Narratives on Partner-Choice

Young men and women of Moroccan descent in the Netherlands live in a world of many different social groups. Brought up by their parents to be ‘good’ Moroccans and Muslims, many have – well into their teens – lived with the expectation that their family traditions. Nezha relates with pride to sail around it, but you can’t say no. So I was accepted. What I figured that the emphasis on certain elements rather than as actors with a view the narratives produced in the interviews, I hold to gain more insight into the question that these Moroccan pioneers with the Netherlands live in a world of many different social groups, although their drawing upon multicultural capital to create new strategies of living is not without constraints. Constraints on using different cultural resources does not necessarily entail sharing in present-day Morocco – have led them to devise their own set of rules for negotiating can be recognized in the stories of all interviewees. Their biographical narrations contain numerous episodes in which they impose upon and shift the meanings assigned to personal law. Also, sharing symbols does not necessarily entail sharing interpretations. The view of the interviewees on the symbolic complex of virginity is a case in point. Although many women question the value of the symbol of virginity as such, their participation in Dutch peer groups – as well as their holiday experiences in present-day Morocco – have led them to devise their own set of rules for negotiating their membership in the Moroccan community can be combined with, for example, the value of autonomy, which is highly valued within the community of Dutch peers with whom they also identify. Their stories demonstrate once more the inadequacy of the ‘between-two-cultures’ model of second-generation migrant identity, which suggests too static a conception of cultures as fixed, homogeneous units with clear-cut boundaries, and neglects the open and contestable nature of cultural relations and practices. It also implies a view of these young people as passive victims of their circumstanceseases rather than as actors with a more cultural capital to create new strategies of living is not without constraints. chain of thought and taking into account what her society considers chaste behaviour. Furthermore, they no longer see virginity as a concern of the whole community, but perceive it as a personal responsibility and claim the right of individual privacy over such matters. Unlike her parents, Nezha, for instance, did not think it inappropriate to have a boyfriend as long as she safeguarded her virginity. Also, she was furious about her family’s interference with her love life and maintained that whatever she and her boyfriend agreed upon doing or not doing before marriage was nobody else’s business.

Constraints on using different cultural resources

Of course, drawing upon ‘multicultural capital’ to create new strategies of living is not without constraints. Time and again, the life stories contain evidence of the fact that the interviewees have internalized norms transmitted to them by their parents to such an extent that they entertain ambivalent feelings concerning their associations with men and their experiences of sexuality and falling in love. Such narrations illustrate that one is neither completely free in choosing one’s identifications, nor in improving upon the meanings attached to a particular group identity. Although Nezha, for example, emphasizes that she has a clear conscience, it hurts her to know that the false rumours about her premarital behaviour have damaged the reputation of her family and herself. She also dredges the day her two daughters will begin to take an interest in boys and acknowledges that she is not sure that she will allow them the same freedom of movement that she claimed for herself. The individual’s freedom to construct multiple identifications is also constrained by the fact that the emphasis on certain elements rather than as actors with a view two extremites in the cultural groups to which one belongs. People always know more culture than they use, and different groups members lay stress on different things. Nezha, for example, identifies with Islam as a source of guidance in her life, but does not agree with the interpretations of Islamic precepts in the Moroccan code of personal law. Also, sharing symbols does not necessarily entail sharing interpretations. The view of the interviewees on the symbolic complex of virginity is a case in point. Although many women question the value of the symbol of virginity as such, their participation in Dutch peer groups – as well as their holiday experiences in present-day Morocco – have led them to devise their own set of rules for negotiating their membership in the Moroccan community can be combined with, for example, the value of autonomy, which is highly valued within the community of Dutch peers with whom they also identify. Their stories demonstrate once more the inadequacy of the ‘between-two-cultures’ model of second-generation migrant identity, which suggests too static a conception of cultures as fixed, homogeneous units with clear-cut boundaries, and neglects the open and contestable nature of cultural relations and practices. It also implies a view of these young people as passive victims of their circumstances rather than as actors with a more cultural capital to create new strategies of living is not without constraints.

Representation of social identity in life stories

Nezha is one of the women who were prepared to tell me her life stories for my re- research project on young women of Moroc- can descent who have university degrees and/or hold positions in which such qualifi- cations are required. I am specifically inter- ested in the representations of various di- mensions of social identity by these women. The research focuses on the question of how these ‘second-generation migrant’ women construct a more or less coherent self-identity out of their shifting, multiple social identifications. I focus more particu- larly on the representations in their life sto- ries of ethnic, religious and gender identifi- cations. In analysing the relations between the narrations produced in the interviews, I hope to gain more insight into the question of how these representations of historical events, social relationships and individual actions come together to construct social identifications, and how such identifications are transmitted, maintained and trans- formed.

Construction of multiple identifications

I respect my to the question of what the narratives on partner-choice can tell us about the ways in which the 14 wom- en with whom the interviewees have so far been completed construct, maintain, and combine their various social identifications. In the above quotations, we get the impres- sion of Nezha as a woman in Dutch society: ‘If somebody wants to ask your hand, his family should ask. But that was not without constraints.

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