Moroccan Dutch students. That was a real revelation. For all of us. We still are in contact. But I remember the moment of revelation at that time: 'Apparently I am not alone' – I always felt THE exception. They were on your own wavelength, let's describe it this way. There were incredible levels of mutual understanding. Of course, that is fabulous. We surely all were... the outsider, you know. That was a fantastic period, indeed. I primarily related to Moroccan Dutch people. Students. They were my best friends. Look, I also participated in a normal student fraternity, so there I did interact with other [ethnic Dutch] – But when you ask me: who did you mostly relate to, then it is primarily [with Moroccan Dutch]. (Said)

In the light of these previous quotes, Said's current relation with his ethnic background is remarkably comfortable. Remember the quote presented in the last chapter:

I actually highlight it all the [time] – I am just PROUD of it (laughs apologetically but affirmatively). I find it important to – I WANT to show that you can be both Moroccan and successful. I want to, very deliberately, show that these two CAN be combined. Whenever I can, I also say I am a Muslim. Whenever I can I say I celebrate the Ramadan. And whenever I can I say I regularly pray. And whenever I can I say that I... whatever – that I visit Morocco every year, for example. (Said)

From Said's story, interesting themes emerge, which I further examine in this chapter. First, I describe a particular trajectory of ethnic identification that I encountered in many of the participant's life stories (7.1). I then explicate the occurrence of this trajectory. Is this a generic process? What is the role of belonging? And, what are the roles of sameness and difference? How do they relate to ethnicity and education level? (7.2) Subsequently, I concentrate on the interaction with the so-called 'co-ethnic co-educated soulmates'. Can we say that among these co-ethnic co-educated soulmates a 'minority culture of mobility', or

'minority middle-class capital' emerges? (7.3) The chapter concludes with a brief summary and a discussion of the generalizability of the findings (7.4).

## 7.1 A trajectory of reinvention of ethnic identification revealed

Many aspects of Said's story also emerged in the other interviews. Most of the participants sketched a trajectory with roughly comparable phases. In the previous chapter, we learned about the childhood phase and the adult phase. All participants were born in Moroccan and to Turkish families around the moment of their migration. Therefore, except for Nathalie, the sphere of primary socialization in their very early years was completely Moroccan or Turkish. As we have read, the childhood accounts in the context of their 'white' schools and neighborhoods were dotted with memories of 'feeling different' and the longing to be accepted by others. Some participants were actively excluded or even bullied, whereas others just felt that they differed from some implicit norm. Several explained how they internalized the stereotypical ideas that Moroccans and Turkish are less intelligent. To avoid standing out because of their ethnic backgrounds and to be accepted as one of 'us', they tried to conceal or downplay their ethnicity. For some participants, these feelings of being different extended into their secondary school phase; others, like Said, did not feel like an outsider anymore and developed a positive self-image. Said's close friendships with ethnic Dutch peers made him feel accepted and valued. His ethnic background simply felt irrelevant to him at that time. His self-confidence grew because he realized he was doing well and could be proud of himself.

The participants' reflections on their ethnic affiliations as adults differ from the reflections on their ethnic affiliations when recalling their childhoods. Their current relationship with their ethnic background is described in far more positive terms. All participants, except Nathalie, explicitly identify in ethnic terms (in combination with feeling Dutch). Furthermore, they have good relations with their parents and have many co-ethnic friends. Many show a social engagement that is inspired by their ethnic backgrounds. They contribute to bridging cultural differences or support the next generation of co-ethnics.

A period that popped up in many of the interviews as a significant phase was the moment when the participants entered university and met students with co-ethnic backgrounds. Said described in euphoric terms what it meant for him to suddenly meet co-ethnic students at university. It was a 'fantastic period', a 'revelation'. Others, such as Berkant and Mustapha, recount this phase in remarkably similar ways:

Then, you suddenly ARE at university, you ARE together with people – Well... since the second year, when I became involved in the Turkish student association – that was a PEAK experience. Suddenly, a whole new world unfolds, um – with an urgent need to share your experiences with somebody who went through the same as you did. So that was really a peak, my time at the Turkish student association. Really a peak. (Berkant)

So, when at university I did meet Moroccan students, for me that was a relief. Indeed, there was no need to explain myself anymore. About why this and why that. So, at that moment I started to explore my roots, also via my studies, as I did a research project in Morocco. And I became active in the student environment. Yes, Muslim, Moroccan, whatever, youth association as well – I have since then been very involved with the Moroccan community. I very much enjoyed it. It gave me heaps of energy, and it really made me grow as a person in that period. (Mustapha)

The reason for this delight was an unparalleled mutual understanding. There was the sudden insight: ‘Apparently there are more of us’. The participants felt a ‘match’ with these co-ethnic students, who were on the same ‘wavelength’. There was this sudden, urgent need to share stories with people who had similar experiences. These co-ethnic students also had been ‘the exception’ in their environments, to use Said’s words. Not only in their school environments, but also in their relations with co-ethnics, these students encountered identical problems. For Karim, meeting co-ethnic student Kamal was ‘life changing’. With Kamal, Karim finally no longer felt judged; he felt appreciated as a person. Like himself, Kamal felt burdened by high expectations from his family and ‘the entire community’. Both men were put ‘under a microscope’ and felt the pressure to behave as ‘one of them’ (their co-ethnics), and were expected to pray and to marry. They felt the heavy imperative to succeed in educational and professional terms. Openly sharing these experiences was a relief. Even Esra and Imane, who initially kept their distance from co-ethnic students due to assumptions that these students would be as conservative as the co-ethnics they already knew, ultimately felt like fish in the water among the co-ethnic students they met. These fellow students appeared to share their modern, liberal and emancipated attitudes. Many of the participants were members of Moroccan or Turkish student associations (sometimes in addition to general student associations), which they often helped to found.

These stories, characterized by a ‘sudden’ unprecedented understanding and described in terms as ‘revelation’, indicate that the participants had not experienced their ethnic identities in a way that felt applicable to themselves until they met these other higher educated co-ethnics. It is through this specific social interaction with co-ethnic peers who shared their education level that the meaning of their ethnic backgrounds fell into place and became more fitting. Experiences that previously felt unique and personal suddenly became shared experiences among people with similar ethnic backgrounds and similar

trajectories of mobility. Apparently, these minority climbers created a new way of relating to the ethnic labels that applied to them as higher educated.

Apart from the university phase, in their early adult life, many felt the increasing need to explore and reassert their ethnicity because it more and more started to feel like a (missing) part of themselves. The following quotes of Hicham and Ahmed illustrate the importance of their ethnicity. They explain that disregard of their ethnic sides led to a feeling of 'loss'. Their quotes also show the effort it took to develop this ethnic side in correspondence with who they are. Their accounts seem to particularly apply to members of the second generation who are higher educated.

Hicham: (...) That's kind of funny. It happens to all people who made the decision to assimilate quite far. You see them struggle – that they just realize: 'Fuck, wait, I actually miss aspects that I feel I carry inside, which I concealed and suppressed, and which I miss badly'.

Marieke: Did you 'lose' something?

Hicham: Yes, I think so. I've discussed this at home as well, with my wife. I lost something because of my choice to be ambitious. I sacrificed part of my family bonds. You used to visit your grandpa and grandma and uncles and aunts, and neighborhood friends that you grew up with; people among whom you can experience part of your Moroccanness – in music, or in jointly watching the Moroccan football team or whatever. I've partly lost that: the opportunity to very directly experience the identity of my parents, and therefore also a part of my own identity – to experience that in my close surroundings. These are very basic things, like: in those old days, when I came home from school, I sometimes dropped by at a Moroccan tearoom. Even though these were not my kind of peers, with regards to their socioeconomic background or whatever, these were the only people in my environment to share some mint-tea with, having Moroccan music in the background... That brings some peace.

Ahmed: (...) of course, for me it's a quest as well... I grew up in very white surroundings, and that's one of the reasons I returned to Amsterdam: because I missed my Moroccanness.<sup>i</sup>

Marieke: Why was that?

Ahmed: Because I had always been in a white – well, I'm somewhat exaggerating with this 'whiteness' and 'Moroccanness' – ...because I had always been in these surroundings, and suddenly there was a moment when I wondered: 'What now?' I started to feel the need to explore: 'Okay, what does it mean for me, how does it impact me?' Then, more questions emerged, and the need increased –

Although the participants' stories somewhat vary, the commonalities between many of the interviews are significant. The empirical findings reveal a specific development of ethnic identification, taking place among second generation

climbers in parallel with their trajectories of social mobility. This trajectory is characterized by a 'reinvention' of ethnic identification in early adulthood. During childhood and youth, many of the Moroccan and Turkish Dutch participants tried to downplay their ethnicity because in their primarily 'white' environments it was a reason for their exclusion. In early adulthood, after reaching high education levels, many of the social climbers started reasserting their ethnic identities, but in ways that fitted their higher education levels. It seems as if they needed to reshape the meaning of the ethnic labels in ways that adapted to their newly achieved positions. They did so jointly with co-ethnic, co-educated peers at university, among whom they felt unprecedented levels of understanding. In their later lives, for most, their ethnic identifications had become important and valued parts of themselves (in nearly all cases in combination with a self-identification as Dutch), which the participants articulated in certain contexts at certain moments.

## **7.2 Identity development and the role of sameness and ethnicity**

What causes this particular trajectory? Why does this reassertion of ethnic identity occur among the minority social climbers in their early adulthood? As I discuss in this section, general psychological processes of identity formation provide part of the explanation. It is common for people to develop a fitting identity in their adolescence and early adulthood. Educational mobility and changing social contexts offer additional explanations. Relating to others that are relatively similar to oneself – though not solely or primarily in ethnic terms – enhances self-confidence and feelings of belonging. Educational achievements can have a similar effect. This enhanced self-confidence and feelings of acceptance enable individuals to claim their belonging while articulating the dimension that formerly led to their exclusion: their minority ethnicity.

### **Identity development**

The development of a personal identity in adolescence and early adulthood is a common psychological process, described by developmental psychologists as a process of 'identity development' (Erikson 1968; Marcia 1966, 1980). The most 'optimum outcome' of this process – achieved through exploration or even struggle – is an 'achieved identity' (see also Phinney 1989: 35, 38). Marcia describes that this optimum status is characterized by a 'well-developed' internal 'self-structure' (1980: 159). He explains that individuals with a better developed identity are more aware of their own uniqueness and similarity to others and of their own strengths and weaknesses in making their way in the world. Individuals with a less developed identity are more confused about their own distinctiveness from others and rely more on external sources to evaluate themselves (*ibid.*).

Phinney focuses on the ethnic dimension, and formulates an achieved identity as a clear, secure understanding and acceptance of one's own ethnicity (1989: 38).

This description mirrors the picture that emerges from Said's interview as well as from other interviews: the participants' ethnic identification is not static throughout their lives, but has developed over time into a version that feels satisfying and fitting. The participants' stories show that confusion about who you are in ethnic and national terms is unpleasant, whereas experiencing clarity about yourself is a source of peacefulness and happiness. A clear identification for nearly all does not only relate to the ethnic but also the national dimension. For nearly all participants, having a clear and fitting identification is formulated in a combination of ethnic and national terms. Ahmed, for example, over time has developed a double identification, both as Dutch and Moroccan. This 'balance' in his identity makes him now feel pleasant and peaceful (*'ik heb daar een heel goed, rustig gevoel bij'*). Karim's quote, which in part we already read in the previous chapter, shows us how frustrating the lack of a fitting identity can be:

Karim: Then I thought (...) maybe THAT's who I am, you know: someone who is between – One side does not understand me, and the other side does not WANT to understand me. Um... so you're always somewhere 'in between'... (...) What I FEEL, is like – that there are just very few people who understand what it is like to be... not Moroccan enough on the one hand... and not Dutch enough on the other hand. You know? Do you get what I mean? (...)

Marieke: Does it feel unpleasant, to – well – to feel somewhere 'in between'? To... not feel completely part of either side? <sup>ii</sup>

Karim: Well... you just switch somewhat, you know. You want – At some moments you really strive to belong, then you want to be EITHER Dutch OR really Moroccan. At other moments, you feel extremely rebellious and you think: 'You know what? NEVER MIND! I am who I am. I just don't care'. It's a bit of a compromise...

The development of a fitting identity over time means that such an identity is not self-evident but is a result of exploration or even some sort of struggle. This is indeed illustrated by the participants' stories. Most of my participants clearly recount of a struggle (or at least of a phase of exploration) in developing a fitting identification; or, as some refer to, in developing 'pride'. This development of a fitting identification was often complicated by external demands and identifications, and by widespread conceptions about ethnic and national identifications, such as the idea that being Moroccan precludes being Dutch. In the previous chapter, we saw that participants experience an imposed 'mono-identity'. Developing a fitting ethnic identification seems to be about finding labels that suit you – or rather, it seems to be about shaping the meaning of labels that are available in order to make them applicable to who you think you are, and to be content with that. I therefore find the term 'fitting' identification more



applicable than 'achieved identity', also because it has less static connotations. Berkant refers to a struggle and the relief of having developed a fitting identity:

It has been a real trajectory... When I was young, I really struggled: 'Am I really Turkish, or am I really Dutch?' It really helped that I lived in Turkey, for my job. There, I found balance in my life. (...) I really feel I have the best of two worlds, actually. Now, whenever I want, I can decide where I live. I'm convinced I can be happy in BOTH countries. That is – That is – That makes me feel relaxed somehow. (...) I feel... let's say... at 'peace' with myself (laughs) – ...that I can say I really feel I have double nationality (Berkant)

A few participants did not account of such internal struggle. Instead, they seem to always have had quite stable ideas about themselves. A possible explanation is their relatively strong religiosity, which formed a solid anchor throughout their lives and provided clarity about their personal positions. For most, however, the process of developing a self-image that feels fitting and provides a source of self-confidence was not at all straightforward.

Developing a fitting identification is furthermore complicated because the dominant stereotypes of being Moroccan or Turkish are generally associated with arrear, not only in socioeconomic terms but also with regards to competencies. We saw in the previous chapter that, as children, the participants internalized such images and assumed that Moroccan and Turkish Dutch were less intelligent than the Dutch. These ideas were enhanced by the lack of co-ethnic role models embodying success in the Netherlands at the time this early second generation grew up. This means that what was considered typically 'Moroccan' and 'Turkish' in the Netherlands was primarily constructed in relation to the lower class and in opposition to being 'Dutch'. Song refers to a similar phenomenon and argues that minorities need to 'deprogramme' the self (Song 2003: 211-212). She explains that for second generation Chinese in Britain and Vietnamese Americans, after a period of shame during childhood (which made them distance themselves from their ethnic backgrounds), it takes a while to revalue and embrace their families' ethnic heritage when they attempt to free themselves from internalized 'white' views.

The interviews with the Moroccan and Turkish Dutch suggest that not only the internalized 'white' view needs to be unlearned, but ethnic stereotypes that are dominant among co-ethnics do too. In their pursuit of social mobility, participants frequently collided with the strict norms of being a 'good' 'Moroccan' or 'Turk' as held by their parents and local co-ethnic communities, for example about leaving the parental home to attend a distant university. Some participants reported that co-ethnics were extremely critical about the high social positions of other co-ethnics, whom they condemned for being 'too Dutch'. This suggests that for the

participants, it could be hard to combine (aspects of) social mobility and the accompanying acculturation with what was generally considered a 'good' 'Moroccan' or 'Turk'. The absence of higher educated co-ethnic predecessors meant that there was also no alternative Moroccan or Turkish identification available in the Netherlands that fit the participants' higher education levels. This explains why meeting co-ethnic students felt like a revelation and why in this context the role of ethnicity suddenly fell into place. They jointly worked on reshaping their ethnic identities to make the labels 'Moroccan' and 'Turkish' feel applicable to themselves, their higher education levels and their bicultural identification.

The interviews show – in parallel with the psychological literature on identity development – that having a fitting identification goes hand in hand with self-confidence. However, contrary to the suggestion in the literature (see e.g. Phinney 1989: 47), increased self-confidence does not seem to be the result of a developed fitting identity but instead seems to be a *prerequisite* for developing a fitting ethnic and national identity. It appears from my data that many of the participants first acquire self-confidence and subsequently feel confident enough to develop their own relation to the ethnic and national labels, as higher educated people with an ethnic minority background. Said explained that for him, the increase in self-confidence partially depended on his awareness that he was doing fine and was on a good track; he was talented and used his potential. Social mobility can increase one's self-confidence, as we have also seen in the previous chapter. Social mobility can 'prove' one's belonging, not least in the eyes of the beholder. Another reason for an increase in confidence is the experience that one is accepted as 'normal' in the eyes of others, that one does not stand out as the 'exception' anymore. Said presented his phase at secondary school, in which his ethnicity was not salient, as a crucial phase in which he developed a positive self-image apart from his ethnicity. In a later phase, he developed a satisfying relation with his Moroccan ethnicity. Nathalie's story reveals a similar process. Just like in Said's case, she went through an evolution from being insecure with herself to being confident. The insecurity was related to non-belonging, to being 'different', as a child with an ethnic minority background in a primarily 'white' environment. Once Nathalie made close friends, her insecurity started to fade. Only from this situation with increased self-confidence was able to slowly develop pride of her ethnic background:

When you find out that THAT [being Moroccan] is a reason to be excluded, you try to avoid it and to minimize it as much as you can, in order to be as NORMAL as possible. (...) Well... and after a while you ARE normal – or at least, you are accepted as normal by your surroundings – then suddenly... um... then you realize you have nice friends, and that people really LIKE you, and that everything is fine... um... But that REALLY takes time, before you've built some self-confidence. That's definitely not – look, when

you've been bullied, then... then... your self-confidence is BELOW zero! It takes some time to really GET there (...) and then... after a while... well, once you have overcome this... – I'm talking about YEARRRRRS here – then you think: Well, it's actually quite a nice story... And then – then – Only THEN you dare to be PROUD – proud of where you come from... (Nathalie)

We can conclude that it requires self-confidence to explore and articulate one's minority identity instead of choosing full assimilation to seamlessly blend into the majority. This self-confidence can be based on one's religiosity, for example, which can serve as an anchor, and on one's social mobility, which can form a ground for belonging. However, in most cases, the development of self-confidence appears to be based on not-feeling-different, on not-being-seen-as-the-Other and on feeling accepted.

### **Sameness and demographic characteristics. The relevance of 'ethnic feathers'**

In the participants' accounts, the idea of difference-and-sameness emerges as a central and emotional theme. We have seen in the previous chapter, which primarily focused on situations of dissonance, the potential intensity of experiences of difference and non-belonging. These feelings can be the result of active exclusion but also of 'just' feeling different. Exclusionary experiences can be very negative and often spark the wish to belong, to be accepted by others. This can lead to feelings of insecurity and the desire to downplay or even conceal one's ethnic background and generally does not contribute to increased self-confidence. As I show here, while experiencing difference often is unpleasant, experiencing sameness can be extremely pleasant. When participants reflect on their social bonds, they mention sameness in the same breath. Sameness underlies feelings of connection, it can boost self-confidence and contribute to a positive self-image.

What *is* sameness, and what does it bring the participants? It appears that sameness is more about sharing a worldview and experiences than about sharing demographic characteristics such as ethnicity per se. This does not mean however that experiences and worldview are fully independent from one's demographic characteristics. Let us look at three quotes in which participants explain when they feel social bonds and what forms the core of their friendships.

(...) people with whom I share my frustrations and ambitions about changing the world. With whom I talk about fundamental things, with whom I sharpen my views. (Hicham)

(...) a certain social stature, which enables you to share things with one another. Because, that's what it is about: sharing one's fascinations. Because indeed, when you do not have anything to talk about, there is nothing that bonds. (Berkant)

I realize that I need some kind of companions; meaning higher educated. You know, women I can have sharp conversations with. But also men. (...) those few people who are very important to me – let's say, with whom I get this flow of fresh insights, triggering interactions. I like having those inspiring friends around me – companions, to reflect on having a career in this world, in this context. (Aysel)

The participants describe what binds them to others in terms of similarity, in terms of sharing norms and experiences. It is about having corresponding worldviews, which gives substance to conversations and likewise to social relations and friendships. This is not an uncommon notion: the thesis that (attitudinal) 'similarity attracts' has been widely accepted in social psychology for a long time (Berscheid and Walster 1969; Byrne 1961). People seek validation of their attitudes, and people who hold similar opinions and beliefs provide this validation. We could say that the confirmation that one's own attitudes (which are related to who-you-are) are correct, that these attitudes are not labeled as deviant, affirms that one is 'normal'. Bourdieu describes the same mechanism in different terms. He argues that having a similar *habitus* – a set of grown, personal dispositions that guide one's behavior – increases attraction between people and leads to lasting social relationships, because it leads to a confirmation of one's attitudes (Bourdieu 2010 [1984]: 238; Web, Schirato and Danaher 2002).

What does this say about ethnicity? I will show that the similarity-attracts-thesis and thinking in terms of habitus explain both the irrelevance *and* the relevance of ethnicity. Let us listen Berkant when he talks about experiences of sameness and difference in two different neighborhoods.

When I was living in Zeeburg with my family, which is basically a yuppie neighborhood – I think we were the only Turkish family there – we interacted with EVERYONE. Because they were the same 'social layer'. These were people who had similar experiences and with whom we could share ours. Ethnicity was not an issue whatsoever. Later we moved to Amsterdam-North, where we ended up in an immigrant neighborhood. There we interacted with NO ONE. Because we were just in a separate social layer. Highly educated... and my wife did not wear a headscarf at all – she even is antipathetic to headscarves. And then... after day ONE – it's that quick – even the neighbor across the street, who was a Moroccan man, would not even look at us! This makes you think: based on ethnicity we are supposed to fit in here. But you have NOTHING to share. That makes you think: wow, ethnicity is much less important than one would think, much less than the social layer. (Berkant)

The idea that similarity attracts is often automatically translated into the folk wisdom that 'birds of a feather flock together'. However, caution is needed when this adage is blindly applied to social categories, such as ethnic categories, as is the case in groupist thinking, which presupposes strong bonds among an ethnic

‘ingroup’. Similarity is not determined by a single demographic feather. One’s habitus is only partly shaped by ethnicity. Other characteristics, such as socioeconomic class, also play a role in shaping experiences and worldviews and thereby form a basis for social bonds. Berkant’s worldview appears to be shaped more by his class and education level than by his minority ethnicity. The importance of socioeconomic class and education level does not only emerge in Berkant’s quote. In all the interviews where neighborhood preference was discussed, participants expressed a preference for middle-class neighborhoods – regardless of ethnic composition – rather than imagining themselves with their children in a neighborhood that was dominated by (low-class) ethnic minority neighbors.

We have seen in chapter 4 that the education level is related to one’s attitudes, one’s habitus. This is illustrated by the TIES data on gender-equality norms. When we look at the entire ethnic categories, the Moroccan Dutch respondents are much less progressive than the ethnic Dutch control group, and the Turkish Dutch are even less progressive than the Moroccan Dutch (see table 7.1 and figure 7.1). However, when for every category we look at the average scores for the lower and higher educated separately, we see that education level strongly influences the picture. In all three ethnic categories, the higher educated respondents are more progressive than the lower educated respondents. The higher educated Moroccan and Turkish Dutch respondents are more liberal than the lower educated of the control group. This not only illustrates the stronger impact of education level on shaping these gender norms than ethnicity, per se, but also suggests that groupist thinking in terms of ethnicity obscures characteristics that might be more relevant in this respect, such as education level.

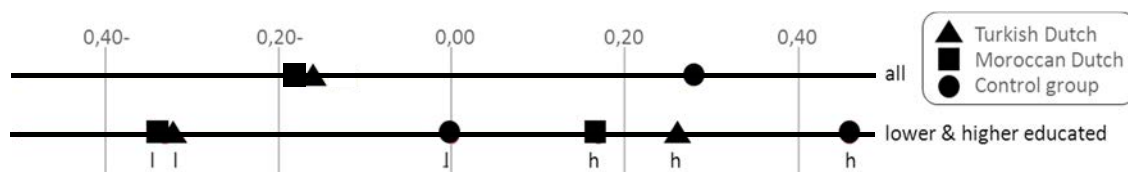
**Table 7.1 Gender-equality norms compared (means per ethnic category and subsection)<sup>1</sup>**

	Turkish Dutch	Moroccan Dutch	Control group
All	-0.16	-0.18	0.28
Lower educated	-0.32	-0.33	0.00
Higher educated (HBO+)	0.26	0.17	0.46

1) Only respondents with a mono-ethnic background

Source: TIES survey for the Netherlands, 2007, NIDI and IMES

**Figure 7.1 Gender-equality norms compared (schematic presentation of table 7.1)**



Considering the effect of education level on habitus and considering the role of habitus in forming social bonds, it is not surprising that education level appears also more important than ethnicity in forming friendships. All participants report that they have close friendships (almost) exclusively with higher educated people and not exclusively with people of the same ethnicity. The observation that the second generation higher educated Moroccan and Turkish Dutch have more friendships with co-educated than with co-ethnic peers is supported by the quantitative TIES data. Second generation respondents with university level education (either attending or having completed their studies at the time of the survey) more often have only co-educated best friends than only co-ethnic best friends. When asked about the ethnicity of their three best friends, 20 percent of Turkish Dutch university-educated respondents answered they had only Turkish Dutch best friends (see table 7.2). It was more common that respondents only had friends with high education levels. When asked about the education level of their three best friends, twice as many of the the Turkish Dutch university-educated respondents (40%) indicated they had only higher educated friends (HBO and university). Among the Moroccan Dutch university educated respondents, these shares were 26 and 43 percent.

**Table 7.2 University educated respondents with three best friends that are all co-ethnic or all co-educated (percentage per ethnic category)<sup>1</sup>**

University educated respondents (at university or having completed)		% that has three best friends that are all...	
Moroccan Dutch	(N=31)	...co-ethnic	26% (not all three co-ethn: 74%)
	(N=28)	...co-educated	43% (not all three co-educ: 57%)
Turkish Dutch	(N=35)	...co-ethnic	20% (not all three co-ethn: 80%)
	(N=30)	...co-educated	40% (not all three co-educ: 60%)

1) Only respondents with a mono-ethnic background

Source: TIES survey for the Netherlands, 2007, NIDI and IMES

Even though 'ethnic background' is often regarded as the feather that naturally makes people flock together, the findings show that (1) sharing an ethnic minority background does not automatically make people flock together, and (2) ethnic background is not the primary characteristic making people flock together. Apparently, sharing a high education level influences one's experiences and worldview (one's habitus) more strongly than merely sharing one's Moroccan or Turkish background.

This discussion of similarity and social categories brings us back from the psychology of interpersonal attraction to the more sociological perspective. Individual experiences and personal worldviews are connected to social structures and to the organization of society into social categories and certain arenas (*fields*). This makes Bourdieu's concept of habitus especially useful, as it

connects individual dispositions with social structures. Wacquant summarizes Bourdieu's ideas:

Habitus designates the system of durable and transposable *dispositions* through which we perceive, judge, and act in the world. These unconscious schemata are acquired through lasting exposure to particular social conditions and conditionings, via the internalization of external constraints and possibilities. This means that they are shared by people subjected to similar experiences even as each person has a unique individual variant of the common matrix (this is why individuals of like nationality, class, gender, etc., spontaneously feel "at home" with one another). It implies also that these systems of dispositions are malleable, since they inscribe into the body the evolving influence of the social milieu, but within the limits set by primary (or earlier) experiences, since it is habitus itself which at every moment filters such influence. Thus the layering of the schemata that together compose habitus displays varying degrees of integration (subproletarians typically have a disjointed habitus mirroring their irregular conditions of living while persons experiencing transnational migration or undergoing great social mobility often possess segmented or conflictive dispositional sets). (...) [Habitus] can be modified through the acquisition of new dispositions and because it can trigger innovation whenever it encounters a social setting discrepant with the setting from which it issues. (Wacquant 2008, p. 267-268, italics in original, underlining MS)

In other words, the habitus of an individual is shaped by one's personal experiences, which are the consequences of one's particular position in a societal arena or field. Every field has a certain structure and certain playing rules. People who occupy similar positions in societal fields are likely to have a largely similar habitus, which enhances their feelings of social connection, their 'feeling at home' with one another. One's position in a certain field is influenced by demographic characteristics that have attained societal relevance in that field. For example, we saw that having a Moroccan or Turkish ethnicity influences how one is approached by ethnic Dutch, thus affecting one's position in ethnic Dutch arenas. Therefore, having a Moroccan or Turkish ethnicity affects one's experiences and worldview in that arena in a certain way. That is why feelings of social connection are often influenced by one's demographic characteristics. These feelings do not (purely) express an instinctive sense of solidarity with others who belong to the same demographic category, but exist because these others have very similar positions and a comparable habitus. In short, *if* birds of a feather flock together, this is not because of their feathers per se, but because of their shared experiences and shared worldview. The empirical data showed that not only ethnic feathers play a role in shaping habitus and making people flock together, but education level as well (and even more so).

### **Sameness. Co-ethnic co-educated soulmates flock together**

This prevalence of education level over ethnicity does not mean that ethnicity does not play a role. In fact, the accounts of the university phase show that ethnicity matters a great deal for shaping social bonds. Although participants had more co-educated than co-ethnic friends, peers who were *both* co-ethnic and co-educational appeared to be real soulmates. Among those peers, unprecedented levels of understanding existed because of the combination of their shared ethnic backgrounds and educational trajectories. For example, they all knew what it meant to experience differential treatment, they all shared a progressive mentality that separated them from lower educated co-ethnics, and they all experienced pressure from their parents to succeed and to remain 'good' Moroccans or Turks at the same time.

The role of sameness contributes to our understanding of processes of ethnic identity formation. Based on my findings, we can extend the current explanations for the resurgence of ethnic identity at university, a resurgence that is also observed in other cases. Waters (1996) discusses heightened ethnic identifications among both 'black' and 'white' students in college, and explains this by referring to the confrontation with difference. She argues that interacting with people who are different makes 'individuals realize the ways in which their backgrounds may influence their individual personality' (1996). My findings indicate that for the Moroccan and Turkish Dutch climbers, it was not the confrontation with difference but with commonality that made them realize the ways in which their ethnic backgrounds had influenced their lives.

Min and Kim's study among Asian American professionals (2000) confirms the importance of similarity for the resurgence of ethnic identification, but my findings still add to their explanation. The young Asian American professionals in their study report experiences that are very similar to those of participants in my study. The Asian Americans downplayed their ethnicity in their youth because of active exclusion at their predominantly 'white' schools. As children, they 'resisted learning their ethnic languages and cultures', 'preferring to identify themselves as Americans', which stemmed 'from the pressure to be "normal"' (p. 745). Later, 'the college environment helped to strengthen their ethnic and pan-Asian identities' (p. 743), as at college many of them had more frequent interactions with co-ethnic peers. The Asian American students saw college as a way 'to escape from the demands of their parent's cultural expectations'; while, paradoxically, it is at college that many of them 'developed an interest and pride in their ethnic subculture' (p. 745). An 'evolution' of their ethnic identity took place; it was a phase of exploration and they took increasing pride in their ethnicity. The young professionals 'generally grew to appreciate their bicultural heritage' (p. 746). They were 'acculturated into the white mainstream culture as higher educated professionals', and they are also 'strongly attached to their



ethnic subculture and binational in their loyalty and identity' (p. 750). Min and Kim seek explanations for the resurgence of ethnic identification in the way colleges nurture the Asian ethnicity and the large presence of Asian American students. However, the findings of my study show that it is not merely similarity in ethnic terms (the presence of co-ethnic peers) that helps such students form a fitting ethnic identification at university, as Min and Kim argue, rather it is similarity in both ethnic *and* educational terms. Contrary to the case studied by Min and Kim, when the second generation Moroccan and Turkish Dutch entered university, there were no large numbers of co-ethnic peers, nor did university curricula support a fostering of Moroccan or Turkish identity. The interviews showed that the mutual understanding was not based on merely shared ethnic backgrounds but rather on a combination of shared ethnic backgrounds and shared processes of social mobility. Issues that participants found important (such as having a progressive mentality, receiving a disappointingly low secondary-school advising, experiencing pressure from parents to be successful and to remain or become a 'good' Moroccan or Turk at the same time) were only grounds for mutual understanding among co-ethnic peers who experienced comparable processes of social mobility.

Using Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and field, these social bonds are easy to explain. In Wacquant's terms, we can say that these co-ethnic, co-educated soulmates feel 'at home' with one another because they share the intersection of two demographic characteristics. They share the specific 'layering' of having Moroccan or Turkish immigrant parents and being highly educationally mobile. They have comparable 'segmented' or even 'conflictive' 'dispositional sets', which are either useful in the co-ethnic field or in the field of work or higher education. In other words: they are soulmates because they occupy comparable social positions in various fields and have been through comparable social trajectories, which resulted in a highly similar habitus. They all grew up in immigrant families, with low educated parents who migrated from Morocco or Turkey to the Netherlands, and they all went through a trajectory of large educational mobility in predominantly 'white' contexts in the same period. They have developed similar sets of specific skills and attitudes, which they employ in different contexts.

The findings show that this common ground, this mutual recognition, helps higher educated ethnic minority members develop a positive relation to their ethnicity. In the case of minorities that hitherto predominantly occupied lower social strata, the meaning of ethnicity in the higher educated context still needs to be shaped. Until then, the ethnic identity has been primarily constructed in relation to lower-class immigrants and does not feel entirely fitting to higher educated members of the second generation. Their particular situation meant that for the higher educated Turkish and Moroccan Dutch of the (early) second

generation, no fitting ethnic identification was yet available. They were the first in their ethnic categories to reach these positions. They were pioneers in their ethnic groups. The soulmate spaces formed a favorable context for jointly developing a comfortable relationship with their ethnicity, given their shared education levels. These spaces provided a favorable context to reinvent their ethnic identification. Not only was there a *reassertion* of ethnic identity after a period during which this ethnic identity had been downplayed or was simply irrelevant, but the participants also *reshaped* their ethnic identity to fit their higher education levels.

### **7.3 Reinvention of ethnic identification and 'minority middle-class capital'**

In this section I compare the previous findings with literature that describes the specificities of the positions and trajectories of other minority climbers. The broad similarities indicate that many aspects of the exposed trajectory are not unique to second generation Moroccan and Turkish Dutch climbers. The trajectory of reinvention as described among the second generation Moroccan and Turkish Dutch climbers in this study resonates with what is called a 'minority culture of mobility' (but what I refer to 'minority middle-class capital'), both in the underlying causes and the social effects.

#### **The underlying causes: distinctive challenges of minority climbers**

We have seen that the specific intersection of ethnicity and education level results in high levels of sameness and mutual understanding among minority climbers. Both in the professional field, dominated by the ethnic majority, and in the co-ethnic field, dominated by the lower educated, minority climbers occupy positions and encounter challenges that are unique to higher educated individuals with a minority background. Empirical studies on various groups in various settings (mostly in the United States) show that these experiences do not only apply to the second generation Moroccan and Turkish Dutch climbers but also to other minority climbers in other contexts. I first discuss the literature and then make the comparison with my findings.

The climbers' tendency to maneuver in *field of the middle class* sets them apart from lower-educated co-ethnics (Neckerman, Carter and Lee 1999). As the middle-class field is dominated by the ethnic majority, in their school and work environments, the minority climbers have more frequent contacts with 'whites' than lower-class co-ethnics have. Therefore, they encounter distinctive forms of social exclusion, often more subtle (ibid.). For example, middle-class Mexican Americans are not seen as bona fide members of the middle class (Agius Vallejo, 2012). They encounter rigid boundaries, which materialize for example when one

is seen as a spokesperson for the entire ethnic category or as an expert on migration issues, or when one is asked what (s)he thinks of the deviant behavior of arbitrary co-ethnics. Haitian African middle-class youth report feelings of being-the-only-one and tokenism (Clerge 2014). In fact, many middle-class ethnic minorities have a 'subtle, global feeling of being different' (Torres 2009: 891). Feelings of exclusion are often accompanied by feelings of isolation and loneliness (Neckerman et al 1999) or even deep dissatisfaction and cynicism (Cole and Omari 2003).

In order to function in the professional field, minority climbers need to acquire 'white middle-class cultural capital',<sup>iii</sup> which requires a high level of sociocultural assimilation (Carter 2003). They need to learn business norms and rituals that are dominant, such as speech patterns, dress and business etiquette (Agius Vallejo 2009, 2012). Another purpose of employing majority middle-class cultural capital is to combat the negative stigma of the ethnic label by showing the erroneousness of stereotypical assumptions and the avoidance of 'stock stories' (typical stories that exemplify and affirm stereotypical images) (Agius Vallejo 2009). Sometimes individuals emphasize their middle-class identities to distance themselves from negative images (Clerge 2014). However, the employment of majority middle-class capital does not mean that minority climbers see themselves as 'white'. Others see them as non-white, and they see themselves as non-white. That does not mean however that they do not see themselves as middle-class.

This description of the professional environments of the minority climbers partly parallels what we have learnt about the second generation Moroccan and Turkish Dutch climbers in the previous chapter. For most participants their professional middle-class environment indeed is predominantly 'white'. The Moroccan and Turkish Dutch participants also mention moments when ethnic boundaries materialize and when they feel 'Othered' because of their ethnic background. They wearily recount of moments when they are singled out as 'Moroccan', 'Turkish' or 'Muslim', or when they are uncomfortably set apart as a 'positive' exception. However, most of the participants do not seem to feel strongly excluded in their direct working environment and they do not report many instances that they unambiguously label as discrimination. They employ 'white' cultural capital in similar ways as described in the literature: they highlight their successful position in combination with their ethnicity to prove negative stereotypes wrong.

With regard to the maneuvering in the middle-class professional field, they stress their versatility and flexibility as the result of lifelong switching between fields and behavioral codes.

(...) I think, over time, I have learned – and I think many people have, those with a Moroccan or Turkish background – that they have learned to be VERY flexible. That you just learned to adapt. I think, your abilities have to be adaptive – um, I mean: When you are at home – well, it's not that you're a completely different person, but you learn to deal with various contexts. You learn how to behave in various ways, knowing what behavior is accepted and what is not. (Said)

The unfamiliarity with the middle-class behavioral codes is not a significant theme in the interviews. A few participants, such as Karim, experienced a gap because of their alcohol abstinence. Furthermore, Hind explained that the student fraternity, with its boisterous atmosphere, somewhat prepared her for her life at a consultancy firm, which has a climate that is largely comparable to the fraternity. She also mentioned that many of the second generation do not understand the importance of extracurricular activities for their careers.

In relation to the gap between the climbers with ethnic minority backgrounds and the middle-class capital, it is important to note the relevance of their low socioeconomic backgrounds. We saw that in their (occasional) unease, ethnic minority climbers resemble ethnic majority climbers, indicating that feelings of non-belonging are partly caused by their low socioeconomic backgrounds. This is also observed by other scholars. Torres argues that the gap that black students at an elite college experience with the 'white' students is primarily related to their low socioeconomic backgrounds (Torres 2009) (see also Cole & Omari 2003 and Agius Vallejo 2012). Unfamiliarity with 'white' middle-class behavioral codes and feelings of incompetence of ethnic minority climbers, are consequences of both the ethnic minority and lower socioeconomic background.

The second class of challenges relates to interactions with lower educated people in the *co-ethnic field*. Minority middle-class individuals have interclass encounters far more frequently than majority middle-class individuals (Neckerman et al 1999; Agius Vallejo and Lee 2009). Their family often is lower-class, as is the bulk of the co-ethnic community, which often functions as some sort of extended family. (Fordham (1988) calls this 'fictive kinship'). Relatively often, minority climbers live in class-diverse neighborhoods and participate in class-diverse organizations. Lower-class co-ethnics can exert strong claims for co-ethnic loyalty and assistance. The practice of 'giving back', comprised of (financial) support to family and other co-ethnics, is apparent among various middle-class minorities (Neckerman et al 1999; Agius Vallejo and Lee 2009). Strong co-ethnic solidarity can exist, for example among African Americans, because of a linked fate due to the racialization of identities, or among the adult children of Latino Americans due to the responsibility they feel towards their parents, which is framed in terms of an 'immigrant narrative of struggle and sacrifice' (Agius Vallejo and Lee 2009). These Latino American climbers attribute

their success to the major sacrifices their parents made for the future of their children. They not only help their parents financially but also through 'cultural brokerage', by supporting their parents in their interactions with the ethnic majority.

Middle-class majority capital is often not valued in the lower-class minority setting, where recognition and acceptance are based on the employment of ethnic minority capital (Carter 2003). As we have read before, in many minority fields, being middle-class and participating in the mainstream economy are denounced, and ethnic minority identities are constructed in opposition to the majority identity as ways to foster intra-ethnic cohesion and solidarity (Song 2003). Depending on dominant ideas about the 'authentic' ethnic identity, there is pressure to behave 'authentic' and avoid 'acting white'. Neckerman and colleagues cite Fordham and Ogbu (1986):

[M]inority oppositional culture racially codes behaviour and styles (...) Such judgments fall heavily on middle-class minorities, who in order to be successful must adopt behaviours and styles coded as "acting white". Minority oppositional culture is reflected in peer pressure not to adopt these behaviours and styles; it can also lead to deep ambivalence about identity. (Neckerman, Carter and Lee 1999: 951)

This particularly applies to the United States because of their history of strong racial inequality. Steele reflects on 'the double bind of middle-class blacks' (1988). The equation of being black with victimization and being lower class required middle-class blacks to 'repress' one dimension 'to appease the other' (p. 43). Steele describes his personal experience of lacking a black identification that does justice to his middle-class status:

As a middle-class black I have often felt myself *contriving* to be 'black'. And I have noticed this same contrivance in others – a certain stretching away from the natural flow of one's life to align oneself with a victim-focused black identity. Or particular needs are out of sync with the form of identity available to meet those needs. (Steele 1988: 43, italics in original)

However, the opposition is not always as deep as Fordham and Ogbu suggest. This oppositional norm is spread less widely than they assume. Several studies show that not all oppositional stances reject educational achievement. Carter (2006) shows that individuals who oppose assimilation (and 'acting white') do not automatically oppose educational achievement and social mobility. Furthermore, critical elements of an oppositional mentality are not only shared by lower educated ethnic minority members, but are sometimes also shared by the higher educated members. Latino and African American students develop academic identities in which they on the one hand acknowledge the importance of

academic achievement for occupational success, while they develop a reflective and critical attitude towards the achievement ideology at the same time (Mechan, Hubbard and Villanueva, 1994).

Also the Moroccan and Turkish Dutch participants have frequent interclass encounters with co-ethnics. As we have read in the previous chapter, they describe a co-ethnic solidarity and a responsibility towards their parents, which they express in a comparable 'immigrant narrative of struggle and sacrifice'. Many also feel a broader responsibility towards the co-ethnic next generation, leading to practices of 'giving back', whether or not within their immediate families. Furthermore, in some interviews, participants mention the judgmental character of some co-ethnics with regard to success or being 'too assimilated'. At the same time, the interviews also show that in these ethnic minority fields, there are not solely critical, oppositional voices. Nearly all participants were raised by parents who stressed the importance of education and who are really proud of their children's achievements. Some participants describe how their success was even beneficial and 'gave them extra credits', also in the co-ethnic field.

### **The result: a 'minority culture of mobility'**

The joint reinvention of ethnic identity among minority social climbers (the reassertion of an ethnic identity that is adapted to fit the newly achieved middle-class status) echoes the idea of a 'minority culture of mobility' introduced by Neckerman, Carter and Lee (1999). These authors argue that the distinctive challenges that result from the intersection of minority ethnicity and a high education level lead ethnic minority climbers to develop their own solutions. They call these solutions: elements of a 'minority culture of mobility'. The implications are illustrated by several empirical studies on minority middle classes (see the studies of Mehan, Hubbard, Villanueva 1994; Carter 2003, 2006; Lacy 2004, 2007; Agius Vallejo 2009, 2012; Agius Vallejo and Lee 2009; Torres 2009; Clerge 2014 – all in the United States). These studies show that minority middle-class spaces emerge, which Lacy (2004) calls 'black spaces', such as gatherings, networks and organizations. These are places where minority middle-class members come together. Here, they are protected from discrimination. Here, they can share stories about discriminatory encounters with people who personally recognize your experiences. They feel like 'fish in the water', they can 'derobe' and switch to co-ethnic interactional and symbolic styles, to styles and preferences that are familiar to these climbers because they grew up with them. For example, many middle-class Mexican Americans occasionally like to speak 'Spanglish', dance salsa and watch Spanish movies. Professional minority associations offer ways of increasing middle-class cultural capital and social capital, offering a range of business trainings and access to (minority and majority) networks. At the same time, these spaces foster 'ethnic' cultural capital by (re-)creating principles of interaction with co-ethnics – such as practices of

‘giving back’ – and by offering places where minority climbers can jointly create fitting ethnic identifications and develop pride with regard to their low-class ethnic backgrounds.

Lee and Kramer (2013) explain how changes to habitus due to social mobility lead to the reformulation of identities. Among the students with lower-class backgrounds they studied, they observe that the ‘schism between their new, hybrid habitus and the community’s working-class habitus does not mean those students no longer identify as working class but rather that their new habitus changes how and what identifying as working class means to them and to others’ (p. 4). Brands’ study illustrates how this works among ethnic Dutch climbers (1992). These climbers create what Brands calls their ‘personal project’ (*‘het eigen project’*). They create their own story, which defines how they see their lives; how they can relate to the cultural capital that is dominant in school and work and how they can distance themselves from their parents without completely severing the bond. They create a new identity that defines their position, both in the fields of school and work as well as in the field of their low-class family. This identity is an answer to the ever-slumbering doubt: ‘do I belong here?’ (*‘Hoor ik hier wel thuis?’*) (p. 272). This identity is not detached from their home-culture but rests upon the norms, attitudes and habits of their parents’ lower class (p. 282). The personal project at the same time helps to distance oneself from one’s youth and one’s home, and helps to cultivate their background and the relationship with their parents. It is some sort of self-justification for one’s changed position. It is a way to leave behind their home-culture and their parents while at the same time to take these along.

We observe a similar phenomenon among the Moroccan and Turkish Dutch climbers in my study. Among their soulmates, in these ‘black spaces’ or ‘soulmate-spaces’, processes of conjoint interpretation seem to occur; processes of making sense of the world and of their experiences in the world. In the interviews, I see this reflected in the repeated emphasis on the deep levels of mutual understanding, and even more in the fact that most respondents experienced this understanding as astounding. The terms ‘sudden’ and ‘revelation’ refer to an unexpected commonality among these co-ethnic co-educated peers. This indicates that they suddenly feel that their individual experiences are not subjective and unique, but are related to their specific social positions as educational climbers with ethnic minority backgrounds. Together, they discover what it means to be a higher educated Moroccan or Turkish Dutch. They do not apply new labels, nor do they (as adults) distance themselves from the ethnic labels, but rather they explore and redefine what being ‘Moroccan’ and ‘Turkish’ means to them as higher educated. They (now) know how to identify as ‘Moroccan’ or ‘Turkish’ even though, for example, their religiosity changed, they are fluent in Dutch, they are more oriented towards the Netherlands than

towards Morocco and Turkey, and they have middle-class ('Dutch') patterns of expenditure, clothing and holidays.

The idea of a 'minority culture of mobility' that is developed and fostered in middle-class minority spaces parallels the 'reinvention' of ethnic identification that I describe among the Moroccan and Turkish Dutch climbers, who crafted their own ways of dealing with their ethnicity. One central parallel is that minority climbers choose not to fully assimilate into the ethnic majority middle-class, but to become middle-class while articulating their ethnic minority identities. The changed habitus of these Moroccan and Turkish Dutch climbers did not lead to an assimilative identification as 'white' or 'native' or exclusively 'Dutch'. The second resemblance is that the minority climbers do not turn to 'retention' of lower-class ethnic identities and merely adopt common co-ethnic images and common co-ethnic capital, but they adapt their ethnic identities to the achieved middle-class status and create new subcultural elements. The Moroccan and Turkish Dutch climbers chose to articulate their minority identities in their own, reinvented ways that fit their higher education levels. The third central resemblance is the importance of co-educational (or co-class) co-ethnics, as the reinvention of identity and subcultural elements is not something done alone. Large shares of the social networks of the Moroccan and Turkish Dutch climbers consist of co-ethnic, co-educated soulmates, who understand their experiences and their life worlds better than anyone. Many participants became members of co-ethnic student organizations or professional organizations, which in several cases they helped to found. A difference between the Dutch case and the theory of Neckerman and colleagues is that in the case of the United States, a middle class with a minority background (of African Americans) already has formed, as a destination for assimilation for other minority groups. In the case of the Moroccan and Turkish Dutch pioneering climbers, however, no such minority cultures of mobility were available to tap into, which they therefore had to create themselves.

### **'Minority middle-class capital'**

I have two objections to the term 'minority culture of mobility'. The first is that the term 'culture' in daily practice has essentialist connotations, implying homogeneity and boundedness. To refer to someone's 'culture' implies that he has norms, attitudes and habits that are particular for a specific category. I object to this presentation, as a minority culture of mobility does not develop as result of separateness and particularity, but emerges from the attempt to combine and connect various fields and dispositions. Although it is a particular effort of a particular group of middle-class ethnic minority individuals, their aim is – while fostering their own uniqueness – to connect with and participate in the middle-class ethnic majority field as well as the lower-class co-ethnic field. Secondly, the affix 'of mobility' seems to imply that this culture aims to enhance mobility,



whereas, how I see it, the subculture develops especially to *deal with* achieved social mobility. Although ‘minority culture of mobility’ is a coined concept in the scholastic literature, I prefer to use ‘minority middle-class capital’.

#### 7.4 Summary and reflection

In the first section we saw that ethnic and national identifications are not static over time. Many of the higher educated second generation participants have struggled with their identifications and with their self-confidence. Experiences of exclusion made them want to downplay their ethnicity. Over time, their self-confidence increased in parallel with increasing feelings of belonging. Slowly increasing feelings of ‘pride’ led them to gradually explore and articulate their ethnic identity. They needed to free themselves from the imposition of a mono-identity and from negative and low-class images of ‘Moroccan’ and ‘Turkish’. They developed a way of ethnic identification that fit their higher education levels, and is combined with feeling ‘Dutch’.

This resurgence of ethnicity occurred in joint effort with co-educated co-ethnic peers, who turned out to be real soulmates. It appears that it is not ethnicity, *per se*, that predominantly shapes one’s experiences and worldview (one’s habitus) and underlies close social bonds; in fact, most of the higher educated second generation participants felt stronger connections with people who share their education level and socioeconomic class than with those who share (only) their ethnic background. However, when at university they suddenly met people who shared *both* their education level *and* their ethnic background, this felt like an astounding revelation. With them, they felt unprecedented levels of understanding. Surprisingly, personal experiences turned out to be related to one’s ethnic background in combination with one’s educational trajectory. These co-ethnic climbers share a similar habitus, based upon the positions and trajectories within the various fields. In these soulmate spaces, they seem to discover what their ethnicity means to them. They reassert their ethnic identities and reinvent ways of relating to their ethnic backgrounds as higher educated.

Based on these findings, I suggest that in the Netherlands ‘minority middle-class capital’ is formed among middle-class people with an ethnic minority background. Even though their co-educated co-ethnic soulmates are clearly not their only friends and connections, for many higher educated ethnic minority members, they form important social circles. Instead of choosing fully assimilative ways of identification, they start to acknowledge the importance of their ethnicity jointly and develop ways of appreciating their ethnic side. This does not mean that they stick to the same rules as their parents, that they have similar worldviews as all co-ethnics, that they prefer Morocco and Turkey to the Netherlands and that they

only interact with co-ethnics. This does not preclude or threaten their feeling Dutch, interacting with Dutch and being oriented to Dutch society. Instead, it means that part of their experiences and part of their preferences are shaped by their Moroccan or Turkish background, by the immigrant history of their parents, by an Islamic upbringing and by their co-ethnic (extended) family. Failing to acknowledge their ethnic side, for many feels like a personal deprivation. They love their family, they value various norms and traditions that are associated with being 'Moroccan' and 'Turkish', they feel inspired by Islam in specific ways, they like visiting Morocco and Turkey and they feel responsible for co-ethnic youth who are still in a position of arrear and need information, a guiding hand and inspiring role models.