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Soulmates Reinvention of Ethnic Identification among Higher Educated Second Generation Moroccan and Turkish Dutch

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Summary – Soulmates

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When Nasrdin Dchar wins the Golden Calf for best Dutch actor in 2011, in his emotion-laden speech he explicitly underscores his Dutchness and his Moroccan blood. How can we explain this? What makes people like Dchar, social 'climbers' with an ethnic minority background, identify with their ethnic labels, such as 'Moroccan' or 'Turkish'? Why Dchar's explicit articulation, at such a remarkable moment? Why doesn't ethnic identification automatically fade in parallel with processes of structural, or socioeconomic, incorporation?

In this book, a trajectory of incorporation is identified that is hitherto underexposed. This trajectory of reinvention of ethnic identity helps us understand the prevalence of ethnic identification among social climbers with immigrant or other ethnic minority backgrounds.

Chapter 1. Introduction. Winning the Golden Calf...
This study explores how ethnic identification is experienced by 'ethnic minority climbers', higher educated individuals with lower class ethnic minority backgrounds. The study focuses on second generation Moroccan and Turkish Dutch individuals with higher education levels. The main questions are:
- How strongly do these minority social climbers identify with their ethnic labels? (To what extent do they feel 'Moroccan' and 'Turkish'?) How does this relate to them feeling Dutch? And, what does it mean when they identify with ethnic and Dutch labels?
- How are their identifications related to the various social contexts in which they maneuver?
- How do their identifications develop over time? How are identifications related to their trajectories of social mobility?

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 sketch the methodological, theoretical and socio-political context of the study.

Chapter 2. Models of incorporation. Ethnic and national identification considered
When we want to explain the relevance of ethnic identification among social climbers, the lenses provided by the two main theories of immigrant

incorporation, 'straight-line' integration theory and segmented assimilation theory, do not seem sufficient. The theoretical perspective on ethnic identities that conceptualizes 'ethnic options' is more adequate for understanding the various underlying reasons for ethnic identifications at the individual level.

The conceptualization of ethnicity and identity is not straightforward. Despite the broad consensus in the social sciences to see ethnicity and identity as social constructions, in many empirical studies, the constructivist perspective is unintentionally substituted by an objectivist, or essentialized, view. This view, which is also common in everyday life, presents ethnic identities as reflecting bounded and homogeneous cultures, and members of an ethnic category as a cohesive and homogeneous group. Many other studies fail to clearly define ethnicity and identity as unambiguous analytical concepts. To avoid both the trap of essentialism and the trap of ambiguity, in chapter 2 an analytical toolkit is assembled. The kit includes five analytical tools: (a) a focus on processes of identification rather than on fixed identities; (b) a distinction between self-identification and external identification; (c) a distinction between category and group; (d) a distinction between label and content; and (e) the idea of intersectionality.

Chapter 3. Research Design. Mixing methods
The study has a mixed methods research design. It combines data from a structured survey among second generation Moroccan and Turkish Dutch and data obtained through fifteen in-depth interviews with second generation Moroccan and Turkish Dutch with university degrees. The survey was conducted in the context of the TIES research project, prior to this study. The two different methods complement each other in valuable ways and are used in various constellations throughout the study. The study shows that methods associated with the quantitative and more positivist research tradition can nevertheless be used within a more constructivist perspective and can be very well used for the deconstruction of concepts such as ethnic identity, as illustrated in chapter 5.

Chapter 4. The Dutch integration landscape and Moroccan and Turkish Dutch
The changed landscape of Dutch integration politics forms the backdrop of this study. Literature shows that, like in many other European countries, the Netherlands has experienced a 'culturalization of citizenship', in which who-belongs and who-does-not-belong has become defined in cultural terms. Immigrants and their children are required to internalize the progressive 'Dutch' norms and identify as Dutch. Based on the presumption that one can be only loyal to one country and culture, identification as Moroccan or Turkish is deemed suspect. Particularly Muslims, whose religion is portrayed as inherently incompatible with 'Dutch culture', are seen as the Other. Although people from

both ethnic categories are predominantly Muslim, Moroccan Dutch are more stigmatized in politics and media than Turkish Dutch.

Moroccan and Turkish immigrants arrived in the Netherlands around the 1970s as labor migrants to work in low-skilled jobs. Most came from rural areas and only had (very) low levels of formal education. Given their backgrounds, it is quite an achievement that nowadays a large and ever increasing share of their offspring enters higher education levels. Despite the commonalities in immigration setting and rural origins, differences exist between the Moroccan and Turkish Dutch. In general, among the Turkish Dutch, their country of origin and national identity are larger sources of bonding and pride than among the Moroccan Dutch. Furthermore, among the various Turkish communities, the levels of co-ethnic cohesion and co-ethnic organization are higher than among Moroccan Dutch communities.

Chapters 5 to 7 form the heart of the book. Here, the empirical data are discussed.

Chapter 5. 'Am I Dutch? Yes. Am I Moroccan? Yes.' Two dimensions of self-identification explored
Do the Moroccan and Turkish Dutch climbers actually identify as 'Moroccan' or 'Turkish'? Both the survey data and the interviews indicate that they do. When asked, a large majority of the second generation higher educated Moroccan and Turkish Dutch indicate that they feel strongly 'Moroccan' or 'Turkish'. This does not mean, however, that they do not feel Dutch as well. A large majority of the survey respondents and nearly all interview participants indicate that they feel both Moroccan/Turkish *and* Dutch. This refutes the idea that ethnic and national identifications are zero-sum in character.

Interestingly, although the Turkish Dutch show a stronger orientation towards their co-ethnics and towards 'Turkish' practices than the Moroccan Dutch, their ethnic identifications are not stronger. Analysis of the statistical data reveals that, among the Moroccan Dutch, 'feeling Moroccan' hardly correlates with other sociocultural variables, and these sociocultural variables show little correlation among each other. Overall, the 'Turkish' label is more substantive than the Moroccan label; identification with the Turkish label more strongly reflects sociocultural content than identification with the Moroccan label. This is supported by findings from the in-depth interviews. This does not mean, however, that for the Moroccan Dutch their ethnic identification is less important than for the Turkish Dutch.

Chapter 6. 'I am… who I am…' Identifications in social contexts
Contrary to what is implied by the previous analysis, individuals do not have fixed identifications. How they identify, how they position themselves – both in terms of labels and behavioral content – depends on the social context. In the in-depth interviews, the participants described that they yearned to belong; they wanted to feel accepted as one of 'us', both in co-ethnic contexts, such as the family, and in interethnic contexts, such as at school and the workplace. However, such belonging is not completely self-evident. Often, particularly in co-ethnic contexts, participants are confronted with behavioral expectations that run counter to their own independent preferences. In interethnic contexts, the participants sometimes face an exclusionary labeling that conflicts with how they want to be seen, namely as one of 'us' in that particular situation. Being categorized as 'Moroccan' or 'Turkish' (or 'Muslim'), even when phrased as a compliment, reduces one to the status of the Other and denies one's agency and belonging. However, these external pressures do not render individuals powerless. The analysis revealed that individuals have various responses at their disposal. In other words, individuals have ethnic options. These range from conformist responses, in which one chooses to conform to the preferences of the other and avoid any risks to one's belonging, to confrontational responses, which are most effective for reaching one's independent goals, but involve the largest threats to one's belonging. At the same time, personal agency is not unlimited. Ethnic options are often pre-shaped and severely restricted by external forces.

When one feels accepted among ethnic Dutch, this does not automatically make one's ethnic identity irrelevant. Instead, belonging among the majority can even lead to the articulation of one's minority identity. One who feels confident that he is completely accepted and that no one can deny his belonging, for example because of educational achievements or professional status, can feel empowered to articulate his minority identity. Furthermore, particularly those who are regarded as successful (measured against dominant standards) are in the ideal position to challenge negative stereotypes, as they are living evidence that being Moroccan, Turkish or Muslim can go hand in hand with being successful.

Chapter 7. Strangers and soulmates. Trajectories of identification and development of 'minority middle-class capital'
Identifications do not only vary between contexts but also vary over time. Experiences of difference and similarity appear to be very relevant themes. These experiences vary over time in parallel with changing contexts and are related to individuals' identifications. During their childhood and youth, many of the second generation climbers felt 'different' and sometimes even experienced downright bullying because of their ethnic background. This made most of them

want to downplay their ethnicity. While feeling different was mostly experienced negatively, experiencing sameness is recounted in positive terms. Contrary to feeling different, experiencing sameness is not described in characteristics such as ethnicity, but refers to having shared experiences and a shared worldview; a similar habitus. This habitus, then, appears to be more influenced by education level than by ethnic background per se. This is illustrated by the fact that higher educated second generation survey respondents have more friends with the same education level than with the same ethnic background.

This does not mean that ethnicity is irrelevant for them. When peers shared *both* their education level *and* their ethnic background, this led to unrivalled levels of understanding. When, at university, the Moroccan and Turkish Dutch climbers 'suddenly' met co-ethnic students, this felt like a 'revelation'. Personal experiences suddenly appeared to be shared experiences and fell into place. Together with these 'soulmates', they explored what their ethnicity meant for them as higher educated. Together, they shaped an ethnic identity that fitted their higher educated position. As they were educational pioneers – they were the first of their ethnic background to reach these education levels in the Netherlands – there were no middle-class ethnic identities available for them yet. Their ethnic identification is something that they reasserted and *reshaped* themselves, which they did so together with co-ethnic, co-educational soulmates. In short: my study exposes a trajectory of reinvention of ethnic identification.

The prevalence of ethnic identity among minority social climbers in adapted forms indicates that a 'minority culture of mobility', or 'minority middle-class capital', is being formed among the Moroccan and Turkish Dutch in the Netherlands. This is comparable to other countries and other minorities. In response to the particular challenges that minority climbers face – resulting from their social mobility in combination with their (lower class) ethnic background –social spaces among minority climbers develop, with specific cultural and identificational elements.

Chapter 8. Wrapping up. Reinvention of ethnic identification among minority climbers
From the empirical results, a range of factors emerge that explain the relevance of ethnic identity for Moroccan and Turkish Dutch climbers. Many of them (at times) identify in ethnic terms because they feel attached to certain customs or ideologies, or to the country of their parents' origin; or because their ethnic background has shaped their experiences in particular ways; because it strengthens their bonds with people they love, such as parents; because they want to challenge widespread ethnic stereotypes; or out of conformism to persistent external labeling as 'Moroccan' or 'Turk'. Clearly, ethnic self-

identifications are partly responses to the social situation at hand and contain strategic elements. The identifications are not solely voluntary and 'symbolic', but also not purely 'reactive'.

The trajectory of reinvention of ethnic identification among minority climbers highlights the possibility of being middle-class without completely assimilating into the ethnic majority mainstream and presents an alternative incorporation trajectory of becoming middle-class with a *middle-class minority identity*. The results help us understand the emergence of a more diverse Dutch middle class, which includes individuals who do not discard their ethnic distinctiveness.