

Chapter 7

Trajectories of Reinvention. Soulmates and a ‘Minority Culture of Mobility’



How do identifications develop over one’s lifetime? What underlies social bonds, and what role do co-educated coethnic peers play? Can we speak of a ‘minority culture of mobility’ in the Netherlands?

As much as identifications are not constant between different contexts, the differences between the childhood and adult phase in the previous chapter, Chap. 6, indicate that identifications are also not static throughout one’s life course. In this chapter, I further explore how the participants’ ethnic identifications change throughout their life course.

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 light of the above extracts, Said’s current relation to his ethnic background is remarkably comfortable. Remember his quote, presented in Chap. 6, in which he emphasized that he highlights his Moroccan identity whenever he can. He stated:

I actually highlight it all the [time] – I am just PROUD of it (laughs apologetically but affirmatively).

Other participants’ stories have many parallels with Said’s story, which I further examine in this chapter. The stories suggest that ethnic identifications develop from childhood to adulthood in a certain way, through interaction with the process of social mobility (Sect. 7.1). The theme of social bonds with others—in particular with coethnic, co-educated ‘soulmates’—sheds light on the role of ‘similarity’ and on the socially constructed, yet substantive, influence of ethnic background (Sect. 7.2). In Sect. 7.3 I argue that the participants, together with their soulmates, shape a ‘minority culture of mobility’. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion (Sect. 7.4).

7.1 A Trajectory of Reinvention of Ethnic Identification¹

Most of the participants sketched a trajectory with roughly comparable phases. As we have seen in Chap. 6, during their childhood, many participants felt like strangers in the majority-dominated fields of their ‘white’ schools and neighborhoods. Their stories were dotted with memories of ‘feeling different’ and a longing to be accepted by others. Several explained how they internalized the hierarchical worldview and adopted the stereotypical ideas that Moroccans and Turkish are less intelligent. To avoid standing out and to be accepted as one of ‘us’, they wanted to downplay or conceal their ethnic identity.

For some participants, these feelings of being different extended into their secondary school phase, while 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

¹Parts of this section have been previously published in Slootman (2014).

him at that time. His self-confidence grew because he realized he was doing well and could be proud of himself.

As adults, the participants describe their current relationship to their ethnic background primarily in positive terms. All participants explicitly identify in ethnic terms (in combination with feeling Dutch). Furthermore, they recount having good relations with their parents and have many coethnic friends. Many show a social engagement that is inspired by their ethnic backgrounds. They contribute to bridging cultural differences or supporting the next generation of coethnics.

Some participants mentioned that in early adulthood, they increasingly felt the need to explore their ethnicity and reassert their ethnic identity. Their ethnicity more and more began to feel like a missing part of themselves. The following quotes from interviews with Hicham and Ahmed illustrate the importance they attach to their ethnic identity. They explain that disregard of their ‘ethnic sides’, resulting partially from their social mobility, 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:

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.²

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 –

The development of a positive relation to the ethnic label, that is, of a pleasant ethnic identification, for many was neither a smooth nor a straightforward process. Most of the participants recount a struggle, which was complicated by external demands and imposed identities. This struggle is part of the struggle Bourdieu refers to when he describes an ongoing clash between worldviews, categorizations and

²Literally, he said: ‘*omdat ik veel meer behoefte had aan mijn Marokkaans-zijn*’.

hierarchies. The dominant classifications conflict with the participants' worldviews and their own positions. For example, we saw that participants experience an imposed 'mono-identity' that prevented them to identify in dual ways. Berkant describes his struggle. His quote furthermore shows the relief of having developed an identification that feels comfortable.

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 describe an 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 right was not at all straightforward.

In many of the interviews, a period emerged that was crucial in the development of a fitting ethnic identification: entering university and meeting students with a coethnic background. Said euphorically relates what it meant for him to suddenly meet coethnic 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 coethnic students, who were on the same 'wavelength'. There was this sudden, urgent need to share stories with people who had similar experiences. These coethnic students also had been 'the exception' in their environments, to use Said's words. These students had encountered identical problems, not just in their school environments, but also in their relations with coethnics. For Karim, meeting coethnic 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 coethnics), and were expected to pray and 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 coethnic students due to assumptions that these students would be as conservative as the coethnics they already knew, ultimately felt at ease among the coethnic 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. In short: their shared ethnic background—which shaped their positions in the various fields—in combination with the comparable trajectories they had taken through these fields, had shaped their *habitus* in similar ways.

These stories, characterized by a ‘sudden’ unprecedented understanding and described in terms such 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 coethnics. It is through this specific social interaction with coethnic 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 new ways of relating to the ethnic labels that are attuned to them as higher educated. Not only did they *reassert* their ethnic identity, after a phase in 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. They reinvented the ethnic identity.

Most probably, the widespread connotations of ‘Moroccan’ and ‘Turkish’ further complicated the development of a fitting identification for these social climbers. These ethnic labels are generally associated with disadvantage, not only in socio-economic terms but also regarding competencies. For example, as we saw, Moroccan Dutch and Turkish Dutch are often portrayed as less intelligent than the ethnic Dutch. These stereotypical notions were strengthened by the absence of coethnic role models embodying success in the Netherlands at the time that this early second generation grew up. After all, the participants were the first in their ethnic categories to reach these positions; they were pioneers in their respective ethnic groups. This means that what was considered typically ‘Moroccan’ and ‘Turkish’ in the Netherlands was primarily constructed in relation to the lower class. Their particular situation meant that for the higher-educated Turkish Dutch and Moroccan Dutch of the early second generation, no suitable ethnic identification was yet available.

Song refers to a similar phenomenon and argues that minorities need to ‘deprogramme’ the self (Song 2003, p. 211–212). She explains that for second-generation Chinese in Britain and Vietnamese in America, after a period of shame during childhood that made them distance themselves from their ethnic backgrounds, it took a while to revalue and embrace their families’ ethnic heritage when they attempted to free themselves from internalized ‘white’ views.

The interviews suggest that not only do internalized ‘white’ views need to be unlearned, but so do images that are dominant among coethnics. 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 coethnic communities, for example about leaving the parental home to attend a distant university. Some participants reported that coethnics were extremely critical of the high social positions of other coethnics, whom they disparaged 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. In other words, it was hard for them, being higher-educated and middle-class, to establish ‘ethnic authenticity’. The absence of higher-educated coethnic predecessors also meant that there was no alternative Moroccan or Turkish identification available in the Netherlands that fit the participants’ higher education levels. This explains why meeting coethnic students felt like a revelation and why, in this context, the role of ethnicity suddenly fell into place. They worked jointly on reshaping their ethnic identities to make the labels ‘Moroccan’ and ‘Turkish’ feel applicable to themselves, their higher education levels, and their bicultural identification.

Besides the role of the coethnic co-educated soulmates, another aspect seemed to facilitate the development of a fitting ethnic identification: recognition, or belonging. Contrary to the psychological model that a fitting identification—or what psychologists call an ‘achieved identity’—leads to self-confidence and wellbeing (Marcia 1980; Phinney 1989), the stories show that for these participants, it is also the other way around. The self-confidence and recognition that came with feelings of belonging lead them to develop a fitting ethnic identification—or as some respondents formulate it, to develop ‘pride’ in their ethnic background. Although I have excluded Nathalie’s interview from the book because of her mixed ethnic background, I use a quote from that interview here, because no other respondent explains this process as clearly as she does:

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 YEARRRRS 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—based in belonging, in not-feeling like a stranger—to explore and articulate one’s minority identity instead of choosing full assimilation and seamlessly blending into the majority. For some participants, this self-confidence seems to be grounded in their religiosity, which for them serves as an anchor. For others, this self-confidence is strengthened by their one’s social mobility, which for them forms a ground for belonging. If we look at this mechanism through Bourdieu’s lens, we see—in line with previous findings—that social mobility provides the minority climbers with symbolic capital that enables them to more confidently claim a position in the system of categorizations. Their social mobility strengthens their position in the struggle about the meaning of the

social world and their position in it, that is, the meaning of their social identity, although it is not entirely clear if this is acknowledged as symbolic capital by other people. (This process can also be described in relation to social-psychological literature, see Sloodman 2017).

In short, although the participants' stories vary somewhat, the commonalities between many of the interviews are substantial. 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. In early adulthood, after reaching high education levels, many of the social climbers started reasserting their ethnic identities. It seems as if they needed to reshape the meaning of the ethnic labels in accordance with their achieved positions. They did so jointly with coethnic co-educated peers at university, among whom they felt unprecedented levels of understanding. In their later lives, for the most part, their ethnic identifications had become important and valued parts of themselves which the participants articulate in certain contexts at certain moments; in nearly all cases, this was in combination with a self-identification as Dutch.

7.2 Sameness and the Relevance of 'Ethnic Feathers'

Sameness and Habitus

In the participants' accounts, the ideas of difference and sameness emerge as a central theme. How the participants experience and value sameness further elucidates the relevance of their ethnic background. In Chap. 6, we have seen the intensity of experiences of difference and non-belonging. In this section I explore experiences and interpretations of 'sameness'. I start with three quotes that show the centrality of sameness in how participants reflect on their social bonds.

(...) 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)

These participants describe their connection with friends in terms of sharing norms and experiences. Apparently, similarity is about having corresponding world-views, which gives substance to conversations and likewise to social relations and friendships. In other words, experiencing 'sameness' is about sharing a habitus. This supports Bourdieu's argument that a similar habitus increases affiliations between people.

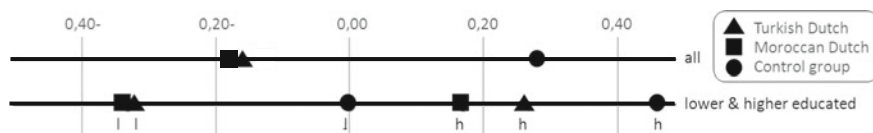


Fig. 7.1 Gender equality norms compared (schematic presentation of Table 7.1)

Sameness, Ethnic Background and Education Level

Like Aysel, Berkant does not in the first instance relate this sameness in worldview to ethnic background:

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)

Apparently, Berkant’s habitus is shaped more by his class and education level than by his ethnic background. The importance of socioeconomic class and education level does not emerge only in Berkant’s response. In all the interviews where neighborhood preference was discussed, participants preferred middle-class neighborhoods—regardless of ethnic composition—to neighborhoods that are dominated by (low-class) ethnic-minority residents.

The idea that class, or education, has a larger impact on the habitus of these minority climbers than ethnic background is supported by the survey data. The survey data on gender norms illustrate that this idea reflects a broader trend. When we compare the ethnic categories of TIES respondents, 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 (Table 7.1 and Fig. 7.1). However, when for every ethnic 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-Dutch and Turkish-Dutch respondents are more liberal than the lower educated respondents of the control group. This not only illustrates the stronger impact of education level on shaping these gender norms than ethnic background 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.

Considering the effect of education on habitus—gender norms in particular—it is not surprising that education level also appears to be more important than ethnic

Table 7.1 Gender equality norms compared (means per ethnic category and subsection)

	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

Data TIES survey for the Netherlands, 2007, NIDI and IMES

Only respondents with a mono-ethnic background

Table 7.2 University-educated respondents with three best friends who are all coethnic or all co-educated (% per ethnic category)

		% that has three best friends who are all...	
Moroccan Dutch	(N = 31)	...coethnic	26% (not all three coethn.: 74%)
	(N = 28)	...co-educated	43% (not all three co-educ.: 57%)
Turkish Dutch	(N = 35)	...coethnic	20% (not all three coethn.: 80%)
	(N = 30)	...co-educated	40% (not all three co-educ.: 60%)

Data TIES survey for the Netherlands, 2007, NIDI and IMES

Only respondents with a mono-ethnic background, who are at university or graduated from university

background for friendships, as the qualitative and the quantitative data show. All interview participants report that they have close friendships almost exclusively with higher-educated people, and not exclusively with people of the same ethnic background. In parallel, the higher-educated Moroccan-Dutch and Turkish-Dutch TIES respondents more often have co-educated best friends than coethnic best friends. When asked about the ethnic background of their three best friends, 20% of Turkish-Dutch university-educated respondents answered they only had Turkish-Dutch best friends (Table 7.2). When asked about the education level of their three best friends, 40% of the Turkish-Dutch university-educated respondents indicated they had only higher-educated friends (HBO and university). Of the Moroccan-Dutch university-educated respondents, 26% had three coethnic best friends whereas 43% had three co-educated best friends.

The idea that similarity attracts, which has been demonstrated by psychologists (Berscheid and Walster 1969, Byrne 1961) is often translated into the folk wisdom that ‘birds of a feather flock together’. This adage is often blindly applied to ethnic categories; ethnic background is regarded as the feather that naturally makes people flock together. The findings however show that sharing an ethnic-minority background does not automatically make people flock together, and that ethnic background is not the primary characteristic making people flock together. Similarity is not determined by a single demographic feather. One’s habitus is only partly shaped by ethnic background. Individuals’ experiences and worldview are connected with their positions in specific fields, which are the result of an entire intersectional range of characteristics, including socioeconomic class. As we have seen, the influence of education even seems greater than that of ethnic background. The educational feather seems brighter than the ethnic feather.

Bourdieu's concepts enable us to describe the relevance of social identities while avoiding the essentialist trap. When a certain ethnic background strongly binds people, it does so because this ethnic background shapes people's experiences and perceptions (and thus their habitus) in distinctive ways. It is the societal relevance of ethnic background—the fact that it shapes people's positions in the various fields, and hence people's experiences—that makes it matter. For example, we saw that having a Moroccan or Turkish background influences how one is seen by ethnic Dutch, which affects one's position in ethnic-Dutch arenas, and thus one's experiences and one's habitus. Feelings of affiliation do not purely express an instinctive sense of solidarity with others who belong to the same demographic category, but exist because these others have 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.

I place a reflective remark here. Although Bourdieu describes the influence of social structures on the habitus and the influence of the habitus on feelings of belonging, his theory lacks a relevant mechanism. As I read Bourdieu, his theory does not account for the influence of social structures on feelings of belonging separate from the habitus. The participants' accounts show that they sometimes experience non-belonging despite a matching habitus, solely because they are labeled as outsiders by social others.

Sameness and the Intersection of Ethnic Background and Education

The prevalence of education level over ethnic background does not mean that ethnic background does not play a role. In fact, the accounts of the university phase show that ethnic background matters a great deal for shaping social bonds. Although participants had more co-educated than coethnic friends, peers who were *both* coethnic and co-educated appeared to be real soulmates. As we have read, among those peers, unprecedented levels of understanding existed because of the combination of their shared ethnic backgrounds and educational trajectories.

The importance of 'sameness' contributes to our understanding of processes of ethnic identity formation. The findings extend the current explanations for the resurgence of ethnic identity at university, a resurgence that is also observed in other cases. Waters (1996) describes the heightened ethnic identifications of both 'black' and 'white' students in college, and explains this with the sudden confrontation with difference. She argues that the interaction with people who are different makes 'individuals realize the ways in which their backgrounds may influence their individual personality' (1996). My findings indicate that, in the Dutch context—which is less ethnically/racially segregated than the American context—for the Moroccan-Dutch 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 of Asian American professionals (2000) confirms the importance of similarity for the resurgence of ethnic identification, although 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 ethnic identity 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', a preference that stemmed 'from the pressure to be "normal"' (p. 745). Later, 'the college environment helped strengthen their ethnic and pan-Asian identities' (p. 743) as at college many of them had more frequent interactions with coethnic 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 ethnic identity. 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 identity and the large presence of Asian American students.

Nevertheless, the findings of my study indicate that the development of a fitting ethnic identification is not merely stimulated by the presence of coethnic peers, but by the presence of peers who are coethnic *and* co-educated. The interviews showed that the mutual understanding was based on a combination of shared ethnic backgrounds and shared processes of social mobility. The issues that were important to the participants (such as having a progressive mentality, receiving a disappointingly low secondary-school advising, experiencing pressure from parents to be successful and remain or become a 'good' Moroccan or Turk at the same time) were only grounds for mutual understanding among coethnic peers who experienced comparable processes of social mobility.

Using Bourdieu's terms, we can say that these coethnic co-educated soulmates feel 'at home' with one another because they share the intersection of two socially-relevant 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 coethnic 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.

The findings show that this common ground, this mutual recognition, helps higher-educated ethnic-minority members develop a positive relation to their ethnic identity. As explained, the ethnic identity previously was primarily constructed in relation to lower-class immigrants. The soulmate spaces formed a favorable context for jointly developing a comfortable relationship with their ethnic identity, given their shared education levels. These spaces provided a favorable context to reinvent their ethnic identification.

7.3 Soulmate Spaces and a ‘Minority Culture of Mobility’

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-Dutch and Turkish-Dutch climbers. The trajectory of reinvention as described for the second-generation Moroccan-Dutch and Turkish-Dutch climbers in this study resonates with what is called a ‘minority culture of mobility’, both in the underlying causes and the social effects.

Distinctive Challenges of Minority Climbers

We have seen that the specific intersection of ethnic background and education level results in high levels of sameness and mutual understanding among minority climbers. In both the professional field, dominated by the ethnic majority, and in the coethnic field, dominated by the lower educated, minority climbers occupy positions and encounter challenges that are unique to higher-educated individuals with a minority background. These stories resonate with empirical studies on social climbers from various groups in various settings (mostly in the United States).

Literature on minority climbers describes how their position is distinctive in both the middle-class and coethnic fields. The climbers’ tendency to maneuver in the *field of the middle class* sets them apart from lower-educated coethnics (Neckerman et al. 1999). As the middle-class field is dominated by the ethnic majority, the minority climbers have more frequent contacts with ‘whites’ in their school and work environments than lower-class coethnics do. 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 they are seen as spokespersons for the entire ethnic category or as experts on migration issues or are asked what they think of the deviant behavior of arbitrary coethnics. 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, p. 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’, which requires a high level of sociocultural assimilation (Carter 2003).³ They need to learn the dominant business norms and rituals, such as certain speech patterns, dress, and business etiquette (Agius Vallejo

³Instead of ‘white middle-class cultural capital’, Carter (2003) uses ‘dominant cultural capital’ to distinguish this capital from the forms of cultural capital present in ethnic minority settings; she calls ‘non-dominant cultural capital’. With this distinction, she acknowledges the important fact that ethnic minority settings also have cultural capital. I avoid the term ‘dominant’ in reference to the ethnic majority mainstream, as what is ‘dominant’ differs per field and therefore is a relative term. (In ethnic minority settings, forms of ethnic minority capital are dominant).

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 avoiding 'stock stories', i.e., 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 use 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 in the literature partly parallels what we have read about the second-generation Moroccan-Dutch and Turkish-Dutch climbers in Chap. 6. For most participants their professional middle-class environment is indeed predominantly 'white'. The Moroccan-Dutch and Turkish-Dutch participants also mention moments when ethnic boundaries materialize and when they feel 'Othered' because of their ethnic background. They wearily recount 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 ethnic identity to prove negative stereotypes wrong.

With regard to the navigation of the middle-class professional field, the participants 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)

They refer to what is elsewhere called a 'reflexive habitus', or 'chameleon habitus' (Abrahams and Ingram 2013; Reay et al. 2009; Sweetman 2003), which might explain why lack of familiarity with middle-class behavioral codes is not a profound theme in the interviews of this study. A few participants, such as Karim, experienced a mismatch because of their alcohol abstinence. Furthermore, Hind explained that the student fraternity, with its boisterous atmosphere, somewhat prepared her for her job at a consultancy firm. She also mentioned that many of the second generation do not appreciate the importance of extracurricular activities for their careers.

In relation to the mismatch with the white middle-class capital, it is important to note the relevance of their low socioeconomic backgrounds. Although they do not frame discomfort in terms of class difference, the parallels with the experiences of ethnic-majority climbers suggest that experiences of non-belonging are also partly caused by their low socioeconomic backgrounds. This is also observed by other scholars. Torres shows that the 'culture shock' that black students experience at a

white elite college partially reflects class differences, although these students in the first place attribute their feelings of discomfort to racial differences (2009; see also Agius Vallejo 2012; Cole and Omari 2003). As in the Dutch case, it also seems that in Torres's case the ethnic (racial) frame is more salient than the class-based interpretation of difference.

The second class of challenges relates to interactions with lower-educated people in the *coethnic field*. Minority middle-class individuals have interclass encounters far more frequently than majority middle-class individuals (Agius Vallejo and Lee 2009; Neckerman et al. 1999). Their family often is lower-class, as is the majority of the coethnic community, which often functions as some sort of extended family; Fordham (1988) calls this 'fictive kinship'. Quite often, minority climbers live in class-diverse neighborhoods and participate in class-diverse organizations. Lower-class coethnics can exert strong claims for coethnic loyalty and assistance. The practice of 'giving back', expressed as financial and other kinds of support to family and other coethnics, is apparent among various middle-class minorities (Agius Vallejo and Lee 2009, Neckerman et al. 1999). Strong coethnic 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 'ethnic authenticity', 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 et al. 1999, p. 951)

This particularly applies to the United States because of its 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, p. 43, italics in original)

However, the opposition is not always as deep as Fordham and Ogbu suggest. 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, on the one hand, they acknowledge the importance of academic achievement for occupational success, while at the same time, they develop a reflective and critical attitude towards the achievement ideology (Mehan et al. 1994).

The Moroccan-Dutch and Turkish-Dutch participants, too, have frequent inter-class encounters with coethnics. As we have read in Chap. 6, they describe a coethnic 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 coethnic 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 coethnics 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 coethnic field.

A ‘Minority Culture of Mobility’

The joint reinvention of ethnic identity of 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 et al. (1999). These authors argue that the distinctive challenges resulting 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 Agius Vallejo 2009; 2012; Agius Vallejo and Lee 2009; Carter 2003, 2006 Clerge 2014, Lacy 2004, 2007, Mehan et al. 1994; Torres 2009—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 coethnic interactional and symbolic styles—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 coethnics—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. These soulmates spaces form a third space just as described by Abrahams and Ingram (2013): a space from which the navigation of the two other fields is facilitated. These spaces function like ‘interspaces’ as described by Ghorashi (2014); in these safe spaces there is room for reflection on the existing categorizations and hierarchy, and on the normalizing power of the dominant worldview, while allowing for ‘the emergence of identity narratives in which self-definitions are central’, instead of imposed identities and definitions (pp. 59–60).⁴

Lee and Kramer (2013) sketch how changes in the habitus resulting from 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’s study illustrates how this works for 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 meantime helps to distance oneself from one’s youth and one’s home, and helps cultivate their background and the relationship with their parents. It is some form 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 taking them along.

We observe a similar phenomenon among the Moroccan-Dutch 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

⁴ Although with ‘interspaces’ Ghorashi refers to spaces where individuals bridge differences and meet with the Other, rather than with soulmates, the function as safe, third space is strikingly similar.

among these coethnic 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 Dutch 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 for the Moroccan-Dutch and Turkish-Dutch climbers. 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-Dutch 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 coethnic images and common coethnic capital, but they adapt their ethnic identities to the achieved middle-class status and create new subcultural elements. The Moroccan-Dutch 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-educated (or co-class) coethnics, as the reinvention of identity and subcultural elements is not something done alone. These 'Soulmates' understand their experiences and their life worlds better than anyone. Many participants became members of coethnic 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-Dutch and Turkish-Dutch pioneering climbers, however, no such minority cultures of mobility were available to tap into, and they therefore had to create it themselves.

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 she or 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 an effort of a particular group of minority climbers, their aim—while fostering their own uniqueness—is to connect with and participate in the middle-class ethnic-majority field as well as the lower-class coethnic 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 the term ‘minority middle-class capital’ would be more appropriate, I nonetheless stick with the term ‘minority culture of mobility’ because of the connection with existing academic literature.

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 ethnic identity. Over time, their self-confidence grew 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 manner of ethnic identification that fit their higher education levels and combines with feeling ‘Dutch’.

This resurgence of ethnicity occurred in joint effort with co-educated coethnic peers, who turned out to be real soulmates. It appears that it is not ethnic background, 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 only share 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 coethnic climbers share a similar *habitus*, based on 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 a ‘minority culture of mobility’ is formed among middle-class people with an ethnic-minority background. Elsewhere I strengthen this argument when I show that Dutch student organizations also form a ‘minority culture of mobility’ (Slootman 2018). Even though their co-educated coethnic 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 coethnics, that they prefer Morocco and Turkey to the Netherlands, and that they only interact with coethnics. 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 coethnic (extended) family. For many, failing to acknowledge their ethnic side feels like a personal deprivation. They love their family, they value various norms and traditions 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 coethnic youth who are still in a position of disadvantage and need information, a guiding hand and inspiring role models.

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