

## **'Nowadays your Husband is your Partner': Ethnicity and Emancipation as Self Presentation**

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Interviewing is asking the interviewee to present herself. In the self presentations of the Turkish and Moroccan immigrant women I interviewed several interrelated meanings of gender and ethnicity were communicated. The themes I will discuss in my contribution to this book are: distribution of domestic tasks between husband and wife, sexual freedom of young women and the broken-off schoolcareer. I will analyse the arguments and expressions used as reflections and reactions regarding the dominant discourse on 'Muslim' women in the Netherlands, in which these women are portrayed as extremely dependent on men, particularly their fathers, brothers and husbands. Before doing this I will give some information about the political and practical research context and explain the main theoretical sources of inspiration.

### **Related worlds and power differences**

Turks (312,000) and Moroccans (265,000) are two of the five largest groups of immigrants from non-European countries in the Netherlands (16,000,000 inhabitants). The other three groups are immigrants from Indonesia, Surinam and the Antilles, three (former) Dutch colonies. Turkish and Moroccan immigrants are often discussed in one breath by the so-called autochtons. This one-group-construction is linked to their common immigration background and economical position in the Netherlands and with Dutch preoccupation with their 'eastern' religion, Islam. The immigration of both Turks and Moroccans started in the period 1964-1974 with annual recruitment contracts between the Dutch government and the Turkish and Moroccan government for the delivery of male 'unskilled' workers. The candidates were selected on physical health and strength, older and educated people were an unwanted category. The Moroccan 'guestworkers' were recruited from the very poor Rif-region in the north of Morocco. A third of the selection had not had any formal education. Only 25% of the 'first generation' Moroccan male immigrants had more education than primary school, mainly the men who emigrated without contract after working in Italy or France. The Turkish workers came from the central area of Turkey and the Black Sea Coast. There were little illiterates among them, but 75% did only primary school. Most of them had a farmers' background. In 1974, the period of economic recession following the oil crisis, Dutch government forbade further recruitment. At that moment 50,000 Turks and 25,000 Moroccans lived in the Netherlands. Although they were recruited on a temporal basis and although they themselves had had no intention to settle in the Netherlands, most of them stayed because of lack of opportunities in their home country. As the greater part of these men had a family in their home country a few years later a second immigration inflow started. This so called

‘family reunion’, often in bits and pieces, was mostly initiated by the wives who wanted independence from their family in law and a father for their growing up children. Generally these women were less educated than their husbands. More than 50% of the Moroccan first generation mothers were illiterate. After arriving in the Netherlands and accommodating to the new situation Turkish women were active on the labour market. They did unskilled factory work or cleaning work. Moroccan women usually were fulltime housewife/mother. They arrived some years later than the Turkish women, as the women of the Moroccan Rif region were more accustomed to husbands working and living far away for long periods. The most recent influx of Turkish and Moroccan immigrants consists of the spouses of these immigrants’ children. Until now around 75% of these young men and women marry someone from the region/country they or their parents come from. The educational level in this group of ‘import partners’ varies from nearly illiterates to academics, men as well as women. The problem and injustice is that –unlike for instance American and Japanese certificates- these foreign degrees are not recognised by Dutch institutions. For instance a certificated and experienced Turkish or Moroccan nurse has to start her professional training all over again to obtain a job in her profession in the Netherlands.

At the same time, the vast majority of first generation male immigrants are unemployed and the average level of income of these households is low. Their (grand)children are labelled as ‘riskgroups’ by policymakers and professionals because of their average low level of education and the high rate of school dropouts and unemployment. One might also point out the educational progress these children, particularly the youngest children of the first generation immigrants, made in comparison to the starting position of their parents. However, this kind of comment is nowadays negatively labeled as ‘political correct’ optimism or relativism. The current correct standpoint is speaking about a ‘multicultural tragedy’ and defining and at the same time explaining educational and social inequality by a lack of ‘integration’. In political, professional, academic and public discussions the disadvantaged position of inhabitants with a Turkish and Moroccan background is totally or partly explained by ‘cultural deviance’. Turks and Moroccans are supposed to have the same culture to a great extent because of their common religion, Islam. Notwithstanding (or thanks to) advanced secularisation in the Netherlands, the Dutch discourse on ‘multicultural problems’ focuses on classical Islam/Christianity dichotomies, such as rationality vs irrationality, developed vs backward, individual responsibility vs subordination to the group, modern equal vs traditional unequal gender relations (Said 1978, Van der Zwaard 1992, 1999b). Consequently signs of modernity, emancipation and educational achievements are labeled as ‘westernization’. In the same line of reasoning the immigration of spouses from Turkey and Morocco is problematized as a backlash in the process of modernization/integration of the second generation and their offspring. In the period I finish this chapter the new centre-right government in formation is formulating proposals to raise the minimal age and minimal income for a marriage with a partner from abroad and to pass on the costs of the compulsory integration course. Of course these measures are meant to stop or diminish immigration (from certain countries) in general,

but in the context of my account it is interesting to see what legitimation is used.

Working as an independent researcher in the field of social policy, I travel between the institutional world of policymakers and professionals (district nurses and welfare workers) and the world of daily life experiences of the main objects of social programmes, women of low income groups. In some research projects I study political documents and institutional practices to investigate the 'interpretative repertoire' (Potter and Wetherell 1987) of professionals and policymakers, the systems of terms that are used for explaining social inequality and characterizing cultural differences, and the effects of these constructions on professional and bureaucratic attitudes and procedures. In other projects I interview women/mothers, mainly immigrant women living in Rotterdam, to find out their perceptions of their social economical position, their ways of surviving and efforts to improve their situation, and their assessment of existing professional provisions.

The image of travelling between two worlds is mainly an expression of my irritation about the apparently self-evident problematizing and pathologizing of these women's ways of life by professionals and policymakers. I frequently use this metaphor to intervene in this massive and dominant political discourse, to influence the professional ethnocentric gaze and to enable the experience of these groups of women to be taken seriously and seen as legitimate and valuable.

From a strictly analytical perspective however, the postulation of two divided worlds or two different vocabularies does not clarify the situation. The way women of low income groups organise their life is also a reaction to legal rules and restrictions, institutional programs and professional approaches. An example is the use of post restantes for partners to prevent the reduction of social security given stricter controls on household composition. Another example is the participation of immigrant mothers in parental education programs, not primarily to improve their motherhood, but to gain contact with people who may help them to find a job. On the one hand my interviewees criticise the expressions professionals use to label them or to explain their behaviour, on the other hand their way of speaking about themselves is clearly mediated through the dominant discourses. Children of migrants may call themselves, for instance, foreigners or 'allochtonen', the Dutch policy term for immigrants and their children and grandchildren. When a Turkish woman does not much want to participate in a mother's course, a very popular professional strategy to 'integrate' migrant women in the Netherlands at the moment, she may use the excuse of having a 'traditional Turkish husband' to prevent further questions and insistence.

To take into account the dominant discursive context in the analysis of interviewtexts of immigrant women the concepts of De Certeau (1988) and Harré (1979) proved to be useful. De Certeau introduced the term 'tactics' to interpret acts which are determined by the absence of power, in addition to 'strategies'(Foucault 1986) which are organised by the postulation of power. Tactics constantly manipulate events to turn them into opportunities; they have more to do with constraints than with possibilities. It is 'backstage' behaviour that offers informal forms of influence and perhaps has the potential to confront the existing dis-

course, but does not yet challenge the overarching powerstructure and beliefs. Macleod (1991) used the concept to interpret the revival of veiling among lower middle-class women in Cairo as a reaction to the hardships of their overburdened life as working mothers with little opportunities to improve their situation, either at home or in the office. She describes this new fashion as 'accommodating protest' against existing gender relations and class relations. Skeggs (1997) used the concept to understand the humour and the flirting behavior of white working class women in 'caring courses', as a reaction to and an escape from the sexist approach and the 'classing gaze' of their teachers. Both authors found that respectability and respect are central issues in the accounts of their interviewees. Respectability is analyzed as part of the excluding self definition of higher middle class women. In the accounts of the excluded and pathologised women of lower classes, this meaning of femininity is connected with feelings of frustration and humiliation as well as with ideals of social mobility. Respect has to do with the wish for self determination and the need for recognition of their contributions and worth, both in the household and in society.

Theoretically these meanings of respect and respectability can be linked to Harré's concept of the expressive order of social life. Harré makes a fundamental distinction between those aspects of social activity that are directed to material and biological ends, which he calls 'practical'; and those directed to ends such as the presentation of the self as rational and worthy of respect, and belonging to a certain category of beings, which he calls 'expressive'. According to Harré, in many social interactions the expressive order is more dominant than the practical order. In his words: 'The pursuit of reputation in the eyes of others is the overriding preoccupation of human life (Harré 1979: 3). Therefore he considers self presentation first of all as part of the 'impression management' people use to accommodate their social reputation to their self image. So by investigating interviewtexts as self presentation, one may firstly find out the interviewees' social knowledge, their ideas about the social stratification in the society they live in and the dominant norms and values. Secondly it may be possible to reconstruct their estimation of their public social reputation and their 'moral career',<sup>1</sup> and their tactics to improve their social reputation. An inspiring research example of such an 'account analysis' is the discussion of life stories of German and Italian immigrant women in Canada by Freund and Quilici (1997). Confronted with some puzzling standard themes in these accounts, such as the description of rather isolated maid-servant-work as a suitable way to integrate in the new country, they analyze them as constructions which help the interviewed women to reconcile discrepancies between life experiences and ideals and to maintain feelings of autonomy and self-respect.

### **The research context: group discussions and individual interviews**

The accounts I discuss here are taken from two research projects. In the one project I organised group discussions between women/mothers of different ethnic groups living in the same 'working class' neighbourhood. There were forty-eight participants: Dutch, Surinamese,

Turkish and Moroccan women and a single Capeverdean and Croatian woman. The groups were composed on the basis of common involvement on an upbringing issue. The themes were: the role of the grandmother, daily practice in large families, upbringing in a new country and child care services. By bringing together mothers of different ethnic backgrounds we hoped to clarify similarities and differences between mothers, without attributing these a priori to 'culture' or 'ethnic background' or 'immigration'. We deliberately did not introduce these categories into the discussion, as we wanted to know which categories these women use themselves and how they position and identify themselves. The discussions were structured as focus group discussions, a research method in which participants are asked to react upon statements or presentations and in which interactions between participants are stimulated (Kitzinger 1994). The theoretical argument being that in daily life people form their ideas and opinions in reaction to the statements or the behaviour of other people as well. The intention was to analyze rational and emotional responses as well. The central theme in my research report is the complex coherence between the life stories of the women, their assessment of their current social and material circumstances and different meanings of motherhood (Van der Zwaard 1995). I will focus here on the unplanned hilarious intermezzi about 'men' in the group discussions.

The other project consisted of group discussions and individual interviews with (150) Surinamese, Antillian, Dutch, Turkish, Moroccan women and a single Croatian, Pakistani and Iraqi woman. The group discussions were used to detect the main themes in their life stories. In the individual interviews these themes were used to reflect on changes in the recent past and to fantasise about the future. The main purpose of this research project was to gather more information about the ways women/mothers of low income groups in Rotterdam try to survive and to improve their situation, and whether they are (sufficiently?) supported by their informal social network and professional provisions. The overall findings and conclusions are published in Van der Zwaard (1999a). Here I will focus on accounts about the broken-off school career. This is a frequently recurring theme in the interviews with Turkish women who emigrated to the Netherlands as children under the 'family reunion' opportunities of male labour migrants.

As interview texts are analyzed here as self presentations towards another person, I should state that I am a Dutch white middle-aged woman. I am the eldest daughter of parents of low education and I attained university by a roundabout way of secretarial jobs. Class differences are an essential part of my own life story. But I do realise that for my interviewees I am in the first place white/Dutch and well-educated and vaguely related to official institutions. I do not have a standard personal introduction for my interviews. Normally I start by explaining why I am going to ask all these questions and what I will do with the information. Depending on verbal and nonverbal reactions during the conversations I might reveal something of my background or my current situation. For example sometimes interviewees wanted to know whether I have children (no) and where I live (in a comparable neighbourhood in Rotterdam). For some migrant women it was the first time they had 'such a

personal conversation' with a Dutch woman at their home. And some took the opportunity to ask me all kind of practical information, about housing, education, medical services etc. If possible I gave answers or I provided contacts later on.

Finally it is important to know that 45% of the population of Rotterdam (600,000) has an immigrant background. These people are born abroad or have at least one parent born abroad. Among them: 40,000 Turks and 30,000 Moroccans.

### **Intermezzi about 'men': explicit quarrels and implicit messages**

The participants of the focus group discussions about child rearing issues enjoyed talking about their daily experiences and did not seem to be afraid to bring to the fore questions, difficulties, different experiences or disagreements. An answer from one often provoked a 'yes, but...' reaction from another. Consequently different sides of an issue, different circumstances and different considerations came into discussion quite naturally. Besides, there were moments of recognition, sometimes leading to emotion and expressions of understanding, sometimes leading to hilarity.

The introduction of the word 'men' was always cause for hilarity. It struck me that as soon as somebody used that word the atmosphere in the group changed from a rather serious discussion to a somewhat giggling women-among-women conversation. There was always someone who reacted with a remark like 'an extra child' or 'an extra problem', which was irrevocably followed by a series of anecdotes of (often failed) efforts to attain a more equal distribution of domestic tasks and responsibilities. Turkish and Moroccan women participated notably with more enthusiasm in these lively conversations than Dutch women. The accounts of the Turkish and Moroccan women often consisted of a mixture of indignation about the current state of affairs. They were triumphant about small successes and expressed self-ridicule over failed efforts to change the situation. Dutch women remained more serious. They did not react or they intervened with questions expressing dilemmas and contradictory feelings.

My first thought was, that 'the power of self-evidence' might be more effective in Dutch households than in immigrant households. This power-concept of the Dutch social psychologist Komter (1985), based on research on decision making in (white) Dutch families, refers to the implicit consensus about how things go, which maintains the existing unequal distribution of tasks and decisionpower in 'modern' families. Komter showed that this consensus is based on the habit of women to adjust their wishes and needs to those of her husband to avoid difficulties and quarrels and to maintain the idea of a modern, equivalent and harmonious marriage. Young immigrant women, busy designing their household structure in a new situation, might lack some self evidence. They explained that their own mothers can only partly serve as role model, because of different circumstances and different ideas about staying in the Netherlands. Therefore problems regarding a more honest distribution of domestic tasks might be fought out more openly.

My second thought was that the effusions of the Turkish and Moroccan participants should not only be understood as actual descriptions of domestic power conflicts, but as a way of self presentation towards the Dutch audience: the Dutch participants and the Dutch researcher. So what was the impression management aim of this self presentation? In view of the many times the words Turkish, Moroccan and Dutch were used one thing was clear. The individual self presentations were (also) connected with the social reputation and cultural identity of different ethnic groups.

### **Identifying as a new generation of young modern Turkish women/mothers**

I will illustrate this combination of individual and group presentation with textfragments from a group discussion about child care services. There were seven Turkish, one Moroccan, one Croatian and two Dutch women in the group. All the Turkish women came to the Netherlands during their childhood. They were all fulltime housewives. Most of them stopped working after the birth of their second child. In the first hour of the meeting there was extensive discussion about the problems encountered trying to find suitable employment which might be combined with the responsibilities of motherhood.

The conversation about men and the distribution of domestic tasks followed after a discussion of youth experiences with child care. Some Turkish women talked indignantly and, at the same time, understandingly about the way their own mothers solved child care problems. Most of their mothers did cleaning work or factory work during the first ten, twenty years in the Netherlands. Sometimes child care was (partly) solved by giving the eldest daughter responsibilities at a young age or by sending one or more children back to Turkey for a few years. One women explained in detail the different positions and ideas of their parents then and those of young parents nowadays. Important arguments in her account were: there was no one who could help because we were the only Turks in our street then; our parents came here for a temporary stay to earn money, while for us young Turkish women living in the Netherlands is the normal situation.

Esma, another Turkish woman, completes her argument by saying: 'Nowadays you do everything together with your husband. I may safely say: I don't like cooking and I actually do not cook at home. My mother would not be allowed to say this.' Sibel, also Turkish, reacts: 'No, a women ought to cook, that was how it was, but this has all changed now.' Dubravka, the Croatian woman says: 'Yes, at present women and men are equal. They both work, they both do their things at home. In former days it was quite different.' Karin, a Dutch woman, disagrees: 'That's not altogether true. When my child is ill, I take a day off, my husband will not do it.' She has five children and she had explained earlier how she and her husband organise child care in shifts. He works during the day from Monday to Friday and she works in the evenings and on the weekends. Suna, Turkish, admits immediately: 'That's the only thing we could not change yet.' Carla, a Dutch woman asks: 'But do we want to change that? If I answer honestly, it is no. After all I want to be the central person and the central manager.

In this respect I resemble my mother.' Selma, Turkish, reacts: 'It's the same with me. I think all mothers have those feelings.'

By positioning themselves as a new generation of Turkish (immigrant) women/mothers they include themselves in the group of modern young mothers in the Netherlands. By doing this they also appropriate the well known contradictions between the ideology and the daily practice of modern mothers. Family research in the Netherlands has demonstrated that the essential difference between mothers/housewives with 'modern' opinions and women with 'traditional' ideas about motherhood is situated in what they say, and not in what they do (Knijn & Verheijen 1988). In Harré's terms you might say: a modern mother puts up with the undesirable unequal distribution of tasks in order to maintain practical family-organization, but at the same time she tries to keep the reputation of a modern emancipated woman. The women interviewed suggest that more has changed in the domain of house keeping than in the domain of child care. Where children are concerned contradictory feelings seem to handicap the realisation of the ideal of modernity. Some of these feelings had been discussed earlier in relation to the issue of combining labour and child care; such as guilty feelings, the feeling of not being a 'real' mother, jealousy towards the grandmother/baby sitter, the wish to be a better mother than their own mother. All mothers presented themselves as mothers with a great sense of responsibility. This responsible mother account undermines their accounts about the modern distribution of tasks at home.

### **Refusing the compliment of being a model Moroccan woman**

Souad, the Moroccan participant, had not reacted yet. Asked for her comments, she happened to have a different opinion and practice. Souad emigrated to the Netherlands as a young adult to marry a Moroccan man. First she recounts the strict arrangements about domestic tasks she made with her husband and children the moment she started working outside the home. A Dutch woman asks her how she solves complicated situations, for example when her children are ill. She answers that she will not stay at home automatically and illustrates this with a recent event: 'Last week my son was ill, but my husband was also ill, so there was no reason for me to stay home.' As if she wants to illustrate how strong a woman must be to achieve equality she continues by narrating a quarrel with her brother-in-law. He became angry with her, because one evening she stuck to her plan of going to a party instead of welcoming him and his wife. During the postponed visit, one week later, he is still angry with her. She states:

I said to him: "Mohammed, I was invited to that women's party<sup>2</sup> two weeks before. So I went. But the kitchen is always open. You can make a meal together. You come for your brother, don't you!" He said: "Yes, but my wife..." I answered: "Your wife may easily talk with you. I am not going to stay home for that."

The mentioning of women's parties provokes a series of hilarious remarks from the Turkish

women about going out with women, I will return to these later.

Souad takes up the thread of her own serious argument again: 'In Turkey or Morocco you can easily go out with your husband. There is always a mother, aunt or sister who can take care of the children. Here we do not have family. So one has to stay home when the other wants to go out in the evening'. Carla, Dutch, and living in the same street as Souad: 'But you are an exceptional ideal woman.' Souad does not accept the compliment. She immediately starts telling a story about a conflict with her husband about the distribution of tasks at home.

My husband said recently: "The doors are dirty". I had a day off, but cleaning the doors belongs to his task. If I clean them, he will never do it again. I may have time to do it, but I go out, to friends. Some time ago we quarreled about it again. Then I said: "OK, I will resign from my job, I will stay at home and take care that dinner will be ready on time each day and that everything is always clean." The following week I was free, it was the school holidays but he did not know that. So Monday I stayed at home and said to my children: "What are we going to do?" My husband asked: "Did you really resign!?" He asked my children, but they didn't know either. They asked me: "What will we do for money?" I answered: "Your father will take care of that." I succeeded making up idle stories for another two days, but of course I couldn't keep up. Then I told him that it was not true. He said: "You are really a mean pig-headed woman." I said: "You are pig-headed too, you always try to throw the work on me, but I want enjoy my free time too. Not always running, running..."

The other participants are impressed by her story. Esmā, Turkish, concludes: 'Men always try to throw work on women.' Carla, Dutch: 'It does not matter, Turkish, Moroccan, Dutch men, it's all the same.' All ladies in chorus: 'All men!' They start giggling about so much harmony, but Souad continues seriously: 'But in former days Moroccan men really did nothing at home. Just eating and playing the boss. Nowadays it's different.' Carla states:

You educated your husband. But if you only look in our street, how little Moroccan women come on the street. That causes conflicts. The children want do otherwise, the mother too, but she does not do it because of her husband. But those fathers have problems too. They came here thinking that all would be going on the familiar way. But you and your husband are different, you mix with other people.

A Turkish women interrupts with a remark about the first generation of migrants who hold onto the idea of Turkey and Turkish norms of thirty years ago. Other Turkish women join in and once more they emphasise the big difference between their parents and themselves concerning life story and norms. Souad does not join this conversation. She mentions changes among Moroccans, but does not speak in separate generations and categories. Neither does

she react to Carla's suggestion that her being a 'model woman' is the result of her mixing with other ethnic (Dutch, I suppose) groups. Her reaction to the initial compliment by narrating the heroic quarrel-story is ambiguous. On the one hand, it might be interpreted as a way to explain that her situation at home is no more ideal than that of the others; that she is not a model woman at all. On the other hand, she deliberately tells a heroic and impressive story about the tenacious and successful struggle with her husband. Taking the two interpretations together, the conclusion may be that she does not only say something about herself, but that she also want to improve the social reputation of 'Moroccans' as a group. She clarifies to the others that the Moroccans nowadays are not the same as the Moroccans in former days. Something is changing, but definitely not automatically. It requires tactics as well as perseverance and tenacity from the women; and that is the same for all women.

### **Fun, freedom and morality**

Both interventions from the Turkish women in the serious argument of Souad have to do with fun, freedom and morality. The words 'women's parties' causes the following conversation:

Esma: 'Women's parties, in my mother's time that was not possible. But we young women, we really go out on Saturday evening, women together. And the men stay home to take care of the children.'

Hürya enthusiastic: 'That's a big fashion lately. We take the very sexiest clothes from our wardrobe. The party starts at seven and we keep on to one or two at night. Some even go to discotheques afterwards, but we behave a bit properly.'

Esma: 'Maybe the next time...'

Sniggering.

Sibel: 'I know Dutch women who say: "My husband would not do that, give up his Saturday." Women you wouldn't expect to say that at all.'

Immediately the Dutch women present let us know that their husband would take care of the children. However Dubravka, the Croatian woman, says that she would not at all like going out 'on my own, without my husband'.

Esma: 'But among women, that's really big fun. All the things we do!!!' (screaming)  
And it remains proper!

Laughter, much talking over each other.

Later, they broach a related topic to illustrate the conservatism of the 'first generation labour immigrants', their sticking to the idea of Turkey and Turkish of thirty years ago. They talk about confrontations with Turkish youth in Turkey. 'They thought we were free, because we were from Europe. Europe, that is saying sexual freedom. They thought we did all kinds of things. But actually we girls from Europe were behind the times compared with the girls in Turkey. Our parents were quite rigid about going out and having boy friends. They

always said: “Turkish girls don’t do that” and we fell for it. But during our holidays we found out that the girls in Turkey had a lot more freedom than we had. Turkey changed altogether, even the villages changed. But our parents do not want to see that and they do not take it from us.’

The self-presentation of these Turkish women as ‘second generation migrants’ consists of different identifications or self categorizing. In the first place they present themselves as ‘established’, women who know no other life than living in or belonging to the Netherlands. This is in contrast to their parents who retained the idea of a temporary stay in the Netherlands for a long time and hence were or still are ‘outsiders’ in the Netherlands.

In the second place they present themselves as European Turks who are behind the times compared with Turkish Turks. For a long time their Turkish identity was filled in with accounts from their parents about norms and customs in Turkey, which could only be verified during holidays. All the examples talk about morality and sexual freedom. In most of the Dutch literature about Turkish and Moroccan immigrants rigidity in this domain is explained by the concept of ‘honour’ in combination with ‘Islamic culture’.<sup>3</sup> However, these women emphasise that their parents’ restrictions are consequences of social isolation effected by emigration and immigration. Besides they clarify their parents’ sticking to old norms as a reaction against negative images of European moral standards. In Turkey, European Turks are admired, but also suspected of moral deterioration. The accounts of the young Turkish women do not make clear how they dealt with their bad reputation in Turkey. What they emphasise is that their holiday-experiences resulted in disputing their parents’ definition of ‘being a Turkish girl’. Remarks like ‘they do not take it from us’ suggest that their parents are stubborn, particularly concerning moral issues. For in other domains, the women mention changes in their parents’ attitudes. For instance regarding the equivalence of sons and daughters, Hürya says:

Young people do not mind any more, a boy or a girl. But in former days... my father in law had two sons. When his third child happened to be a daughter he did not come home for three days. Now he thinks it’s mad. Now and then his daughter says: “Go away, you may not sit next to me, because you did not see my mother for three days.” He really loves his daughter. He feels ashamed.

This emphasis on current consensus between parents and (older) children may be an expression of efforts to find a new collective orientation and identity in circumstances which have been changed by migration. It may also be interpreted as softening the negative picture they gave of their parents and older Turkish immigrants in general. These two interpretations do not necessarily exclude each other.

The third identity theme in the second generation account is linked with ‘being behind the times’ and may be called ‘recovering’. They definitely make clear that they are no longer backward girls and that they have worked off arrears concerning their freedom of movement

at a rapid tempo. Women's parties on Saturday evening are not only presented as a warlike deed in the struggle with their husbands, but also as proof that they are no longer behind the times, in relation to both Turkish women in Turkey and Dutch women in the Netherlands. In Harré's (1979) terms: the women describe their moral career as an upward tendency. Based on the theoretical framework of De Certeau (1984) one might add: humour is used as a tactic to criticise dominant images of Muslim women in a non-confrontational way.

### **The broken-off school career**

There is another domain in which these eldest daughters of labour immigrants have to work off arrears: education. Arriving in the Netherlands in the middle of primary school they were confronted with Dutch schools which were poorly equipped to take care of pupils with another mother tongue. Consequently most of them ended up in so called 'international linking classes'<sup>4</sup> in secondary girls' schools leading to very restricted qualifications. Many of them did not finish school. They left school the moment compulsory education ended and some gave up before that age. In those days (1980s) there were two explanations for the broken-off school career of Turkish and Moroccan girls. On the one hand, the parents were blamed for having traditional ideas about girls and education. Turkish and Moroccan parents would not attach great importance to educated daughters, because after all their future would be restricted to being a (house)wife and mother, probably not living in the Netherlands. Besides they would be afraid that their daughters might come into contact with boys. This 'cultural' account was the most dominant explanation among professionals and policy makers. On the other hand, some education researchers pointed out the restricted perspectives of the schools these girls were assigned to and identified comparable attitudes among Dutch pupils in these schools. Their conclusion was that at least a part of the immigrant girls stayed away from school or left school, through a 'lack of motivation'. The girls did not see what good it was to take a diploma of so little value. Besides some were disappointed because in Turkey or Morocco they were successful pupils with high ambitions.

In my interviews with the Turkish 'second generation' women both explanations were brought to the fore. Some women emphasised that her parents (mother and/or father) did not allow them to attend school, because of the boys and because they thought it was not of great use for a (Turkish) girl to obtain a (Dutch) diploma. Some revealed that they were very angry with their parents at that time. Some said that they easily tolerated their parent's opinion because they did not feel at home at school or in the Netherlands. Some said that their parents had not explicitly forbidden them from finishing school, but 'you hear your family talking about girls going to marry and you draw your own conclusions.' Most of them added that their parents changed their mind in later years. They mentioned younger sisters who did get the chance to finish school and who have diplomas of greater value: 'My mother regrets what she did then, she feels sorry for me now'. 'My mother started learning Dutch recently, she always says to me and my sisters: you have to learn ladies, it's never too late.'

At least as many women tell quite another story. They emphasise that it was their own choice to leave school and that they did this against their parents (particularly fathers') will. The reasons they give were variations on 'I did not feel at home at school' and 'I did not see what good it was to finish (that) school'. They explain their lack of motivation by pointing to the limited value of the diploma and to the lack of career opportunities for migrants in the Dutch labour market. 'I thought, we as foreigners will never get a chance to get a higher position than our parents.'

On the one hand, the complexity of most accounts brought me to the overall conclusion that, for the most part, the broken-off school career was the result of a mixture of circumstances, assessments and conflicting feelings, of both the parents and the girls themselves. On the other hand, it struck me that either dependence or autonomy was the central theme in the accounts. Re-analyzing the accounts as self-expressions towards a Dutch researcher, the emphasis on dependence and Turkish traditional ideas about femininity might be interpreted as giving an explanation that fits within the dominant discourse and the supposed interpretation repertoire of the interviewer. This is completed by a deliberate effort to improve the social reputation of Turkish immigrants by adding that their parents' opinions have changed. The emphasis on 'my own choice', autonomy and the progressive ideas of their parents about girls and education might be interpreted as a critical reaction against dominant discourse about 'Islamic' gender relations, in which the unequal chances of (female) migrants in the Netherlands are neglected.

## **Epilogue**

This analysis of interviewtexts of Turkish and Moroccan immigrant women as self presentation towards a Dutch audience reveals in the first place their social knowledge, their assessments of their social reputation as 'Islamic' woman in the Netherlands. Implicitly and explicitly the women react against dominant ideas about their 'culture': their traditional family relations, lack of freedom and restricted autonomy. Differentiating the category of Turkish and/or Moroccan women into subgroups, such as first and second generation immigrants, and emphasizing change are both tactics to improve their social reputation. However, by positioning and identifying themselves as 'modern' women, wife and mother they clearly appropriate the complexities and contradictions of this position and identity too. For example, the presentation of marriage as partnership, the combination of the glamour idea of freedom with female decency and the complicated idealization of autonomy. Moreover, their reactions reveal that for migrant women, individual social reputation is always connected with the reputation of the ethnic group. Therefore being judged as an exceptional modern model women is not considered a compliment.

## **Notes**

1. Harré's definition of a moral career is: 'the social history of a person with respect to the

attitudes of respect and contempt that others have to him and of his understandings of these attitudes' and 'a life trajectory defined in terms of public esteem' (1979: 312). Harré borrowed this concept from Goffman (1959).

2. The social equivalent of a 'girls' night out'.

3. For a critical review of this literature see Lutz (1991).

4. In 'international linking classes' newcomer-children mainly get language teaching.

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