

## Living in a ‘drain’

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### *Summary*

*The usual characterisations of multi-ethnic neighbourhoods in Dutch cities are rather humiliating and reinforce the negative image of these neighbourhoods. The Rotterdam invention ‘drain’ (afvalputje) is a very dirty example, but the current label ‘disadvantaged neighbourhood’ (achterstandsbuurt) equally does not improve their reputation. The impact of this negative labeling is far-reaching. Not only does the reputation of a neighbourhood affect the reputation of the residents, it also influences their perception of their environment and neighbours. The precise effects of a negative reputation on the (self)images of the residents depends on their housing history, their social-economical possibilities, their future plans and the availability of alternative sources of appreciation and acknowledgment. The overall effects are distance and prejudices between different groups of the population and hesitations to concern oneself with neighbourhood-affaires.*

### **Introduction**

The organisation of social policy in the Netherlands is among other things based on a classification of neighbourhoods, expressed in disadvantage scores. Usually this score is an addition sum of the proportion of poor, low educated and unemployed residents and the proportion of (first-generation and second-generation) immigrants. ‘Disadvantaged neighbourhoods’ may change to ‘problem neighbourhoods’ by a high percentage of single-parent families, the number of registered criminal acts and by their unsafety-score. In daily political and professional discussions the proportion of immigrants weighs heavily. In the media ‘disadvantaged neighbourhoods’ and ‘problem neighbourhoods’ with a high proportion of immigrants become easily ‘ghettos’ including the connotation of threatening ‘American circumstances’.

In my place of residence and main research field Rotterdam the vocabulary used to characterise immigrant neighbourhoods is even more dramatic. Since the local elections of 2002, which led to the end of a long period of social democratic political hegemony and the installation of a right wing city council, aldermen and other political spokesmen try to prove their street-credibility by problematising the multi-ethnic society and inventing course expressions to tipify immigrant neighbourhoods, or the whole of Rotterdam. A recent popular expression is ‘drain’. It was first used by a social democratic district governor to problematize the removals of recent immigrants and refugees from smaller towns in the Netherlands to Rotterdam and the concentration of these newcomers in shabby boarding-houses. Soon it became a common sense characterisation of neighbourhoods with a fast growing proportion of immigrants, because ‘the colour is not the problem, but the problems in Rotterdam have a colour’ as an alderman of a right wing populist party likes to say.

I do not agree with the underlying analysis and I abhor this humiliating way of speaking. In my research reports and other publications I brought countless qualitative data which show the diversity, self-sufficiency and social mobility in immigrant neighbourhoods. In public performances I try to introduce other characterisations, like for instance 'springboard' to underline the ambitions and efforts of the newcomers and other residents to improve their situation. For this conference and paper I have another object in view. I will explore the impact of the negative labeling of immigrant neighbourhoods on the perceptions, valuations and decisions of the residents; its effect on their images of their residential environment and of the other residents, and on their self-images. In other words, the subject of this paper is the relation between the social reputation of the neighbourhood and the social reputation of the residents, from the point of view of the residents; and the way they deal with a bad reputation, as well mentally as practically.

Empirically this paper is based on several qualitative researches in immigrant neighbourhoods, by order of municipal services, housing associations and immigrant organisations. Working as an independent researcher in the field of social policy, I travel between the institutional world of policymakers and professionals (district nurses, welfare workers, housing associations, townplanners) and the world of daily life experiences of the main objects of social programmes, low income groups, women/mothers and residents of immigrant neighbourhoods. In the period 1995-2005 I interviewed approximately 300 men and women, and I held group interviews with another 350 respondents. 80% of the respondents are (son/daughter of) immigrants, mainly from Turkey, Morocco, Cape Verdian, Surinam and Antilles. My empirical archive consists of (mostly verbatim) transcriptions of these interviews. A continuing line in these researches is the exploration of self-perceptions, ways of surviving, social networks, ideas about and efforts to social mobility, and assessment of existing professional provisions.

### **Theoretical sources of inspiration**

Important elements of the theoretical framework for the interpretation of these interviews and inspiration for this paper is Harré's concept of the expressive order of social life and the term 'tactic' of De Certeau. The British social psychologist Rom 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). The 'moral career'<sup>1</sup> dominates the social economical career. Self presentation, for instance in interviews, is 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 rhetorical and practical 'tactics' to improve their social reputation.

The French philosopher/sociologist De Certeau (1988) invented the term 'tactic' 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 discourse, 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 'accomodating 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 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.

In my researches reputation, respect and respectability were not explicit interview-items, but these subjects came up spontaneously in the respondents' accounts on the changing population, the pedagogical climate on the street, the possible removal to another neighbourhood, and recent urban renewal, the building of more expensive houses in the neighbourhood. Their accounts show the dominance or hegemony of the political and professional disadvantaged neighbourhood-discourse. On the one hand the respondents use expressions and reasonings of this discourse to underline their standpoints and to legitimize their choices; on the other hand they dissociate from and criticize this negative approach of their group and their neighbourhood. Both reactions can among other things be understood as impression management, as tactics of the respondents to uphold their status or social reputation, towards the interviewer, who is (wrongly) supposed to live in another type of neighbourhood and towards the middle class society she is supposed to represent. In the following I wil discuss some examples and go into the position of different groups of residents and the relations between them. I explain and illustrate the impact of their perceptions and reasonings on the idea of feeling home and their involvement in the maintaining of the physical and social quality of the neighbourhood. I finish with a description of their doubts about staying or leaving the neighbourhood, the city and the country.

### **The outsiders' gaze**

*'You don't dare to say anymore that you live in this neighbourhood'*

Remarks about 'not daring to mention your neighbourhood' are only partly practical and mainly rhetorical. Some will incidentally avoid to name their neighbourhood, some consistently use another description of the area they live and some do not draw practical conclusions from this opinion. The rhetorical use and expressive meaning is more important. These remarks express above all the awareness or idea of the bad reputation of one's neighbourhood in the outside world and the negative effect of it on one's own reputation. The outside world is an anonymus public or demonstrable personages like colleagues and family members.

*'My colleagues live outside Rotterdam, 40, 50 kilometers away, but everybody seems to know my street! Do I have to tell you more!'*

Some present the bad reputation of their neighbourhood as a fact, an irrefutable general opinion. Others tell that they argue about it with family members. *'We always have to explain why we still live there'*. To convince the family they use practical and emotional arguments. Practical arguments are the ethnic shops, the market, the short distance between home and work, good public transport and central location. The main emotional argument is familiarity of the neighbourhood: *'I feel at home here, I know every square centimeter in this neighbourhood.'* Nowadays not only the old 'Dutch' residents, but also the Turkish, Moroccan and Surinam immigrants can tell about the-old-days (the 70's or the 80's of the last century) and their childhood in the neighbourhood. Geographically they have three non-competing identities. They define themselves as Turk (or...), Rotterdammer and – in spite of all the negativity- often also as resident of a certain neighbourhood.<sup>2</sup> Besides shame and uncertainty about the reputation of their neighbourhood, there are also manifestations of a positive identification and of proud. *'Since my sister moved to a suburb, she visits me everyday!'* Nevertheless, the arguments with family members about staying or leaving the neighbourhood trigger doubts related to status-issues. Can I/we, being a person/family getting on, stay in a disadvantaged neighbourhood? Why should we stay with the stragglers? In other words: I feel at home, but do I still belong here?

Residents with a more self evident higher social-economical and/or cultural status, like students, artists or Dutch middle income households equally do not know if they belong to the neighbourhood, but this uncertainty has another meaning. Some do not even know the name or the exact borders of the neighbourhood and never mention it as place of residence, because they see themselves as outsiders, or 'not real residents' of the neighbourhood. The negative discourse about the neighbourhood and its residents does not injure their personal reputation, but it apparently rules out the possibility of identification. They live 'in the center' or 'near the bridge'. However some of them do identify with the neighbourhood including its bad reputation. They derive from it a status of cosmopolitan adventurer or progressive multiculturalist.

*'We have consciously chosen for the city. I want my children grow up in the multicultural society.'*

### **The pedagogical climate**

*'For the future of my children...'*

Immigrant neighbourhoods are young neighbourhoods by the relatively great number of children and youngsters. This is more a consequence of the immigration history of the two biggest groups of labour immigrants in the Netherlands, Turks and Moroccans, than an indication of the childfriendliness of the physical environment. The children of the labour immigrants joined their fathers in the 70's/80's, they married -in majority with someone from their country of origin- some ten years later, they found a house in the neighbourhood and got 2-4 children. In the meantime 'Dutch' children became a small minority in these neighbourhoods. You hardly see them on the streets and even less in the schools. The immigrant young parents problematise this situation. They prefer a 'mixed' environment for their children. Their children should play and speak with Dutch children, to improve the Dutch language, to know how to behave in Dutch circles, as a guarantee for 'a good future', a good job and income.

*'If we stay here, my sons will never speak Dutch properly. They'll stay with their family, like me, their children will grow up in a disadvantaged neighbourhood and so we never get on!'*

This segregation problem is linked to the problem of 'black schools'. The immigrants' definition of this educational issue tells about segregation and quality, and about discrimination and prejudices. They have their doubts about the quality of the disadvantaged schools in the disadvantaged neighbourhoods. They know the professional discourse about these schools and they would prefer *'not to take risks with my children'*. They are also uncertain about the attitude of the teachers towards their children. They fear that teachers, who generally live elsewhere inside or outside Rotterdam, will have low expectations of the children, based on prejudices about the neighbourhood and its residents, and that this will lead to low ambitions and consequently to low school achievements. As the –scientifically proved– effect of class based and culturally prejudiced expectancies of teachers is little discussed in public, the parents do not have standard-sentences to express this pedagogical uncertainty at their disposal (Jungbluth 1991, 1999). In the interviews immigrant parents explained this point without heavy words like discrimination or prejudices, but with stories about own experiences and hearsay tales.

*'I placed my eldest daughter on a mixed school in another neighbourhood. When my son had to go to the day nursery here, I could not manage bringing and fetching them both anymore, as I myself was on a training too. Then I visited all schools in the neighbourhood. They did not differ very much, but what I find very important is: how do the teachers approach you? How is their gaze? Do they look at you when they talk to you? Do they listen to you? Do you feel welcome?'*

*'My elder children are on a school I am not completely content with. So I looked for another school for my youngest. I liked this school immediately, because it looks tidy, serious, and the headmaster stands at the frontdoor every morning, he knows everybody.'*

Detached from the interview-context these remarks might be interpreted as the simple wish of parents to put their children under the care of kind educational professionals. Linked to accounts about their own (bad) experiences in Dutch schools (as the automatic referral to low vocational education) and linked to their awareness of the bad reputation of immigrant neighbourhoods, this simple wish changes to a serious doubt about educational quality, prejudices and mutual trust. This doubt, which is critically related to the disadvantage discourse, is often discussed among immigrant parents and is one of the causes of the relatively frequent intermediate changes of school of their children.

The third upbringing problem related to the social reputation of the neighbourhoods is the pedagogical climate on the streets; or the fear of parents that their children will meet 'the wrong friends'. This is a general parental fear which grows as their children and the influence of their peer group grow, but in a neighbourhood with a bad reputation it is directly linked to the environment: the coffeshops and the boys (and girls) 'hanging on' the street. This fear is strengthened by news about incidents and filled up by own experiences in combination with negative images of specified groups. Parents fear that their children will go 'the wrong way' by contacts with children of other ethnic groups or children of a lower class, and that they will vitiate their future.

*'There are famous football players in my family in Surinam. So I have always said: when I have a boy, I will send him to a football club. My son was in the youth training of Feyenoord, but he was dismissed. He had made jokes, he was impudent. He learned that from the children in the street. I brushed his teeth with pepper, he will never say it again. According to the trainer he is not tough enough, he is too playful for a real training in this club. Probably I was a little previous in sending him there. (...) But this is not a good environment to raise*

*your child. All those Turks and Moroccans, and my children have to be thrown together with them.'*

Naturally none of the interviewed parents described their son or daughter as initiators of impudences and other troubles. Parents have to uphold their reputation as parents and pedagogical reputation is always narrowly linked with respectability. In a neighbourhood with a bad reputation this fear for external bad influences can lead to extreme restrictions of the freedom of movement of the children. The negative stereotype is that Turkish and Moroccan children are allowed to stay outside very late in the evening. My observation is that the streets and squares in 'young neighbourhoods' are often strikingly empty measured to the number of children who live in the surrounding houses.

### **Through (un)safety glasses**

*'I never had something happen to me (yet), but...'*

Since 2002 residents of immigrant neighbourhoods in Rotterdam are frequently questioned about their unsafety feelings and professionals haven't been dismissed because of the insufficiently improving safety score of their district. This monitoring and fixation on (un)safety affects the perception of the physical environment, the people who live there or pass by, and of daily and incidental events. In a neighbourhood with a bad reputation the lacking of personal bad experiences is perceived as favourable exception, attributed to impressive looks, precautionary measures or good luck. In the mean time any incident, experienced by oneself or reported by the media, is a confirmation of the many threatening dangers and the correctness of the bad reputation of the neighbourhood.

*'We have to do with safety here. This is not one of the safest neighbourhoods. I feel safe, as I know it is not safe. Late at night you should not walk alone on the B.street. I never had something happen to me, but I have heard. I did not see it myself, but I believe what they say. I do not go out late and after an evening-shift I come home by car. But if it ever happens to me, or to my wife or children, then it's over and out, then I'm gone.'*

This is more than presenting oneself as a responsible head of the household and being streetwise, this is alarm phase 10, and this is not a statement of someone who has already plans to leave the neighbourhood. Actually this respondent bought a house in the neighbourhood and is thinking about exchanging it for a more luxurious one, also in the neighbourhood.

Relying on the many remarks about the good relations, the good atmosphere and the lack of fear in the porch and in the circle of direct neighbours there is a link between familiarity, good relations and feelings of safety. Conversely feelings of unsafety and the tense alertness towards unknown people and unknown situations in a slightly larger environment do not create a friendly and welcoming climate for newcomers, especially when these newcomers look or are seen as 'different'.

*'Lately we went to the market and there, on the corner we saw a lot of Antillians. With good weather it looks just like an ant-hill. Well, I don't want to sound negatively, but I can't stand it. I mean: I love people, doesn't matter, all colors, but they shouldn't create or have such a threatening atmosphere. (...) This is already a "negative neighbourhood" and then these groups added too.'*

The social reputation of the neighbourhood works here on both sides. On the one hand a bad reputation triggers feelings of unsafety and fear of unknown people, and on the other hand

these unknown people are perceived as added danger to the social reputation of the neighbourhood.

### **Rich import as confirmation of second-rate status**

*'They have their beautiful houses for a good price, but they will not mix with us.'*

In the 70's and 80's the motto of urban renewal was: building(s) for the neighbourhood, meaning: for the residents who have lived there for many years in rather bad circumstances. Nowadays the intention of urban renewal is saving the neighbourhood (and the city) from social destruction by tempting richer outsiders to settle, or –as second best- by holding social mobile residents. In the words of a Rotterdam alderman: *'To bring some civilisation there.'* This urban renewal strategy causes a lot of emotions. In the frontstage the rage of residents who must leave their relatively cheap houses on the best locations to make room for the expensive houses they will never be able to rent or buy. They protest with slogans as: *'We will not make way for the rich.'* ('Niet wijken voor de rijken') As backing vocals residents who are not directly affected by the demolition plans grumbling about newcomers who will not mix and about stigmas that will not disappear.

Although the new houses are often bought by residents of the neighbourhood, these newcomers tend to be seen as distant and different. A man with a fulltime job outside Rotterdam, who just apologized for being late at the groupinterview by traffic-problems, described the new 'rich' residents as *'all commuters, man and woman working outside Rotterdam, driving into and out of the neighbourhood with their big cars. They are happy with their little palace for a good price, but they will not mix in the neighbourhood.'* Others comment: *'We may see them in the supermarket, but they will not send their children to our school.'* These remarks show awareness of the status-differences between the new import and themselves and insecurity about superiority feelings of the newcomers towards the settled residents of the neighbourhood. One older woman pointed straightforward to the reputation-issue: *'Those houses don't help, on our forehead is still written: "disadvantaged neighbourhood"'*. A classic description of a stigma.

This does not mean they do not appreciate urban renewal at all. Residents of Rotterdam South, the part of Rotterdam with the lowest status and the nickname 'farmers-side', are very happy with the famous bridge, the theater and restaurants, the wide streets and all the new big buildings on their side. *'It reminds me to Istanbul!'* They regard this extension of the center to the south as improvement of the reputation of their part of the city. As well native Dutch as immigrants like to walk there and show family-guests from elsewhere the beauty and modernity of Rotterdam. And yet they will never mention the luxurious housing-estates around these public buildings. Questions about it gave rise to negative stereotyping and distant reactions like: *'I never go there, because I don't feel easy', 'It's like science fiction there, all those empty and tight streets'*.

Envy may be part of these reactions, but this envy is mixed with and strengthened by feelings of degradation caused by the discussion about the necessity of urban renewal: the problematic composition of the population of their neighbourhood. Even if they do not lose their houses, the argumentation for urban renewal strategy makes them feel underestimated and treated as second rate citizens. Although most of them prefer their neighbourhood to be more mixed, as well ethnically as social economically, they don't want to be seen as part of the problem. They are angry to be degraded to a social problem that has to be solved or compensated by

importing richer residents. This anger and distrust is not a favorable condition for the development of good relations.

*'Do you see it as two different worlds?'*

*I don't, but they do. People from beyond complained about the bushes here. They think: I have paid for this beautiful house and now I have to look at that rubbish.'*

*Do they ever come across?'*

*Yes, to put their waste disposal bags in our containers.'*

Living on a rubbish dump is very close to living in a drain.

The residents living opposite equally do not feel easy. Some express the supposed prejudices about the disreputable poor at the other side. Others just do not seem to know how to handle the situation.

*'The city counsel wanted a mix of rich and poor here. A beautiful bridge was built and all kind of modern buildings to attract us. But then the responsibility was transmitted to the district council and they do not show very much interest. The mix of rich and poor, they leave it to us to find out how to manage that, I feel a bit deserted.'*

### **A forgotten patch**

*'Nobody ever passes this way'*

The fixation of city councils and housing corporations on building for the middle income groups is often coupled with lack of attention to and delay of investments in the other parts of the neighbourhood. After thirty years the renewal of the social housing projects is wearing out and social housing corporations invest selectively in their property. The inhabitants experience undermaintainance of their houses and surroundings as neglect and injury of their dignity. They feel given up and written out just like their houses; not of any worth any longer. This feeling is strenghtened by the disappearance of provisions and shops. The neglect and deterioration is as wel a practical as an expressive issue, a matter of reputation. In the negative part of their description of the neighbourhood the stigma 'no-go-area' is reflected by expressions like 'forgotten patch' and 'nobody ever passes this way'. These qualifications have an empirical base as the lack of interesting provisions and the stigma 'no-go-area' will not stimulate outsiders to visit the neighbourhood. Instead of labeling it positive as 'urbanity in the lee' like their new rich neighbours appreciate this kind of environment or as '*being a pioneer in an unreclaimed area*' like an artist described his love for the neighbourhood, the majority of the residents tend to perceive the lack of (respectable) passers-by as another prove of the low status or bad reputation of the neighbourhood.

In one of the neighbourhoods I investigated the residents managed to keep up a positive image of their neighbourhood for many years in spite of its bad reputation. According to professionals, governors and the media it has always been a 'problem neighbourhood', because of the 'isolated location' and the high proportion of immigrant single parent families. The concerning residents nevertheless appreciated their neighbourhood, because they moved from old and bad houses into this bright new neighbourhood on a fantastic location on the riverbank. However, after 15 years residents started complaining about living in a 'negro pit', about living behind a wall (a row of houses with entrance gates) and about the lack of passers-by. They reacted still indignantly at negative news about their neighbourhood, but they also felt neglected by the housing association and other institutions. The removal of the tramway was for them as well a practical problem as an expressive issue. It was the prove that they were not of any worth anymore.

The idea of being neglected and disrespected as residents of a neighbourhood with a bad reputation may be stronger when people experience a lack of appreciation and reputation in several domains. That would explain why in immigrant neighbourhoods residents protest against a facility for drug addicts because they feel personally depreciated (*'You politicians thought: there are just immigrants living there!'*) as in richer neighbourhoods residents protest against the establishment of a home of retarded children because of the possible devaluation of their houses.

### **Disappointed and self assured residents**

*'We decided to do it ourselves.'*

The reputation of a neighbourhood do not only influence the residents' experience and assessment of the physical qualities of the environment, it can also influence their conduct. Anger or disappointment about neglect and disrespect may keep them from contributing to the maintenance of collective and public space in and around the complex. They draw a sharp boundary line between their own self-made palace and the rest of their environment. Ultimately a complex, street or neighbourhood may end up in a negative circle of rancorous unconcern. The responsible institutions deliver too little quality, inhabitants feel disrespected and tend to a discontented but passive attitude; in so doing they confirm the professional's idea that it's no use tidying up 'in this neighbourhood' etc.

This is the most pessimistic scenario, there are also signs of alternative developments. Especially the social mobile residents and the rich import show an equally critically but more self-assured and active attitude towards neglect and bad services of the responsible institutions. They do not put up with low quality or with antisocial conduct. The rich import does not identify with 'the neighbourhood', so generally they will not join the traditional neighbourhood-committees, but they will react on events and situations they do not appreciate. Their cultural and social capital helps them to be effective, but if necessary they put their shoulder to the wheel. They experience the social reputation of the neighbourhood less as a fate or inescapable stigma, and more as something makable and improvable. The following anecdote illustrates the difference that can make.

A couple living in a social housing complex near a richer area complained about the better services in the other area. *'To give you an example. Two weeks after New Year there were still remains of the firework all over our street, as the streets on the expensive side were clean after a few days.'* This couple just bought a house in a suburb.

In the same week a colleague of mine interviewed a couple in that other area. She noted: *'The services are not always optimal here. A week after New Year the streets had still not been swept. We decided to do it ourselves with a group of neighbours on saturday.'* The interviewee gave the example as a proof of the good atmosphere in their street.

Another tactic of mutual support which in the mean time enhances self assurance and self respect is self organisation around religion, ethnicity, country of origin, gender or age. The immigrant organisations in these neighbourhood are networks of care, of emancipation and of information, and they make some countrymen feel more home in the neighbourhood and in the Netherlands. They are extremely important for the older people, as well practically by helping them with forms and organising meals, as emotionally by providing a place to meet each other and to celebrate national or religious festivities. These organisations may also

function as discussion partners or cooperation partners of other organisations or institutions about neighbourhood matters, but that depends on the openness from both sides.

### **Staying or leaving?**

*'We can buy a house in the street behind here, but what progress do we make then!?'*

The recent urban renewal creates possibilities for social mobile residents to buy a house in their familiar neighbourhood. The bad reputation of the neighbourhood may however cause practical and mental pressure to look for a house in a 'better' neighbourhood. The practical aspect had to do with mortgages and the policy of banks. Sometimes banks do not grant mortgages in neighbourhoods with a bad reputation (Aalbers 2003) and often they dissuade people buying a house there, because of the problems of selling it again later.

*'They said: "Who will buy your house later? There are too little residents in this neighbourhood who can afford such a house and for people from elsewhere this place is not attractive".'*

Besides these important practical reasons there are also expressive arguments to buy a house elsewhere. For the residents of immigrant neighbourhoods who can afford a middle class house the purchase of such a house is a huge step forwards in their housing career and they doubt whether this step is combinable with staying behind in a disadvantaged neighbourhood. Suburbanisation is sometimes seen as a social-economically determined choice, a self evident step in the housing career of city dwellers or of middle class families. This supposed automatism is however influenced by the reputation of urban neighbourhoods.

The factor reputation also works the other way round. Even the most decided removal-planners doubt about the success of this operation, for general and specific reasons. The general reason is that social mobility is always attended with uncertainty, feelings of displacement and the fear of not being admitted or of being unmasked as deficient outsiders by the higher class in the new environment. The added specific reason of immigrants to feel uncertain about moving to a 'better' neighbourhood is their fear for the hostility against (Islamic) immigrants among the residents of these neighbourhoods. Turks and Moroccans know all kind of racism stories of the suburbs: about neighbours who refuse to greet for years or groups of teasing youngsters aiming at 'foreigners'. They prefer a newly built suburb, because everybody will be new there, so they will not have to fight for their place in a white stronghold. But still they have doubts: shall they follow the Dutch who fled the neighbourhood because of them? Will they be welcome? How will they react on their headscarf, or on the dress of my sister in law?

*'I am who I am, a woman with a headscarf. I don't want a confrontation to be accepted. That's why I prefer a mixed environment.'*

So the negatively tuned discussion about 'disadvantaged neighbourhoods', about immigrant neighbourhoods and about immigrants restricts the possibilities of immigrants to find a place where they can feel at home. This is not an exaggerated conclusion. Recent researches show that on the one hand a majority of the indigenous Dutch think negatively about Islamic people, as on the other hand especially middle class immigrants judge negatively of the social climate in the Netherlands (Gijsberts & Dagevos 2005). They feel restricted and discriminated and have become less optimistic about the accessibility of the higher regions of the Netherlands for immigrants. In other words: they feel disrespected and do not only doubt whether they will stay in the immigrant neighbourhood, after 9-11 they are more and more thinking about leaving the Netherlands.

*'I am happy that we finally moved to this suburb. My husband is less content. He and my eldest son talk a lot about moving to Turkey lately. Who had ever thought about that a few years ago!'*<sup>3</sup>

### **The overall effect: distrust, distance and distinction**

The presented examples show first and foremost that the idea of living, or even being locked up, in an underestimated neighbourhood of outsiders may injure the self-respect and self-confidence of residents and consequently affect the perception and appreciation of the other residents. Generally the standard expression *'the neighbourhood has deteriorated'* firstly refers to inferior residents and only secondly to neglected houses. Everybody tries to keep the negative reputation of the neighbourhood at bay by stressing distinction and distance. All kind of characteristics may function as markers of distinction, such as ethnicity and nationality, length of stay, social network in and outside the neighbourhood, a job, knowledge of Dutch language, level of education and profession and upbringing discipline. These attempts to uphold their own social reputation as respectable, civilized and developed residents are often accompanied with negative stereotypes of other groups of inhabitants. So a bad reputation of the neighbourhood produces or enhances distance, distinction, mutual prejudices and distrust between different groups and through that diminishes the residents' possibilities of feeling at home.

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<sup>1</sup> Harré borrowed the concept 'moral career' from Goffman (1963) who defines it as a socialisation process that leads to changes of the self image.

<sup>2</sup> 'Dutch' is also a possibility, but this identity is more competing with Turkish etc, as well in the eyes of the indigenous Dutch as in the eyes of the immigrants themselves.

<sup>3</sup> Recently Turkish city-councillors of Rotterdam organised a conference to discuss the increasing emigration of high educated Turks to Turkey.