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## 9 Changing Urban Networks and Gossip: Moroccan Migrant Women's Networks in the Dutch Welfare State

*Marguerite van den Berg*

### Introduction

Moroccan migrant women in the Netherlands are the objects of heated debate. Their emancipation and social mobility has been the concern of politicians and policy makers for years now and their lives and practices the object of many policy interventions. The social networks of Moroccan migrant women (first generation, that is to say, women that themselves migrated to the Netherlands) often appear in discussions on their social position. On the one hand, many worry that Moroccan women are isolated, on the other, the ties of Moroccan migrants are supposedly many but bonding and restraining. The precarious position of Moroccan women is often perceived as a problem, but the social mobility of Moroccan second-generation women is often praised. Policy interventions are legitimized because of the perceived lack of autonomy of Moroccan women, but when 'youth at risk' are to be disciplined, policy makers look at Moroccan mothers to set their sons straight (see Van den Berg, 2007).

Although these are obviously very contradictory images, there is some truth (or potential) in all of them. Moroccan migrant women do generally have relatively precarious social positions. Many women who migrated to the Netherlands from Morocco to either follow their husband (who already migrated for employment) in the 1970s or marry a Moroccan Dutch man in the decades thereafter (De Mas, 2001), have received little education, relatively often are dependent on income support, due to gender inequality in many families are very dependent on their husband and their husband's family, and live in the cities' and smaller municipalities' poorer areas (see Pels & De Gruyter 2004; NGR 2005; SCP 2006).

In this chapter, <sup>1</sup> I argue that because of these positions, poor Moroccan migrant women are very dependent on support networks for survival and the produced gossip in these networks. Looking through the

prism of gossip allows for a better understanding of the social networks of migrants that traveled not only between countries, but also from rural to urban areas. By focusing on gossip, this article is embedded in the tradition of urban sociology and urban anthropology in which 'talk' and the social rules on which 'talk' is based, and which derive from it, are the central objects of study in order to uncover social networks, conflict and norms (see Elias & Scotson 1965; Bergmann 1993).

This chapter is based on the qualitative fieldwork study that I conducted in 2005/2006, in which it became clear that the behavior of these women was very much influenced by their fear of gossip. However, the form and effect of gossip for these women changes in the urban context of Rotterdam with the Dutch Welfare State providing social support. I will argue that precisely this context possibly makes for a different effect of gossip as it no longer produces social integration, but disintegration, because women can increasingly opt out of networks. Dependence on welfare provision of social support can therefore be a necessary step towards independence and social mobility.

### **Gossip as prism**

Everybody gossips. People across genders, ethnicities and classes like gossiping (Levin & Arluke 1985; Tebbutt 1995; Bergmann 1993; Wittek & Wielers 1998; Gluckman 1963). In the social scientific literature on gossip, the functions of this phenomenon take center stage (Bergmann 1993; Gluckman 1963; Elias & Scotson 1965). Roughly three social functions of gossip can be distinguished in the many books and chapters that have appeared on this subject: 1) gossip as a mechanism through which information is shared, 2) gossip as a mechanism of integrating social groups, and 3) gossip as a means of social control (cf. Bergmann 1993; Gluckman 1963; Elias & Scotson 1965).

In this chapter, I interpret gossip as an interaction of two or more people talking about a person who is known to them, but is not present (cf. Gluckman 1963; Guendouzi 2001; Iterson & Clegg 2008; Houmanfar & Johnson 2003). It is important, though, to note that what makes talking about an absent person 'gossip' is not the content of the information that is exchanged, but the form of the interaction and the social field and social relations in which it takes place (see Yerkovic 1977; see also De Vries 1987; 1993). Gossip is, in other words, about sharing an interpretation of social behavior which takes place 'backstage' in order to set 'frontstage' norms (Goffman 1959; see also: Guendouzi 2001).

Social support networks run more smoothly with gossip. Gossip stimulates a homogeneity and integration of social networks that enables bonding social capital, that is to say: people are more likely to be helpful to people who are like them and who attain to the same set of norms. On the basis of gossip that sets these norms, moreover, it is easier to exclude the 'deviant', 'odd', 'uncivil' or 'bad' of social support (Bergman 1993; Gluckman 1963; De Vries 1987 and 1993; Elias & Scotson 1965).

In networks that are highly integrated, such as small (parts of) professional organizations (see Iterson & Clegg 2008; Houmanfar & Johnson 2003; Kurland & Pelled 2000 and Wittek & Wielers 1988 for good examples of literature on organizations and gossip), gossip often plays a big role and vice versa: networks in which many participants gossip, often are relatively close knit (Elias & Scotson 1965). Gossip can be a crucial activity in maintaining social capital and social relations (Clawson 2005). This relation between social structure and gossip makes the phenomenon of gossip a good prism for studying social relations and also – as is the case here – the social integration of networks of migrant women.

### **The case: Moroccan women in Rotterdam**

Most Moroccan migrants migrated to the Netherlands following the migration of guestworkers in the 1960s and 70s who migrated for jobs in Western Europe (France, Belgium). Moroccan first-generation women mostly came to the Netherlands because of marriage. Some were married to Moroccan men in Morocco who later went to Europe as guestworkers and after the 1973 economic crisis brought their wives and children to stay because of the risk that going back to Morocco in these economic insecure times entailed (De Mas 2001). But most Moroccan women came to the Netherlands because they married a previously migrated Moroccan young man or a second-generation Moroccan-Dutch. Most Moroccan migrants to the Netherlands (and Belgium) come from small villages in the rural northern highlands: the 'Rif mountains'. Many, especially women migrants from Morocco, were poorly educated and often also illiterate. Marriages were often arranged by family or local networks (De Mas 2001).

The women in this chapter share a similar migration history. All respondents in this research define themselves as Moroccan immigrants. They are between twenty-five and forty-five years of age, born in Morocco, and migrated to the Netherlands because they married a Moroccan immigrant. All women are still married and all have children (two to five in the ages between 0 and 30). Most women in this study are from

the North of Morocco, from places like Berkane, Al Hoceima, Nador and Oujda. Some were from the large metropolitan areas: Agadir, Rabat and Fes. Most women speak a Berber language (Tamazight) and (often an elementary form of) Dutch; some speak primarily Arabic. All respondents spoke sufficient Dutch to do the interviews and discussions in Dutch. The socio-economic position of the women (and of a large portion of the Moroccan population in the Netherlands, see above) is precarious. Many of them depend on welfare benefits and live off an income close to the 'poverty line'. The women refer to themselves as 'poor' and are thus categorized in social policy.

This analysis of gossip and urban networks is based on data that I collected during 2005 and 2006 in a qualitative fieldwork study in an urban neighborhood in Rotterdam (Delfshaven), the second largest city in the Netherlands of almost 600,000 inhabitants. Delfshaven is a neighborhood in which thirteen percent of the population is first- or second-generation Moroccan, 72 percent is first- or second-generation migrant and 28 percent is 'indigenous'<sup>2</sup> Dutch ('autochtoon' in Dutch).<sup>3</sup> The study was set up to research the social capital and social mobility of Moroccan migrant women in an intersectional approach focusing on gender, ethnicity and class (see Van den Berg 2007 for more information on this research). I participated in citizenship courses (*inburgering*), volunteering projects, taught Moroccan women Dutch in their homes for two years, participated in community-development projects and documented my observations, as well as formal and informal conversations. In total, approximately fifty women were involved in the research, which most often meant that I would talk with them during these activities, or they would be part of a group discussion. I interviewed 10 of these 50 women one-on-one in depth.

Because I don't speak any Arabic or Berber Language, and was not part of the groups in which I participated long enough, I was not part of the networks and exchange of gossip that I studied. From my relative 'outsider' position, studying gossip is necessarily limited to describing the meaning that Moroccan migrant women ascribe to gossip. What can be analyzed is the fear they felt when we talked about gossip and how they narrated about how gossip influenced their lives. In other words: some effects of gossip are studied here. But most importantly, I intend to go beyond the mere question of gossip in this chapter into the question of social networks and their integration or disintegration in the Dutch urban context.

### **Narratives of gossip: 'The tongue has no bone'**

'Do you know her?'

'What do you think of them, you know that family that just moved here?'

The women in my research asked me these types of questions regularly. It is often the beginning of a gossipy narrative. Before the women could fully count me in on their conversations, they needed to make an inventory of who I did and did not know and what details I could add to the gossiping.

If I had answered such questions and through the activity of gossiping had become part of these women's networks, other women that I wanted to include in my research would have stopped talking to me. Some discretion on my part was necessary for the successful conduct of my research. Exactly how quick my role as a researcher entered the networks and gossip of Moroccan women in Rotterdam became clear to me very early on as I was confronted by one respondent with gossip that concerned myself. The first time that I visited the Moroccan organization in Delfshaven, I had participated in an Arabic writing class. Later that week, I went to visit one of the respondents who had been part of my network a bit longer. As soon as we sat down for tea, she told me that some of her family members participated in an Arabic writing class and that they saw a Dutch woman there this week! She could not understand this incident: what would a Dutch woman want from Arabic classes? How strange! This can't be right! As I told her that the woman in question was me and how I went there to do research for my book I had been telling her about, she grew quieter, as now of course, this conversation was no longer a form of gossip (as the person that she gossiped about suddenly came to be present!) but rather became an awkward interrogation.

#### *'Blame', 'In-group news' and 'Praise'*

The boundaries of smaller, family-oriented networks are being set and negotiated through gossip in the case of Moroccan women, not those of a whole ethnic community as seems to be the case with Turkish immigrants (see De Vries 1988). One can hardly speak of a Moroccan community as such in Dutch cities like Rotterdam (see for an elaboration, Van den Berg, 2007), which for example becomes clear in the fact that only in Delfshaven 21 migrant organizations exist for Moroccans alone: every subgroup has its own association.

'Don't write that down... I don't want people talking about it...'<sup>4</sup>

The women in my research often shared with me their concerns about gossip and how what they told me should remain private. Many women were in fact very anxious about rumors and gossip about their behavior. Some of the time they denied being part of gossip activities, but mostly, at least in private conversations, they admitted to their own gossiping. 'The tongue has no bone', as one respondent explained to me, is a well-known Arabic saying (phonetic Arabic: *Lcen mafieh le'dam*, compare: in English: 'Loose tongue'). She was admitting, in other words, how she could not help herself.

Elias and Scotson distinguish three kinds of gossip in their renowned study of neighborhood relationships (1965): 'Blame gossip', 'in-group news gossip' and 'praise gossip'. The first is what is meant by 'gossip' through the popular use of the word: it is negative gossiping. 'In-group news gossip' concerns the exchange of more or less neutral information about members of the network. 'Praise gossip' is positive gossip. It is very much connected to 'blame gossip' since gossip work (setting norms, integrating the network) can be done by either blaming the deviant or praising the conformists. This became very clear in the language courses in which I was participating in my fieldwork, in which one of the participants, Sanae,<sup>5</sup> was talked about, but only in the most positive possible sense. When she was present, she had a position of authority in the group and was very much accepted as such by the other women in the group. While she was absent from the class quite often, she was almost always present as a representation in narratives. The women present would stress their closeness to Sanae:

Respondent (R) : Sanae is my next door neighbor. She has been for eight years now.

Me: Oh really, that long?

R: Yes, her door has always been open...

R2: She's really such a nice, good woman, Sanae

R: When I had my baby, she came to help me for ten days you know.

Me: Really?

R: Yes, really. And she loves her and my children. Sanae helped me a lot actually. Every day until I was strong again. Then: finished.

R3: She's really a good woman, everybody thinks that!

Sanae is praised in this conversation for her efforts in the support system they share, her hospitality and her love and attention for children. In other such conversations about her, her family was praised: her daughters are doing well and she has a nice husband. Her pious behavior was praised as well as this gave her a lot of status. Rather clear, unambiguous norms as to what a 'good woman' is are set here. All mem-

bers of this network get this clear message about the expected and approved behavior; a good woman is pious, has successful children, and is dedicated to her children, husband and other close contacts.

The gender dimension in these norms is very salient. As gossip often has to do with 'civil' and 'uncivil', 'pure' and 'dangerous' behavior, gender norms are often the object of concern. This in part explains why the women in this study were reluctant to have contact with or even briefly talk to men. This came to the fore in the following discussion:

R: I'm scared. If I talk to a man on the street, he may talk about this to other people, or other people might talk about it.

Me: If he does talk about it, what would he say to other people?

R: Njem, I don't know really...

Me: What would he say? Would he say: 'Samira says hello to me' and then what...?

R: Maybe he would say: 'Today she says Salaam' tomorrow he will go a little bit further with me, you understand? He will say that I'm a bad woman...

Me: What does that mean, that you are a bad woman?

R: Just, that I talk to men and so on, I don't know what he might say...!

The fear of the women was primarily of 'blame gossip', where their (moral) behavior would be discussed in a disapproving manner. However, it should be noted that many of the women enjoyed (as do most people) talking to each other about other people. In fact, this was one of the reasons why some women enjoyed coming to the language courses three times a week.

#### *The management of reputations and social capital*

However rational and legitimate the discussions may be, the fear of gossip limits the social capital and the potential of social networks to resources of other women and men in their own families. Women have to maneuver to make sure they stay out of positions in which they are the subject of gossip. Contact with others that are part of your network is especially important for the management of reputations. Therefore, contact with a Dutch native man (for instance my partner), is not really considered a problem. Contact with him was considered much more benign because the chances of him talking about it to people in the networks of the women were slim. I, as a researcher was considered rather 'safe' for the same reason: it can be much easier to tell your secrets to a stranger than to someone you know very well. Some women

limited their intimate contact to one or two friends or family members. Rachma's situation is a good example here. Rachma refrained from talking to her husband's family members out of fear of gossip. She has managed to have one real friend (female) in whom she confided. She considered other contacts with Moroccan migrant women far too dangerous.

You know, I can really trust her [friend, MB], I can tell her anything. But some people, you know, they always tell other people what you've said to them. I trust my friend and she is quite enough for me. I don't want any other people bugging in.

In this example, the management of Rachma's reputation very much limited her access to other social networks and resources. This kind of reaction was very widespread among the women in my research. The freedom of movement and actions of many of the women was quite heavily limited by gossip and strong social control. Exclusion of networks can be an extreme result. One of the women, for example, felt forced to pull herself back from her family because they talked about her divorce.

My family 'bla bla bla' [makes hand gesture]. That's why. That's not good. I don't have any contact with them anymore.

In most cases, the women I interviewed were very cautious not to give any reason to be the object of gossip. Many – like Rachma – decided to do this *not* by living by the moral codes of others, but instead by opting out of networks or seriously limiting the amount of contacts they maintained – accepting the consequences this had for their claim on the resources in networks: on social capital. This can be something of a catch-22 situation for them because isolating yourself from the networks that you used to be a member of, can very well give rise to gossip itself. In other words: staying in or opting out can both lead to harmful gossip. Of course, many of the women did stay in the networks and negotiated their reputations by conforming to the norms exchanged in them. It is not possible to generalize the reactions of the women to gossip in their networks with this study alone, because of its ethnographic character. However, studying the choices of the women that opt out of networks allows for an innovative view on the networks of Moroccan migrant women in the Netherlands.

### Opting out: the welfare state and urban anonymity

The women that opted out of networks or were thinking about the possibility of this, did so because of their fear and dislike of gossip. Opting out of networks took different forms: sometimes, the women took their distance from family-based networks physically (by moving to a different neighborhood), sometimes they refrained from going to family gatherings or parties and sometimes they abstained from contact with anyone of Moroccan descent altogether. Loubna indeed went as far as stating that she was not interested in contact with any people of Moroccan descent:

Oh no! Moroccans? I don't have many contacts with them. Only my brothers and mother. Oh no: Moroccans talk far too much. I am not at all interested.

Note how Loubna ascribes gossiping to the whole ethnic group of Moroccans. This opting out can have very serious consequences for the access to resources in social networks. A telling example is that of one of the women I visited regularly in her home – I will call her Selma – who lives in relative isolation. Many members of her own family stayed behind in Morocco when she married her Moroccan Dutch husband. She does not have many friends in the Netherlands and she would like to keep her husband's family at even more distance – although she only sees them very occasionally. She told me how she had many bad experiences with her husband's family and with Moroccan friends. Selma was relatively free to do whatever she wanted: she went to school, picked her children up from their school, and went to the city centre quite often. Her 'choice' for isolation therefore cannot be said to be imposed by her husband. She claimed gossip to be her first and foremost concern:

You know, people criticize me. They say my house is not good, or not clean, that my children are not good... I don't want these people in my home. Moroccan women talk too much. I'd rather stay at home. I'm better off alone with my husband and my children.

This narrative confronts us with the question of why the integrating effect of gossip is turned on its head in such cases. The preliminary answer that can be given on the basis of an analysis of material in this research is twofold:

1. The Dutch welfare state provides social support;
2. The urban context provides space, anonymity and chances for social mobility.

Both changes enable women to become more independent of their networks and therefore the gossip within these networks. The reactions of the women to gossip thus point to changes in urban social networks.

Many Moroccan migrants come from – as explained above – rural areas in the highlands of the North of Morocco. Therefore, they not only traveled across borders, but also from very rural areas, (with very few schools, transportation and jobs) to urban or urbanized areas in Western Europe. The communities of which they were members in Morocco were very close knit. In many of their home villages, everybody knew each other, married within the community and many social ties were based on blood. This high level of integration was the effect of several factors (not least the geographical boundaries of the mountains), but also of gossip, as well as gossip being the effect of this high level of integration (cf. Elias & Scotson 1965).

#### *The urban condition*

In the Dutch context, networks become far more fragmented. Women have many more 'exit' options and alternative choices in the urban context of the Dutch city than they used to have in their hometowns. In the urban areas of Rotterdam, women can find social support through their bridging networks of neighbors, mothers of their children's friends and women they meet in community projects. The story of Aisha (a woman who migrated to the Netherlands at the age of fourteen to marry a far older man) is very illustrative. She lived with her husband and four children in Delfshaven, but maintained a very close relationship with a woman from a smaller town near Rotterdam (Cappelle aan den IJssel). Their friendship was very important to Aisha and one of the things most important to her was the fact that her friend knew very few of Aisha's family and lived relatively far away. The story of the friendship reads almost like a love story:

I met her at a party for women in the community center. We both danced and liked each other so much! We talked and danced and talked some more. Then we both went home and I thought: why didn't I ask for her phone number? We later met again at a party to celebrate someone's baby being born. I was so happy! Ever since then we've been best friends. We've been like this for four years now. We see each other a couple times a week. Mostly, we meet in the city center, or she drives here with her car. Then we go shopping and eating and talking.

The urban condition made this friendship of Aisha possible, since her friend is not part of her family (and therefore is not so interested in judging her behavior on behalf of her family or network), does not know many members of her family, is not part of the same networks but does share a similar background that gives the basis for their close relationship. Also, the urban context provides them with a community center, in which dancing parties are organized, with easily accessible transportation and the possibilities to go out on the town (shopping or eating) without being too scared of being judged by others.

#### *The welfare state*

Possibly even more important for the changes in urban networks is the provision of services by the Dutch welfare state. This provides a peace of mind and a possible independence of social network that migrants often did not experience before. Institutionalized care networks, such as childcare, maternity care and local physicians are important alternatives providing social support that is not provided (or at least quantitatively much less) in the rural areas of Morocco. Furthermore, income support, public housing and public health insurance provides the women with a minimum standard far more comfortable than what they were used to.

When in need of advice, practical support, or important information, many Moroccan women in Rotterdam are used to going to their physician, local bureaucrats or professionals such as social workers. In the villages in which they grew up, in order to attain these services, one would have to put their social network to work. In Rotterdam, some women preferred the formal services:

When I have any questions about my children [toddlers], I don't have to ask my family, you know? Here [in the Netherlands], I can just go and ask the people at the child health clinic ['consultatiebureau'].

The anonymity and quality of social support by agents of the welfare state as compared to the possibilities of information being used in gossip in social networks makes many women prefer the first option. In other words: the welfare state provides opportunities for women to distance themselves from close-knit networks and the gossip in these networks. This is not to say that the women are always very satisfied with the way they are supported by bureaucrats or professionals, nor that they go to the formal services for every problem they have (in fact, in some cases, asking family for advice was very much preferred). However, the opportunity to use the formal and anonymous channels of the

welfare state provided a sense of real independence. In fact, oftentimes, this route to independence gives incentives to other forms of emancipation, such as education. This is the case, for example, as women want to learn more of the Dutch language in order to be able to make use of the public services more efficiently. Selma explains:

It is important to speak Dutch, you know. My sister-in-law speaks Dutch really well and she can go to the Welfare Agency ['Sociale Dienst'] by herself and never has any problems with them. Her husband does not need to help like my husband has to help me. The people at the agency always help her right away.

For Selma, this is one of the most important reasons to learn how to speak Dutch: the ability to take care of your own problems with the services provided by the state and not needing your husband with you all the time.

*Emancipation: from family or state?*

This observation brings me to the final point of this chapter: dependence on the welfare state can be a necessary step of social mobility and emancipation of migrant women. That is to say, by becoming more *dependent* on social services, they can become more *independent* from their husbands and families. Paradoxically, dependency on social services can in this way be interpreted as a form of emancipation and social mobility. In fact, when asked about their experiences with 'moving up' in the Netherlands (see Van den Berg 2007), many women explicitly referred to their contact with agents of the welfare state, as is the case in this example:

When I came here [the Netherlands], I knew nothing! I was real stupid, honestly. But now: I go to the doctor myself, I talk to the neighbors, I go shopping on my own. This is much better!

The ability to ask the local doctor for advice is interpreted by this woman as an important aspect of 'getting ahead'. Other such aspects that were mentioned very often were a sense of agency at the desk of the Welfare Agency (Sociale Dienst) and the attainment of an apartment of a public housing association (wooncorporatie). Very important in this respect were the language courses in which many of the women were (as was I) participating. These – often mandatory – courses (provided by private entrepreneurs that are financed by the state) gave the women some tools to get around in Rotterdam and some perspectives on futures beyond the privacy of their homes (for an elaboration on these

classes – including the downsides – see Van den Berg 2007). Khadija talks about her ideas on her future in five years and the negotiations on this topic with her husband:

In five years, I will have continued going to school. I would really like to work, you know, a real job, not just voluntary work. I would like to work at the [primary] school in which I am already volunteering. I don't know if it would be possible to become a real teacher. I don't know if my husband would allow it. But I think he would allow me to have a job there, like an assistant or something. I want to continue going to school. I think my daughters will continue working when they have children. I want them to, at least.

While the women in this study appear in statistics as one of the most immobile groups of the Netherlands in terms of formal educational attainment and job status classifications (see for example SCP, 2006 for a report on these processes), I thus found various alternative ways of 'moving up' that were often facilitated by the state: attaining more agency, informal education and better housing conditions. Also, narratives such as Khadija's show the everyday negotiations about 'getting ahead' and the limitations of the regular view on emancipation and social mobility.

In perspectives and policies in which the emancipation of these migrant women is central, one would therefore expect an emphasis on these steps towards independence. However, migrants' dependency on the welfare state is very often framed as a 'burden' on society as a whole (cf. Ghorashi 2005). This research shows how dependency on the welfare state might just be a very necessary step in moving up and (individual) emancipation. This warrants a reconsidering of the dominant conceptualization of emancipation and social mobility in Dutch policies and much social scientific research, where labor participation (in formal, paid employment) and full financial independence has traditionally been the most important objective/operationalization of emancipation (however ambiguous Dutch practices may be). This research shows how financial *dependence* from the state can give way to forms of emancipation and social mobility such as the attainment of (informal) education and independence from direct relatives, and is thus *not* necessarily a form of inactivity and backwardness.

## Discussion

Gossip as a prism on social networks in the urban context helps us to see changes in the structure of networks and the level of integration of these networks. Also, it allows us to view the opting out of networks that some women prefer (and their disintegration as a possible consequence), as a stepping stone towards social mobility and thus to go beyond dominant conceptions of mobility and emancipation.

However painful the loss of community or close-knit family networks (and a sense of belonging) is for individuals, the context of the welfare state and the urban condition of living in the city of Rotterdam provide for exit options and alternative choices much appreciated by many of the women in this research, because it gives them the opportunity to 'move up' the social ladder.

While many large-scale studies show the immobility of such groups as Moroccan first-generation migrant women, small steps towards better living conditions, more (informal) education and independence are taken. These steps are very often provided for by the welfare state or at least can be taken with the peace of mind that the welfare state provides. Welfare dependency can in this sense be a necessary step in the process of emancipation from the bonding social capital of kin networks.

The process of emancipation of Moroccan migrant women takes place against the backdrop of discussions about the burden migrants are on the welfare state, waning solidarity and the retrenchment of welfare provisions (see WRR 2006; Zijderveld 1999). Their dependence on welfare and oftentimes problematized 'inactivity' lead to rather assertive or even aggressive policies to 'activate' Moroccan women as citizens, but especially in their role as mothers of 'Moroccan youth' (see Van der Zwaard 2008; Van den Berg 2007). The dominant conception of social mobility as the attainment of formal education and job statuses *obscures* alternative ways of 'moving up' and 'emancipating' that are in fact very salient in the lives of the women in this study.

The use that the women in this study make of the welfare state is often directed towards forms of emancipation, as has been and remains one of the most important functions of the welfare state. They negotiate network norms, but also have the freedom to move away from strong ties and the gossip that keeps these networks together. When focusing on formal educational attainment and labor participation, it is easy to overlook the many ways in which these women become more emancipated with help from the state and how they pass their new-found independence on to the next generations.

## Notes

- 1 The author would like to thank the members of the 'urban studies' seminar of the sociology department of the Erasmus University Rotterdam, Bram Peper and Claartje ter Hoeven for very useful suggestions and comments on earlier versions of this chapter.
- 2 The term 'indigenous' is often used in migration/integration research to refer to people who have lived in the country/area for several generations. The indigenous Dutch in Rotterdam are often descendants from domestic migrants that migrated to the city in the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century.
- 3 [www.cos.nl](http://www.cos.nl) (Statistics Bureau, Rotterdam), data retrieved February 2007.
- 4 Author's translations.
- 5 The names used in this chapter are not the actual names of the respondents in order to protect their privacy.