MERITOCRACY OR PLUTOCRACY?

FINDING EXPLANATIONS FOR THE EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGES OF MOROCCAN IMMIGRANTS LIVING IN THE NETHERLANDS

ABSTRACT
Moroccan immigrants in the Netherlands have, throughout the last decades, been relatively unsuccessful in both schooling and job attainment. Although later generations of immigrants are doing better than those of their parents (and grandparents), young Moroccan men tend to do worse than both native Dutch and other immigrant groups (especially those from Surinam and the Netherlands Antilles). Educational failure and high (youth) unemployment rates are seen as explanatory variables for their disproportionate dominance in the Netherlands’s crime statistics. This fact especially underlines the importance of an empirical investigation in the causes of, and policy resolutions for, Moroccan immigrants’ position within the Dutch educational system. In this paper a theoretical approach is formulated which integrates elements of the competing traditions of Human Capital Theory and Cultural Reproduction Theory into one theoretical framework. It is shown how social locations account for initial differences in educational opportunity, which tend to be reinforced through peer pressure in schools and neighborhoods, and through specific institutional characteristics of the Dutch educational system, namely, tracking and school segregation. It is only by taking into account these three factors that we can come to a comprehensive understanding of immigrants’ educational disadvantages. Furthermore, it is argued that such an understanding has profound consequences for questions of meritocracy and plutocracy relating to the educational system and to how we perceive the Moroccan immigrant position in Dutch society.

INTRODUCTION
Since the 1950s, the Netherlands, like many other western European countries, has seen a vast increase in immigration. In the 1950s and 1960s, due to a shortage in the (manual) labor supply, the Netherlands recruited great numbers of immigrants, first from Southern Europe and later from Turkey and Morocco (in the 1960s and 1970s, respectively). These so-called
‘guest workers’ were joined by a large stream of immigration from the former Dutch colonies: Surinam (independent since 1975), the Dutch East Indies (‘Republic of Indonesia’, independent since 1949) and the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba (autonomous countries within the Kingdom of the Netherlands). While the majority of the first wave of ‘guest workers’ returned home, many later immigrants eventually brought their families or started new ones in the Netherlands (Nicolaas and Sprangers 2002). Consequently, many children of non-Dutch descent now live in the Netherlands. The most abundant ethnic minority populations in the Netherlands today are those of Surinamese (331,900), Antillean (129,700), Moroccan (323,200), and Turkish (364,300) descent. Of these, slightly over 40% are second-generation immigrants (Jennissen and Oudhof 2007).

The Netherlands, in the last two decades, has been facing many problems with delinquency, disproportionately (almost exclusively, in the public perception) associated with male Moroccan youth. These young men tend to be from low-income families, raised by low-educated parents, and are concentrated in relatively poor urban areas (Dagevos 2006; Andriessen et al. 2007; Dagevos and Gijsberts 2007; Jungbluth 2007). While they often do (much) better than their parents when it comes to attained education and occupation level, they are lagging behind both native Dutch and other main minority groups (those from Surinam and the Netherlands Antilles) – while they are in many respects comparable to Turkish immigrants. Their minority status alone, thus, cannot account for their socially pathological behavior patterns.

In public debates, explanations for their behavior have been sought in Moroccan immigrants’ ‘Berber culture’: their ‘primitive and violent cultural heritage’ from rural northern Africa. Such cultural explanations have however found little empirical support. Here we are primarily interested in education as it plays a large role in perpetuating (or even strengthening) the Moroccan immigrants’ relative disadvantages in the labor market. It has been shown that educational failure and success are tightly linked to labor market opportunities as well as, and perhaps more importantly, political participation and (socio-emotional) wellbeing (Marmot et al. 1991; Bills 2004; Becker 2007; Dagevos and Dagevos 2008). It is this relation, which makes education a very important dimension to explore.

In this paper, I integrate two competing theoretical explanations that have been offered to elucidate inequality of educational opportunity into a theoretical framework that is suitable to guide minority status alone cannot account for socially pathological behaviour patterns.

2 Total population of the Netherlands is 16,334,200, of which 1,720,100 are of non-Western origin (2008; CBS Statline).
3 While my concern with regard to juvenile delinquency excludes Moroccan girls, in terms of educational opportunities gender does indeed matter a lot (e.g. see De Vries 1988; Coenen 2001; Bouw et al. 2003). Although it is important not to overlook this dimension in empirical research, I am confident that my theoretical section does not suffer from treating boys and girls as part of one group.
Contemporary criticism has led to the depiction of society as more plutocratic than meritocratic.

REWARDING MERIT OR RESOURCES?
Contemporary norms for educational opportunity and educational success generally go back to Young’s conception of merit. In his classic essay, *The Rise of the Meritocracy 1870 – 2033. An Essay on Education and Equality*, Young (1958) portrays a society that is governed by the principle of Meritocracy: power and success are awarded to those who have deserved it by merit. In his book, merit is equated by a simple formula: \[ \text{M(}erit\text{)} = I(Q) + E(\text{ffort}). \] While both IQ and effort are certainly contested concepts, this ‘meritocratic ideal’ is, in most Western countries, accepted as the standard by which the educational system ought to reward successes. 4

Many scholars from the interconnected fields of psychology, sociology, and economics, however, argue that our modern society falls short of this ideal; they argue that all modern societies, to some extent, suffer from inequality of educational opportunity. That is to say: IQ and Effort, for some, do not lead to their reward of Merit. The main groups within this categorical ‘some’ have been identified through their differences from privileged groups in terms of race, gender and/or class. Contemporary criticism has led to the depiction of society as more plutocratic than meritocratic. In other words, one in which wealth rather than merit determines your position in society and your chances for success. While researchers tend to expand their scope of accountability beyond wealth, they do emphasize the role of resources in the generational transfer of educational opportunity.

The field that addresses these inequalities of educational opportunity seems to be rigidly divided into two competing camps: Human Capital Theory (HCT) on the one side and Cultural Reproduction Theory (CRT) on the other. I argue that this divide should be seen as a *constructed* barrier, resulting from a clash of scientific ‘schools’ or traditions, rather than a line separating theoretical incompatibilities. That is to say, I believe that the two traditions are not incompatible at all, and that elements of the two traditions can be integrated into a coherent synthesis. Both CRT’s concepts of *habitus* and *cultural capital* and HCT’s treatment of *preferences* however, it has been argued, are too vague and slippery to satisfactorily incorporate into empirical research (e.g., see Bowles and Gintis 1975; Kingston 2001; Sallaz and Zavisca 2007). Instead of dodging this obstacle altogether, in this paper I offer an integrated and *applicable* synthesis of the relevant concepts from the competing theories. In the next section, I will show how we can use elements of both theories to construct a theoretical framework, which can guide empirical research.

PREFERENCE, CONSTRAINT AND ASYMMETRY
Human Capital Theory (HCT) is a tradition firmly rooted in rational-choice theory and dominant in neo-classical economics. While its origin traces back to Adam Smith, the major contributors

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4 See Karabel (2005) for an insightful analysis of how the concept of meritocracy came to be used as a political instrument in American higher education admission processes.
are identified to be Jacob Mincer (1958, 1974) and Gary Becker (1962; 1992; 1993; Becker & Tomes 1986). HCT’s starting point, with regard to education, is its role in increasing students’ productivity on the labor market. Becker (2002) offers a short description, which clarifies what ought to be understood by the term ‘human capital’:

“Schooling, a computer training course, expenditures of medical care, and lectures on the virtues of punctuality and honesty [are] capital. That is because they raise earnings, improve health, or add to a person’s good habits over much of his lifetime. Therefore, economists regard expenditures on education, training, medical care, and so on as investments in human capital. They are called human capital because people cannot be separated from their knowledge, skills, health, or values in the way they can be separated from their financial and physical assets.”

Different labour market outcomes, therefore, are related to different investments in human capital. From a similar logic, educational mal-performance or under-representation can be attributed to an insufficient investment in human capital. Translating this perspective to the matter at hand, we can pose the following question: Why do some prioritize investment while others neglect the value of adequately investing in human capital? HCT offers three explanations for this scenario: Information asymmetry, credit constraints and preferences.

Information asymmetry points to the disparity of information that is available to different socio-economic groups or to the distortions in channels of information that are accessible at different rungs of the social ladder. An example would be that recently immigrated Moroccan parents have insufficient information available on which to base their decisions of investment in their children’s human capital – i.e. through sending their child to pre-school or selecting, out of all schools, the best one for their children. Information asymmetry leads to suboptimal investment decisions and can explain different decisions between groups of individuals who differ in their ability (or power) to access and/or utilize relevant information.

Credit constraints refer to the lack of finances to exercise one’s preferred decisions. While most of the Netherlands’ primary and secondary education is free, one may be financially constrained in choosing whether or not to send one’s child to preschool or to university. We should note, however, that in the Netherlands for both preschools and universities, government aid is available for families with limited financial resources.

‘Preference’ is perhaps the most blurry of the three concepts. An example of preference would be the case in which an individual chooses not to pursue higher education even though he has the mental capacity to do so, due to his preference. HCT leaves space for all sorts of motivations, but suggests one: discount-rate. This concept is an indicator of how willing someone is to accept foregone earnings when making investments, which will only later pay off. Take for example the question of whether to attend university (when eligible). Were one to choose to attend university, one would not only have to pay tuition fees and other related expenses, one would also forego earnings for the duration of time that has been, in a sense, exchanged for the use of the university’s
resources; one has no time to work and earn a wage. The willingness to forego earnings is explained by the extent to which one is present-oriented or future-oriented – economists measure this willingness in terms of one’s ‘discount rate’; e.g., see Warner and Pleeter 2001). This, of course, begs the question how such orientations arise – a question we return to later.

SOCIAL LOCATIONS AND THE BLACK BOX OF PARENTING

Cultural Reproduction Theory (CRT) originates in the works of Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron (1977), pertaining to cultural capital and the ways by which its possession and transference serve as means for class reproduction. The concept has been greatly advanced throughout the years (see Bourdieu 1979, 1984, 1993, 1996). CRT explains the interaction between individuals’ production of cultural capital and the institutional mechanisms by which those with high cultural capital are given sole access to the societal ladder (and thus, to cultural reproduction).

The starting points in Bourdieu’s theory are social locations. Individuals in different social locations, he argues, are socialized differently. Through this socialization process, children acquire from their parents and, more generally, from their ‘social environment’, a sense of what is comfortable and what is natural. These experiences become embodied, incorporated into the individual. Bourdieu calls this embodied position the individual’s *habitus* (a term he borrowed from Elias 2000 [1939]). One’s early socialization also shapes the form and amount of resources (*capital*) that the individual inherits and draws upon in interactions with and within various institutions in the social world (Bourdieu 1984; Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). As such, differences in socialization lead to differences in *habitus* and *capital*, which determine – to a certain extent – how well one can perform (or how powerful one is) in different spheres of life (*fields*).

Understanding domination and inequality thus implies studying the processes through which individuals maintain their privileges and transfer these across generations. This is where Bourdieu’s views most clearly clash with HCT. Instead of seeing status, privilege, and social rewards as ‘earned’ by individuals through their intelligence, skills, and effort, Bourdieu argues that two processes systematically advantage some and disadvantage others. First, as mentioned above, people are born and raised in different social locations, which greatly shape their chances for success in life. Secondly, dominant groups in society exercise their power not only through the advantages that they give their children; they also make the ‘rules of the game’ in dominant institutions. In other words, dominant groups both set the goals and provide the means of attaining those goals the best they can through socialization processes.

Although in the above we provided an overview of what CRT entails, Bourdieu stresses that discerning cultural capital, in the end, is an empirical matter. In this light it is important to mention that Bourdieu devised the theory *inductively* over the course of many years through his research on and within French society. Before we attempt to integrate CRT in our theoretical framework, I believe it to be worthwhile to take a good look at the application of Bourdieu’s ideas on research in other societies. In this light, we will look at what I consider to be a best practice: Annette Lareau’s (2003, 2003) study *Unequal Childhood*. 
Lareau’s study is an attempt to shed light on the ‘black box’ of parents-child transfers of cultural capital. In her study, she maps the ways in which parents’ resources shape their children’s daily lives. The main distinction is that between middle-class and working-class modes of childrearing. To the former, she ascribes a style she calls ‘concerted cultivation,’ to the latter ‘accomplishments of natural growth.’ The two modes of childrearing, she shows, lead to differences in skills, attitudes, and orientation. Lareau describes how parents in middle-class families actively foster and assess children’s talents, opinions and skills; parents stress the importance of reasoning, discussing with their children what is considered acceptable behavior and why (Lareau 2003: 31). Additionally, children are encouraged to ‘foster their talents,’ primarily through enrolling them in an assortment of organized activities (i.e. soccer practice, piano lessons, church choir). Furthermore, parents actively intervene in institutions (i.e. in school, in the context of medical professionals) to ensure their children are getting the best possible treatment and, in doing so, set examples for their children how to, later, do this for themselves. Through all this, children are prepared for adult life with better skills, with greater savoir-faire in institutions, and with a sense of entitlement – a feeling that they ‘deserve’ to be, or land, in a good place. Examples of these are “greater verbal agility, larger vocabularies, more comfort with authority figures, and more familiarity with abstract concepts” 5 (Lareau 2003: 5).

In contrast, working class and poor parents undertake a mode of childrearing called ‘accomplishment of natural growth.’ In the accomplishment of natural growth, parents see it as their main responsibility to make sure their children are “fed, clothed, sheltered and transported” (Lareau 2003: 66). Parents’ efforts are geared primarily towards making sure these necessities are accounted for, and children are given relative freedom to arrange their own time, and choose their activities and playmates, as long as the children remain within the boundaries of safety, rules, and discipline enforced by their parents. While this may, from a middle class point of view, seem simply like taking ‘lesser responsibility’ or a ‘smaller burden,’ Lareau stresses two counterpoints to this perception: first, she explains that working class parents regularly spend a lot of their resources (money and time) on making sure these circumstances are realized; and, second, she asserts that the greatest difference between the middle class and lower classes is their divergent views of what good parenthood entails. This means that working class parents who meet up to the standards of ‘accomplishment of natural growth,’ consider themselves as very good parents.

This less intricate mode of childrearing, however, tends to result in a suboptimal development of children’s skills and abilities; the parents’ relatively strict approach of directives and discipline leads to underdevelopment of reasoning skills and a general acceptance of authority; through their parent’s (negative) examples, children generally inherit a sense of dependence and powerlessness when it comes to making their way through (dominant) institutions; and finally, all this leads to an emerging sense of constraint on the part of the child – constraint which limits the child’s level

5 This last thing might be especially important in light of the increasing importance of IQ-tests and other testing embedded in the 'access procedures' of selective schools and universities. For a discussion, see Buchmann and Roscigno (2003) and Mijs (2008).
of ambition and which tends to bind it to the social position it was born in (Lareau 2003: 31). Furthermore, dominant societal institutions (i.e. schools and major companies) favor those skills, opinions, and orientations that are instilled by ‘concerted cultivation’ over those transmitted through the ‘natural growth’ practice of childrearing. Consequently, chances are unequally distributed in childhood and inequalities made to persist throughout adult life.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Human Capital Theory</th>
<th>Cultural Reproduction Theory</th>
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<td>Educational differences arise through different (rates, forms, amounts of) human capital. These differences are caused by:</td>
<td>Educational differences arise through:</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Credit constraints</td>
<td>1. Different starting positions leading to different socialization. This causes differences in habitus and (rates, forms, amounts of) capital.</td>
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<td>2. Information asymmetry (e.g., by social status)</td>
<td>2. ‘Rules of the game’ in dominant institutions, set by dominant groups to keep them advantaged.</td>
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<td>3. Discount rate (by ‘present-orientedness’</td>
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*Figure 1. The central tenets of HCT and CRT.*

**SYNTHESSES: PEACE-LESS INTEGRATION**

However hard it may seem, after laying bare the differences between HCT and CRT, I believe there to be some common ground for us to build upon in the construction of a theoretical framework. Let us first very briefly summarize the explanations for educational inequality offered by the two perspectives (Figure 1). HCT states that educational differences arise as individuals make different investment decisions, which are influenced by credit constraints, information asymmetry, and/or preferences (namely, discount rate). CRT stresses that it is the different social locations that people are born in, which greatly shape one’s (chances of) capital accumulation. Furthermore, those people born in dominant social locations set the ‘rules’ by which success and failure is decided in dominant societal institutions.

If we remember that the task is not to reconcile these competing traditions, but to take from each the compatible components which allow us to construct our theoretical framework, we can do so by treating individual differences highlighted in HCT as linked to the social positions discerned in CRT. That is, people making investment decisions, more or less conscientiously, is a good starting point in the study of educational inequality. An adequate account however needs to place these decisions in the context of their social locations and within institutional structure (the latter of which I will elaborate on in the next sections). Social locations are those positions that people are born into. From CRT and, more specifically, Lareau (2003) I take three elements, which greatly affect investment decision: time perspective, entitlement/constraint, and savoir-faire. HCT confirms the importance of time perspective through stressing the term discount rate and adding a fourth element that affects decisions: information (asymmetry). Together, these four constitute what I call a middle-class mindset. The mindset, a continuum of four factors, is devised to grasp the
essence of what is referred to by scientists studying ‘human capital’ or ‘cultural reproduction’ in relation to educational opportunity (Figure 2).

I use here the term ‘middle-class mindset’ as a reference to Bourdieu’s concept of social locations which individuals are born into. The mindset, I argue, comes with the social location and can be broken down into the four aforementioned factors. Conceptually, this mindset ‘translates’ social location into the prime values and competencies, that shape an individual’s educational investment decisions – and, consequently, their chance of educational success.

We will discuss next the institutional structure of the Dutch educational system, which constitutes the environment for educational performance and investment decisions. Before we do, however, we first discuss the relevant differences between the main ethnic groups in the Netherlands discerned in this paper.

DIFFERENT MINDSETS
Before singling out Moroccan immigrant students in the Netherlands, we should address the differences that may exist between ethnic minorities. One factor to consider is the duration of stay. While there has been migration to and from Surinam and the Netherlands Antilles since the Dutch colonization in the 17th century, Moroccans and Turks have been migrating to the Netherlands only since the 60s and 70s – and have only since the 80s and 90s done so in great numbers and with the intention to permanently settle in the Netherlands (De Valk et al. 2001; Central Bureau of Statistics 2003; Garssen, Nicolaas and Sprangers 2005). On top of those differences in duration of stay/settlement, many Surinam and Antillean immigrants learnt the Dutch language and saw, in their respective countries, the introduction of a public school system, which was built by the Dutch and is based on the Dutch educational system. Thus, people from Surinam and the Antilles (which I will collectively refer to as Caribbean immigrants) have been migrating to the Netherlands longer and are expected to have had better preparation for participation in Dutch education.

Another element which might be of importance is religion. Of importance here is not so much

<table>
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<th>Middle-class mindset</th>
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<td>Sense of entitlement</td>
<td>Sense of constraint</td>
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<td>Informational advantage</td>
<td>Informational disadvantage</td>
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<tr>
<td>Future-orientedness</td>
<td>Present-orientedness</td>
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<td>Institutional savoir faire</td>
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Figure 2. Factors constituting a ‘middle-class mindset’.

6 Migration to the Netherlands, however, became substantial only from the late 1940s on.
7 And which official language of instruction is Dutch.
how religious practices differ, but how religion tends to contribute to individuals’ identities. In this sense, the adaptation to ‘Christian-Judeo’ Dutch society may be less of an obstacle for Caribbean immigrants of predominantly Christian faith, than for Moroccan and Turkish migrants (to whom I will collectively refer as Mediterranean immigrants) of the Islamic religion. Important to note is the between groups difference when we compare levels of religiosity between 1st and 2nd generations of immigrants. Where Antillean and Surinam religiosity has greatly diminished and regressed towards the native Dutch’ level (from 75% to 36% and from 77% to 54% respectively), Moroccan and Turkish religiosity remains practically unchanged across generations: from 97% to 96% and 95% to 93% respectively (Dagevos, Schellingerhout and Vervoort 2007: 180). Adding one and two together, we have reason to hypothesize that Caribbean immigrants will have had less difficulties in adapting to secular Dutch society and will have had better opportunities to develop a middle-class mindset than immigrants from the Mediterranean.

When it comes to differences between Turkish and Moroccan immigrants, we have some reason to assume that Moroccans do worse than Turks. The differences kick in when we look at peer groups and social interactions. While both groups are greatly overrepresented in cities and, within those cities, in poor neighborhoods, we can name two factors that distinctly influence Moroccans (Garssen and Wageveld 2007). The first element we get from De Jong’s (2007) study of street culture. It is argued that Moroccan youth, independent of their social origins, tend to be drawn to a specific street culture, which is typically diametrically opposed to school norms and, thus, detrimental for educational opportunity (cf. what Paul Willis [1977] called ‘counter-school culture’). While a universal mechanism may lie at the base of street culture’s attractiveness (alternative means for self-respect and ‘success’ when one ‘fails’ in mainstream culture/education), Moroccans particularly seem to be drawn to this way of life. One factor leading to that may be the stress on manliness in their Islamic upbringing and lack of parental supervision; another can be found in socio-economic conditions: small housing, big families, effectively forcing children to spend their time on the streets (Garssen and Wageveld 2007). What differentiates Turkish from Moroccan immigrants here is that the former tend to have more organized activities and strong and extended networks that can be seen as giving alternatives to street culture, while the latter are greatly lacking organized activities and have, of all immigrant groups, the least contact with native Dutch speakers (Gijsberts 2004; Van den Broek and Keuzenkamp 2008; Vermeulen and Berger 2008). These differences point not only to a lack of alternatives, but also to the relative isolation in which many Moroccan boys find themselves to be.

Public opinion and the media constitute the second element. The Moroccan boys’ overrepresentation in Dutch crime statistics is a fact well known to the public and often mentioned by policy makers. We can imagine that these well-known statistics influence the ways in which Moroccan boys are perceived – especially those boys that are very ‘present’ on the streets, i.e. loud and attracting attention, preoccupied with showing their cool and toughness. This is confirmed by the finding that native Dutch, of all immigrant groups, speak most negatively of Moroccans (Gijsberts and Vervoort 2007).
A further step is hypothesizing, independently of whether people perceive all Moroccan boys differently because of the misbehavior of some, that Moroccan youth themselves might feel stigmatized by the media. De Jong’s account offers just one of many descriptions of these boys’ taking offense to the way they are often portrayed in media and political discourse (as “problem youth” [probleemjongeren], “youth delinquents,” [jeugdcriminelen] and “damned-Moroccans” [kutmarokkanen]). His qualitative account is supported by evidence regarding perceived discrimination against Moroccan immigrants in housing, on the labor market and in popular media (Andriessen et al. 2007). Also, a recent survey by the Netherlands’ Cultural Planning Bureau, found Moroccan immigrants to answer more negatively than other ethnic groups to questions relating the openness of Dutch society to immigrant culture, the Islam in particular (Gijsberts and Vervoort 2007). If we revert back to HCT’s notion of information asymmetry, we can formulate the following explanation: Moroccan boys, more than other immigrants, embody a negative image, feel and/or are discriminated against, and ultimately acquire a more negative perspective of their educational and labor market opportunity, and of their chances for social mobility in Dutch society. Moroccan boys’ information on school and work is biased in the sense that it is more negative (i.e. with regard to the use of staying in school, pursuing tertiary education, etc.), than that of other students – thus constituting an asymmetry. All of this presents the alternative (street culture) as attractive, for it offers the means for upholding one’s self-worth. Information asymmetry, here, refers also to the process of ascribing perceived negative group characteristics to individuals – i.e. teachers treating particular students negatively for they are considered, ex ante, to be potential disruptions in class. Consequently, there are two sides to the medal, which both work to Moroccan students’ disadvantage.

SEGREGATION AND TRACKING

It should be recognized, and this is where the institutional perspective comes in, that the importance of peer pressure (friends and neighborhood) is intrinsically related to school segregation in which, more than stressed-out teachers and poor financing, other students have the most negative effect on one’s educational aspirations and accomplishments. Before suggesting institutional effects on educational inequality, a brief overview of the Dutch educational system is provided.

Figure 3 gives a schematic overview of the different levels in the Dutch educational system. While every child attends elementary school from age 4 on, around the age of 12, children take a national ability test (‘CITO-test’), the scores on which their access to the different levels of secondary education is largely determined: VMBO (lowest; leading to MBO), HAVO (intermediate; leading to HBO) or VWO (highest; leading to WO). The uninterrupted lines represent clear boundaries between school levels, the interrupted lines mean that within the school level, various programs are available, differing in years of schooling. In principle the only way to go is up within a column. However, in principle, movement between columns is possible, while this often implies additional procedures, study delay and sometimes additionally schooling. The steps which are possible
between the columns are those between the highest levels of VMBO onto HAVO, from HAVO to VWO, from MBO-4 to HBO and from HBO-p to WO. Each transition implies successful graduation from the previous level of education and sometimes additional requirements; for example, if one wishes to study an economics program at HBO-level, one needs to have finished an MBO-program that meets specific economics requirements. The Dutch educational system has, in an international comparative, a relatively vast system of tracking, which starts differentiating students when they are relatively young.9

The negative effects of school segregation, mentioned in the preceding, which are related to the institutional make-up of the Dutch educational system, lead to the re-enforcement of disadvantages for those who go to ‘Black’ schools10 (the disadvantaged) (Paule 2006). The rigid system of early tracking in the Netherlands contributes to this process in that students with initial disadvantages tend to be sent to lower school levels in which ‘Black’ schools are the vast majority (Gijsberts and Herweijer 2007; see also Oakes 2005). Additional negative effects of tracking lie in the characteristics early and rigid. Research on tracking shows negative effects for equality of educational opportunity in internationally comparative studies (Schütz et al. 2005; Brunello and Checchi 2007), in studies of Dutch society in particular (Crul and Schneider 2005; Dronkers 2007); and it is argued that the same effects can be found even in systems with relatively loose tracking (or streaming)(Lucas 2001). Early tracking implies that the student’s parents have an important role in educational decisions (i.e. which school level one goes to), thus increasing the importance of societal position. Furthermore, the system’s rigidity makes these early decisions harder to ‘correct’ later on when a student may be found to be brighter than initially assumed (i.e. masked by language deficiencies or cultural differences). We

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8 VMBO itself is subdivided in four different programs, all of which take four years to finish, but differ greatly in quality and level. Consequently, only the highest level (as a rule) and the next-to-highest level (conditionally) give access to HAVO.

9 Countries with an even more differentiated system of education are, most noteworthy, Germany, Austria and the Czech Republic, while most developed countries are less differentiated than the Netherlands. The least differentiated countries in Europe are Sweden, Spain, Iceland, Norway and Finland (Van de Werfhorst and Mijs 2007).

10 The notion of ‘Black school’ refers to ethnicity rather than skin color and to social class, to reflect schools with a concentration of relatively deprived [kansarm] non-Western immigrants.
can thus theorize that these institutional characteristics of the Dutch educational system tend to increase disadvantages by constraining educational transitions.\footnote{While I do not present it here as such, the Dutch system of tracking, when judged by its effects, can be seen as an example of the ‘rules of the game’, which Bourdieu describes as being set by dominant societal groups to advantage dominant groups. While it may not have that explicit goal, the reproduction-effect of tracking may be a factor which reduces the resistance there is to the system. To put it in plain terms: dominant groups are not likely to oppose a system which helps them to maintain their dominance.}

When we consider school segregation and tracking in joint operation, we can convincingly argue that the institutional characteristics privilege dominant societal groups; they are both better prepared and better informed for making the important decisions that have to be made at a relatively early stage. While the Dutch educational system leaves room for ‘correction’ of initial decisions by means of mobility between school types, this should not be overestimated. First, mobility is hindered by the costs it brings for the mobile student, \textit{i.e.} study-delay and re-schooling. Secondly, and most importantly, initial differences tend to increase throughout the school system. The latter is caused by curriculum differentiation on the one side, setting higher targets and providing better support for those students in the highest tracks, and school-segregation on the other: disadvantaged students constitute the vast majority in lower school levels (Paulle 2006; Gijsberts and Herweijer 2007; Van de Werfhorst and Mijs 2007). This implies that the longer a student is educated at a low educational level, the less likely he is to be upwardly mobile in the educational system.

**HYPOTHESES: APPLYING OUR THEORETICAL MODEL**

When we apply our theoretical model to Dutch education and draw from the knowledge we have of the main groups of ethnic minorities, we can propose the following hypotheses (Table 1). First, we expect both Caribbean and Mediterranean immigrants to have an underdeveloped middle-class mindset compared to the native Dutch. This, we hypothesize, will be expressed in four ways: immigrants have less familiarity with and knowledge of the Dutch educational system (H1); hence, when it comes to finding their way in the educational system, we expect they have less \textit{savoir faire}, especially since they can draw on little experience in other institutions (H2); immigrants’ perspective is likely to be more present-oriented than future-oriented, especially for those immigrants who initially did not plan to settle permanently (H3); due to cultural-differences, especially in language and religious identity, we expect there to be less \textit{entitlement} and more \textit{constraint} in the subjective experiences of immigrants (H4).

This underdeveloped middle-class mindset, we expect, will result in lower investments in human and cultural capital which, in turn, will be reflected in lower ability scores (H5). Information asymmetry plays a large role here: the ‘risks’ related to making such investments could be perceived differently between groups; perceptions about risk of failure in school – and the consequence of failing – tend to differ (Van de Werfhorst and Mijs 2007). It should be noted, also, that money plays a role. While ‘credit constraint’ on its own may be of limited importance in choosing one’s educational path, in combination with a more negative perception of the ‘risk’ of failure and its
consequences, it may lead to more ‘safe’ choices.\textsuperscript{12} Especially in the multi-track system of secondary and tertiary education in the Netherlands, this process may be of great importance. This process, I expect, results in an overrepresentation of immigrant students in vocational education (MBO and HBO – safe choices) as opposed to general/academic school levels (HAVO/VWO and WO) (H6).

For all these hypotheses it goes that Caribbean immigrants tend to have had more ease developing a middle-class mindset. Consequently, we expect Caribbean immigrants to have less of an educational disadvantage than do Mediterranean immigrants (H7). Due to the effects of ‘street culture,’ we expect Moroccans to generally do worse than Turkish immigrants (H8).\textsuperscript{13} If we combine our model with our knowledge of the institutional structure of the Dutch educational system, we can add the following hypothesis: tracking and school segregation increase disadvantages across educational transitions. This goes especially for Moroccan immigrants, for whom street culture becomes more attractive the worse they do in school (H9).

Finally, when we control for family background by conventional measures (\textit{i.e.} family income and parents’ educational attainment) I expect the educational disadvantages of immigrants to be reduced, \textit{but not to disappear} (H10). This, I suggest, is because conventional measures of family

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|p{13cm}|}
\hline
H1 & Immigrants, compared to the native Dutch, have less familiarity with and knowledge of the Dutch educational system. \\
H2 & Immigrants, compared to the native Dutch, have less institutional \textit{savoir faire}. \\
H3 & Immigrants’ perspective, compared to the native Dutch, is more present-oriented than future-oriented. \\
H4 & Immigrants, compared to the native Dutch, feel less entitled than restrained. \\
H5 & Immigrants, compared to the native Dutch, make lower investments in human and cultural capital, which is reflected in lower ability scores. \\
H6 & Immigrant students are overrepresented in vocational education (MBO and HBO) as opposed to general/academic school levels (HAVO/VWO and WO). \\
H7 & Caribbean immigrants have less of an educational disadvantage than do Mediterranean immigrants. \\
H8 & Moroccan immigrants have a larger educational disadvantage than Turkish immigrants. \\
H9 & Tracking and school segregation increase disadvantages across educational transitions, especially for Moroccan students. \\
H10 & Immigrants lag behind the native Dutch even when we control for family background by conventional measures. \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Overview of hypotheses}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{12} Cf. the theory of ‘Relative Risk Aversion’. See Breen and Yaish 2006; Stocké 2007; Van de Werfhorst 2008.
\textsuperscript{13} Note that this hypothesis relates primarily to boys, while the data (as we will see) do not allow us to distinguish between male and female students.
background fail to capture the nuances, which lie in the concept of middle-class mindset; \textit{i.e.} immigrants’ relative short stay in the Netherlands and the vast cultural differences between the Netherlands and their country of origin, first, make them less confident and at ease in Dutch education; second, make them less oriented towards Dutch education; and, third, less likely to have family and friends that bring with them valuable experiences in Dutch education.

AN EMPIRICAL EXPLORATION
While my main target was to formulate a theoretical approach, a pre-empted tentative empirical exploration can be offered to address my assumptions and test my predictions. I do so by analyzing quantitative data collected through the longitudinal NWO-funded PRIMA research\textsuperscript{14} and additional data provided by CBS and CFI – well respected government funded institutes. The data reflect widely accepted quantitative resources, which are regularly used to track educational achievements of different societal groups as well as to evaluate educational policy. The figures presented below are adopted from the results of recent SCP\textsuperscript{15} and WODC\textsuperscript{16} reports on minority integration in Dutch society (Dagevos and Gijsberts 2007; Jennissen and Oudhof 2007).

A first glance at educational inequality is provided in Figure 4. This figure gives the best available quantitative indication of students’ ‘starting position’ in education, in displaying the ‘cognitive skill disadvantage’ of students in the 2\textsuperscript{nd} grade of primary school (children of the age of five and six), compared to the average score of native Dutch students. Cognitive skills are measured on a (CITO) test, on which the average score of all participants was 50 and 10 the standard deviation (\textit{i.e.} 68\% of students score between 40 and 60 points). The figure allows us to see that children of ethnic minority groups, from the start on, lag behind native Dutch children (\textit{i.e.} in 2004 a child of Turkish descent on the average scored less than a native Dutch child by well over one standard deviation of the mean). While most minority groups (Surinamese students being the sole exception) have through the last eight years made good progress towards decreasing their disadvantages, there remains a substantial gap between their performance and that of native Dutch students (between 0.7 and 1.4 standard deviations from the mean). Important to note is that even Dutch students from very low-educated parents (both parents are educated at lbo-level or lower) outperform the best performing minority groups.

Figure 5 shows the distribution between secondary school levels of students from different ethnic groups (\textit{i.e.} the percentage of Turkish students that are enrolled in VMBO-b/k, those enrolled in VWO, etc.). As the allocation of students to different secondary school levels is decided upon largely by the CITO scores at the end of primary school (see the overview of the Dutch educational system, pp. 11-13), this figure constitutes an indicator of the educational position of students at the next phase of their education. The figure shows that all immigrant groups do worse than native Dutch

\textsuperscript{14} PRIMA is a cohort study, started in ’94/’95, on the educational careers of students in the Netherlands.
\textsuperscript{15} SCP is the Netherlands’ Social and Cultural Planning Office, a government agency which conducts research into the social aspects of all areas of government policy (www.scp.nl/english).
\textsuperscript{16} WODC is the Ministry of Justice’s Scientific Research and Documentation Center (english.wodc.nl/organisatie).
students; that is, both Caribbean and Mediterranean students are overrepresented in the lowest level of education (VMBO-b/k) compared with native Dutch students, and underrepresented in the higher levels (VWO and HAVO/VWO).

With regard to particular ethnic groups, we see that Moroccans are the most underrepresented group in VWO with a relatively large gap between them and Turkish students on one side and Caribbean students on the other. For HAVO, the pattern is somewhat more gradual, although here also Moroccan students are fewest. Conversely, Moroccans are overrepresented in VMBO-b/k, the lowest levels of education.

We can thus state that the differences in elementary school performance persist as differences at the secondary level. While the data do not allow us to make clear-cut comparisons, one could make a case for an actual increase in inequality. Such a claim is hard to express numerically, but has a solid foundation in our knowledge of the institutional structure of the Dutch educational system: it is only in the transition to secondary school that educational disadvantages of immigrant students are expressed in different school levels. These different levels are of essential importance for the students’ educational opportunities as even minor differences may either greatly enhance or limit...
one’s access to further (tertiary) education: while VMBO leads solely to vocational education (MBO), HAVO is the gateway to higher education (HBO and, through that, WO). The differences within levels of VMBO are important also, as VMBO-gl & -tl are the only levels of education (within VMBO) which offer the possibility, after successful graduation, of a transfer to the HAVO-level (thus, to higher education).

To assess the differences in educational outcomes, we examine student enrollment in the highest levels of education: higher professional education (HBO) and university (WO) (Figure 6). While the Dutch educational system offers relatively good chances to students graduating from secondary vocational education (MBO), higher education undeniably gives students the best labour market opportunities (Van de Werfhorst and Mijs 2007). Ethnic group differences in higher education enrollment thus indicate differences in educational outcomes, which implicate systematic ethnic inequalities regarding labour market opportunity – and, arguably, the position of different ethnic groups in Dutch society.

While all minority groups show a rising number of higher education students (e.g., relatively to ’95-’96, the percentage of Moroccan students has doubled in ’05-’06), their numerical importance is overshadowed by the fact that, still, the vast majority of higher education students are native Dutch: in 2006, more than 85% of students in higher education was either native Dutch or of Western-origin (CBS Statline). In comparison, the ‘second best’ ethnic group are students of Surinamese origin, who constitute just over 2% of all students.

However, these numbers by themselves do not tell us much as they do not take into account the size of the ethnic groups for which the enrollment numbers are shown. In Figure 6 and Figure 7, we juxtapose the enrollment percentages (for HBO and WO respectively) to the relative share of youth aged 18-20 of the corresponding ethnicity – and get an entirely different picture. The numbers are standardized to reflect the enrollment numbers as a percentage of native Dutch student enrollment, controlled for demographic indicators of the different ethnic groups. For example, 62%, for Turkish students in ’05-’06 (in Figure 7) indicates that the HBO enrollment of Turkish students,
relative to the share of Turkish youth aged 18-20 in the Netherlands, is 62% of the corresponding number of native Dutch students enrolled in HBO. That is, if 100 out of 1000 Dutch youth aged 18-20 are enrolled in HBO, 62 out of 1000 Turkish youth are. The indicator is devised in such a way that ethnic group enrollment can be compared with that of native Dutch students and trends can be observed for the 10-year period in which the data were collected.

These figures continue to show the impressive trend of increasing minority student enrollment over the years. However, a considerable gap remains between native Dutch students and those of Moroccan, Turkish and, to a lesser extent, Surinamese origin (74%, 62%, and 82% of native Dutch enrollment, respectively). Moreover, all immigrant groups (with the exception of ‘other’), are more likely to be enrolled in HBO than in WO. Antillean students differ from other minority groups in their relative advantage over native Dutch students (104% of native Dutch enrollment). The decline of their advantage (from 128% to 104% in HBO, from 104% to 88% in WO) has been attributed to changes in migration patterns: recently migrated Antillean children tend to come from poor and low-educated families (Van Kralingen 2003; Besjes and Oudhof 2007; Van San, De Boom and Van Wijk 2007). Another noteworthy phenomenon is the relatively high enrollment of students from other non-western minority groups (96% of Dutch enrollment in HBO, 119% in WO). This could either point to the relatively good performance of specific immigrant groups (e.g., political
refugees) or of highly motivated international students who have registered at universities and have indicated their non-western origins.

TENTATIVE FINDINGS

In this section, we summarize the findings of our empirical exploration, before reflecting on their implications in the concluding section of this paper. Firstly, we found unambiguous support for our sixth and seventh hypotheses: immigrants are overrepresented in vocational education and Caribbean students, across the board, have less of an educational disadvantage than Mediterranean immigrants. Additionally the data seem to confirm hypothesis five (‘Immigrants, compared to the native Dutch, make lower investments in human and cultural capital, which is reflected in lower ability scores’) when we accept children’s primary school performance to be a reflection of early investment in human and cultural capital. Hypothesis eight (‘Moroccan immigrants have a larger educational disadvantage than Turkish immigrants’) is difficult to assess because the position of Moroccan students and Turkish students are not consistent when we look at different school levels. With the available data, we cannot confirm nor reject this hypothesis. The evidence regarding hypothesis nine (‘Tracking and school segregation increase disadvantages across educational transitions, especially for Moroccan students’) is ambiguous also. First, the data do not allow for straightforward comparisons across educational transitions. Second, and taking into account the data limitations, while there seems to be a case for increasing disadvantages, Antillean students, due to their overrepresentation in higher education form an exception to this phenomenon. We can therefore neither reject nor accept the hypothesis.

A thorough test of our tenth hypothesis (‘Immigrants lag behind the native Dutch even when we control for family background by conventional measures’) is impossible due to lack of sufficient data. We do find, however, support for our expectation when we compare educational performance for societal groups in primary education: even the very low-educated Dutch outperform all immigrant groups. As for the remaining hypotheses: it becomes clear how little we can say about educational decisions, attitudes, expectations and mindsets with these quantitative enrollment and performance data.

CONCLUSION & DISCUSSION

In this paper, I have argued that elements of the competing traditions of Human Capital Theory (HCT) and Cultural Reproduction (CRT) can be fruitfully integrated into a theoretical model, which addresses inequality of educational opportunity. I showed how Bourdieu’s notion of social locations can account for the different ‘starting positions’ of different societal groups. HCT added to that the notions of time-perspective and information asymmetry as part of the explanation for different educational decisions. Social locations in which individuals are born prepare them better or worse for their educational careers. Differences in individuals’ attitudes, skills, perspectives and information (together constituting, to a lesser or greater extent, a ‘middle-class mindset’) then lead to differences in educational opportunity. Furthermore, introducing a qualitative account of peer pressure, I stated that Moroccan students are more likely to develop anti-school sentiments through their disproportionate involvement in ‘street culture’ (while this culture’s
appeal increases too as anti-school sentiments grow). Finally, through an institutional analysis of the Netherlands’ educational system, characterized by rigid and early tracking and increasingly burdened by school segregation, I argued that inequalities in educational opportunity tend to be reinforced throughout the educational system.

Although we only tentatively explored the empirical evidence for the theoretical model, we can formulate three findings: first, no testable hypotheses could be rejected by the quantitative data; and, second, it became clear how little we can learn about educational decisions, attitudes, expectations and mindsets until we supplement our enrollment and performance data with more refined accounts of what goes on in schools and in families. This point serves to stress that the data currently collected and analyzed by the main advisory bodies of the Dutch government, are essentially inadequate. Qualitative data must necessarily complement such data were we to formulate more insightful accounts of what goes on in school and, in particularly, in the educational experience of immigrant students in the Netherlands. Nijhof (2009) essentially makes this point in stating that we need qualitative accounts to bring proximity back into research. Proximity, he argues allows us to “correct for the bias that enters our research through the theoretical notions and standardized practices which the researcher tends to follow, and which shapes in advance our view on things” (Nijhof 2009: 419; my translation). Consequently, it is through adding to quantitative inquiry, qualitative investigation in physical proximity of our subject of interest, that we are given the chance to gain new insights and to add novelty to common research practice.

Third, with regard to the particular immigrant group which was the focus of this article, I found little ground for separating Moroccan from Turkish migrants when studying educational positions. Moroccan immigrant boys’ disproportionate involvement in street culture, as addressed in the theoretical sections of this article, might then be relevant to explanations of delinquency rather than educational disadvantage. That is, while street culture is likely to impact Moroccan immigrants’ involvement of delinquency, it does not seem to affect their educational position. Here we cannot go beyond this observation. I am confident however that measures refined in line with the theoretical framework offered in this paper, will enable us to shed more light on this issue.

When it comes to addressing the provocative question with which I have labeled my paper, I of course opt for the easy way out: we have little reason to assume that the Netherlands is either a meritocracy or a plutocracy. While meritocratic selection remains the basic process through which students qualify for further levels of education (cf. Driessen, Sleegers and Smit 2008), we have however found important cracks in the meritocratic ideal. Albeit not directly through the transfer of wealth, the social location one is born into does greatly affect one’s chances for educational success. We can only come to a comprehensive understanding of inequality of educational opportunity if we take a perspective, which integrates social locations with investments in capital and examines these in the broader context of the characteristics of institutional structure.
To conclude, I cite some lines from the song ‘Subcity’ by Tracy Chapman:

People say it doesn’t exist
‘cause no one would like to admit
That there is a city underground
Where people live everyday
They say we’ve fallen through the cracks
They say the system works
But we won’t let it
Help

While the Netherlands do not have the inner-city ghettos Chapman is referring to, the parallel lies in the way people think about ‘the system’: it works. For disadvantaged groups, belief in the educational system may be a good thing: without it, it would be hard to work up the motivation and effort to perform well in school. This belief however carries a great danger with it, in that it legitimates educational success and failure. If the system ‘works’, those who fail do so by their own fault (cf. Goldthorpe 1996; De Botton 2004; Karabel 2005; Michaels 2006).

The value of thorough, and refined, research thus lies not only in testing my theoretical framework in specific, and the original theories’ generalizability in general. The fruits of such empirical analysis lie in a better understanding of the processes through which Moroccan immigrants, among other societal groups, are being disadvantaged in the Dutch educational system. Understanding is policy’s starting point and, consequently, our point of departure, were we to effectively do anything to increase equality of educational opportunities for disadvantaged groups. Further research will have to show whether the grounds I have laid for such an enquiry prove helpful in this respect.

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