Gendered travels. Single mother's experiences at the global/local interface.

Annelou Ypeij

Sara (29), a divorced mother of three sons, is born in Morocco. Her migration to the Netherlands is not of her own choice. It is a consequence of her forced marriage that has been arranged by her father. Her husband turned out to be a violent man. He raped her several time, twice resulting in pregnancies from which two of her sons were born. Despite her grief and shame, Sara told her life story with high spirits and energy. She certainly misses Morocco, but she is very definite in her decision to stay in Amsterdam.

Philomena (33) is a Surinam single woman and a mother of two. The relationship with the father of her children ended when she migrated to the Netherlands. She left her two small children behind with her sister in Paramaribo. After saving for yyears she was able to pay for the children's plane ticket. At the time we met, she lived with her children in Amsterdam and she was proud to be working as a city-guard.

Shirley (25) migrated from the Netherlands Antilles to Amsterdam with her mother when she was thirteen years old. At the time of the interviews, she is 25 and a single mother of two children. She has a relationship with the father of her second child, but she intends to break up with him by moving to a small town, northeast of Amsterdam. Counting on the support of her mother who already lives there, she hopes to be able to return to school.

Though these three women have different cultural backgrounds, life histories and migration trajectories, they share the experience of single motherhood and their migration to the Netherlands. As single mothers they attract the attention of researchers and policymakers because they are supposed to be in financial difficulties. As is argued through the feminisation of poverty discourse, female heads of households belong to the poorest of the poor (Chant 1997). As migrants the three women also provoke concern because the integration of migrants into the new society is often considered to be problematic. However, statistical data on the Netherlands show that women who migrated from Surinam are successful migrants considering their levels of education, income and labour market participation. In some respects, Surinam women even outperform autochthonous Dutch women. Many Surinam women, especially Creole women, are single mothers (28 per cent). Contrary to the general belief, their single motherhood doesn't result in low levels of labour participation or a high risk at poverty. The participation of Antillean women on the Dutch labour market, in general, is relatively high, but being a single mother – as 38 per cent of the women are - considerably reduces this participation. Moroccan mothers, whether married or not, have the lowest levels of education and labour market participation (Hooghiemstra & Merens 1999: 58, 69).

These data are intriguing because they suggest that many differences exist among migrant single mothers in the Netherlands. Nevertheless, it is my point of view that reducing the lives of Sara, Philomena and Shirley to levels of poverty, education and labour participation in their new country, will not help much to understand the differences among them. Such a reductionistic approach negates their agency as architects of their own lives and doesn't do justice to the complex processes that direct their life trajectories. As migrants and as single mothers, the women's experiences can be placed in the context of two social trends that occur at a global scale and that are indications of the gendered character of globalisation processes. The first trend is that worldwide, during the last decades, the number of single-mother households has risen considerably (Chant 1997, Moore 1994). The second trend concerns increasing flows of international migration, especially female migration. Somehow, the experiences of Sara, Philomena and Shirley are related to those gendered processes of globalisation. This paper attempts to place the experiences of the women within globalisation processes by an approach of migration as a process and by using a gender analysis.

Boyd & Grieco suggest that to understand the experiences of female migrants, migration theory has to be sensible of gender hierarchies. They critique the neoclassical and push-pull demographic models of the 1970s and 1980s, which emphasized migration as a decision of the rational individual, viz. a male

individual. Even when analysts, under the influence of gender studies, started to integrate the household in their analyses the household was considered to be a harmonious entity. Decisions to migrate were, again, perceived as being taken in a calculating way with the aim of improving the well being of all members of the household. Migrant women were mainly perceived as wives who willingly accompanied the migrant male (Boyd & Grieco 2002). However, as the life histories of Sara, Philomena and Shirley show, migrant women are not always married. And if they migrate as married women, their households - instead of being harmonious entities - may be sites of conflict and violence, as is shown by the case of Sara. Gender relations, hierarchies within families, the marital status of women and their possible motherhood, affect the migration process. As a consequence, migration processes produce gendered outcomes that result in differences between migrant women and men and among migrant women themselves. In other words: migrants travel as gendered persons to new locations. Gender hierarchies, discourses and practices travel with them and are reinterpreted and redefined in the new locations. The question is then how migrant single mothers deal with gender hierarchies and discourses. What are the possibilities and limitations that they experience and how are gender hierarchies and discourses that have travelled from abroad, redefined in the new location?

Boyd & Grieco distinguish three stages where gender directs the process of migration: the pre-migration stage, the stage of the transition across state boundaries, and the post-migration stage in the new country. These stages relate the economic possibilities and gender hierarchies in the country of origin with the immigration policies and the experiences of the migrant in the new country. Besides, the stages give room for an analysis of the social relationships between the migrants and their family and friends who stayed behind. As I will argue, transnational networks are important to understand the experiences of the migrants . The organization of this paper follows the distinction between the pre-migration stage, the transition stage and the post-migration stage and a comparison will be made between Surinamese, Antillean and Moroccan women. It is based on research in Amsterdam on poverty in the Dutch welfare state. Including Sara, Philomena and Shirley, we have interviewed 36 women who are migrants and single mothers[1]. All women have an income around the social minimum level. Within the group of interviewed women, Sara represents an exceptional case. While the majority of the interviewed women originate from Surinam or the Antillean, she is the only Moroccan woman. To use her experiences as a starting point for a comparison between Surinamese, Antillean en Moroccan migrant women gives in my view much additional insights into the gendered character of migration that the advantages of such an analysis outweigh the methodological problem of extrapolating an argument from a single case.

Pre-migration stage

The possibilities for women to take the initiative to migrate are related to local cultural meanings and gender hierarchies in the countries of origin. What impact the local gender hierarchies may have on women's migration strategies becomes clear from a comparison between Morocco, the birth country of Sara, and Surinam and the Antilles, where Philomena and Shirley were born.

In Morocco, notions concerning honour and shame are important to understand the patriarchal relationships between women and men. The sexual division of labour ascribes to women caring and households tasks though they are allowed to earn an income, especially when this is agreed on in the marriage contract. Males are supposed to be breadwinners and to maintain the family. Male domination and authority is confirmed by Moroccan family law and legitimised by the husband's responsibility for the honour of the whole family. Wives may threaten the family's honour by showing indecent behaviour and by not showing respect or obedience to the authority of her husband. To protect the family's honour, men try to limit the mobility of their wives and daughters, which may lead to women's seclusion in the home. Practices of arranged marriages are commonplace, as is the practice of marrying off girls at an early age. It is allowed to divorce and, as a matter of fact, Moroccan divorce rates are among the highest in the world, probably due to practices of repudiation of wives by their husbands. The social position of divorced women and single

[1] The women were interviewed between 1997 and 1999. We have spoken to 22 mothers from Surinam, eight mothers from the Antilles and six women who originate from Hungary, Poland, Morocco, the Caribbean, and Ghana. I thank the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport and NWO/MaGW for their subsidies and financial support that enabled this research.

mothers is weak. They normally fall back on their families for economic security and are remarried off as soon as possible (Bartels 1993, Mernissi 1987, Eldering & Borm 1996). The dominant position of men attributes to the fact that women who migrate often do so as dependent family members under the wings of their fathers and husbands. Though literature doesn't give information on the subject, it might be expected that women who intend to migrate individually, need their father or husband's permission, if only for the application of a passport.

The Creole family system among the working classes in Suriname and on the Netherlands Antilles is often depicted as matrifocal in the literature. In this family system women are pivotal in economic and emotional respects, while the roles of men as fathers and husbands tend to be more marginal. Motherhood comprises both affective care and responsibility for earning the household income. In this value system, sexual faithfulness to one partner and having children with one man are not considered to be very important and single motherhood is commonplace Marriage may be the ideal but is often associated with civil status for the economically more successful. The bond between a mother and her children is the foundation of family domestic units. While these units may exist independently as single-mother households, they may also include other relatives and thus give rise to extended household. Mutual support between female relatives characterizes this family system. On the Antilles, mothers frequently live and work within extended family networks. Such family networks provide women with more security than an individual male partner would. Although mothers ultimately bear individual responsibility for their children, they tend to share parenting and care with others. Surinamese and Antillean women who intend to migrate can take the decision to do so independently from male interference. They are able to migrate individually, as single mothers or otherwise (Venema 1992; Dijke et.al 1992, Wekker 1994).

Most women we interviewed migrated to escape from poverty they experience in the countries of origin. Only one woman from Hungary migrated as a political refugee and two others, namely Sara and a Polish woman, migrated with the aim of being reunited with their husbands. For the majority of the other women the hope to improve their living conditions - through receiving education and finding a job or medical care - was the main reason to migrate. The eight women, who already were single mothers before their migration, stated that being a single mother made their migration even more urgent because in Surinam and on the Antilles, the countries they originate from, they lacked the economic means to raise their kids on their own. Some women migrated immediately after they were separated from their husbands. Besides the economic reasons, women may have additional reasons to leave their birth countries. A Surinamese woman was left behind under the care of her uncle and his family as a ten-year old when her mother migrated to the Netherlands. She decided to migrate herself at the age of sixteen, because the male members of her foster family were increasingly sexually harassing her and tried to rape her. Various women used their migration as a divorce strategy because their migration meant the break up with their partner. A Surinam woman who migrated left her children with her husband. Later she sent for them while the husband stayed behind. An Antillean woman broke up with her partner during the pregnancy of her first child and together with her sister she migrated to the Netherlands where her mother already lived. What is conspicuous is that only three Surinamese women migrated together with their husbands. Including Sara and the Polish woman, we can identify only five cases among the women we interviewed, where marriage and the nuclear family played a role in the migration of the women. None of the other interviewed women migrated together with a husband, as a marital strategy or as a child with both parents. They migrated as a child with their single mother, as an individual, as single mothers with their children or, as in one case, together with a sister. The image in literature of the migrant woman who is married and migrates with her husband is not apparent in the migration histories of the women we have interviewed.

Transition across state boundaries: immigration policies

Legal migration from one country to another is made possible by the immigration policies of the receiving country, in this case the Netherlands. During the second half of the twentieth century, various policies and programs characterize international migration to the Netherlands. In the 1960s a flow of male labour migrants started from Mediterranean countries such as Morocco. Those labour migrants were recruited by large industrial companies and by bilateral governmental agreements with the aim filling vacancies in Dutch

industries. Initially, the migration was perceived as temporary, in the government's point of view as well as in that of many migrants. With the economic crisis of the early 1980s and increasing unemployment in the industrial sector, labour migration came to an end. Many migrants experienced financial difficulties that made return migration problematic. The government developed the *family-reunion and –formation immigration program* that enabled the permanent migration of the wives and children of the male labour migrants. Also, potential wives and husbands were allowed to migrate and to form a new family with an already migrated person (Graaff 2002: 6-7).

In 1975, Surinam, a former Dutch colony, became independent. In the years before independence during the so-call transition period (1975-1979) the Dutch government gave migrants from Surinam the opportunity to choose between Surinamese or Dutch nationality. Because of feeling of uncertainty about an independent Surinam, large numbers of Surinamese chose Dutch Nationality and moved to the Netherlands to settle permanently in the second half of the 1970s. As of 1980, free migration from Surinam is no longer permitted. Currently, Surinamese migration is only possible under the above-mentioned family-reunion/formation program or under the so-called *political asylum program* that allows the entrance of political refugees. Concerning the Netherlands Antilles, another former Dutch colony, the decolonization process has not (yet) resulted in independence of the island group. Though its status is one of self-governance, the island group still forms part of the Dutch kingdom. This means that Antilleans have Dutch nationality. They can migrate and take up residency in the Netherlands freely. Migration from the Antilles tends to fluctuate with the economic situation on the islands. As of the closing of the refinery of Shell on Curacao in 1985 and more particularly during the last decade, large numbers of poor, unemployed Antilleans have tried their luck in the Netherlands (Hulst 1997, Niekerk 2000, Oostindie & Klinkers 2001).

Comparing migration under the family-reunion/formation program and that from the former colonies an important difference is noticeable. The family-reunion/formation program is based on the notion of the nuclear household with the breadwinning male and the dependent wife and children. People are allowed to migrate as dependent wives, children, and potential marital partners. The policy of free migration from the former colonies is based on the historical ties between the 'mother country' and former colonies. This migration policy lacks the gender bias of the family-reunion/formation program. In the past, it has allowed all Surinamese, regardless of marital status or gender to migrate to the Netherlands. Nowadays, for Antilleans it is still possible to move freely to the Netherlands, as individuals or as members of larger families. Since the Antilles are still part of the Dutch Kingdom, Antilleans' migration doesn't have the permanent character of that of the Surinamese. Antilleans can always return to the Antilles, while Surinamese need a visa to visit their country of origin and return migration is complicated by complex bureaucratic procedures[2].

The majority of the women we interviewed come from the former Dutch colonies and their migration histories follow the above-described pattern. Most Surinamese respondents came to the Netherlands before the 1980s, and most Antillean women during the 1990s. Two women migrated under the family-reunion/formation program. One case concerns the already mentioned Polish woman. Before their marriage, her husband had sought asylum as a political refugee in the Netherlands in the 1980s, a period characterized by strong political turbulence in Poland. They met when she visited Amsterdam and fell in love. She migrated as his future wife shortly after and they set up home in Amsterdam. Unfortunately, a few years later the husband had an accident and died. When we interviewed her, she had recently become a widow. After she was married off, Sara, too, migrated as a wife under the family-reunion/formation program. For both women this meant that their residence permit was dependent on that of their husbands'. In case of the Polish widow, after her husband's decease, she was entitled to a permanent residence permit on humanitarian grounds. Women, however, who have migrated as dependent wives and who divorce their husbands within three years after their migration, lose their residence permit and have to go back to their countries of origin. Women who divorce their husbands between five and ten years after their arrival in the Netherlands are entitled to residence permits under specific conditions such as having children under six years old, speaking fluent Dutch, having a job with an income above the poverty level or giving up one's

[2] See Palet Newsletter December 2002 published at the web (http://www.paletweb.nl/nieuwsbrief/dec2002/4.htm).

own nationality. Only after a stay in the Netherlands of more than ten years are migrant women entitled to a residence permit without any conditions (Hooghiemstra & Niphuis-Nell 1995: 52-55, Clara Wichmann Instituut 2000). Divorced women from North Africa and other Islamic countries may be in a particularly disadvantaged position. For example, the Islamic based family law of Morocco still doesn't acknowledge a divorce that is pronounced under the Dutch law, though a thorough reform of the family law has been implemented as of February 2004. For women who are not divorced under the Moroccan law, to visit their family in Morocco is hardly possible because they may be accused of not fulfilling their marital obligations or run the risk that their ex-husband and his family take away the children because they belong to the husband's family (Jonkers 2003: 104; Eldering & Borm 1996: 62). Moroccan women such as Sara who are married to an abusive husband, may be forced to postpone their divorce. As divorced women they may have to leave the Netherlands, but going back to Morocco is no option[3].

At this point of the analysis the conclusion is justified that in the case of female migration from Morocco to the Netherlands, women's subordination and gender hierarchies characteristic for Moroccan patriarchy, are being reconstructed through the Dutch family-reunion/formation program. Also in the case of Surinamese and Antillean women the migration policy towards residents from the former colonies reconfirms existing gender relations. However, in the case Antillean women, who can migrate freely regardless of gender or marital state, not their dependence but their autonomy within the matrifocal family system is reconfirmed by migration policy, as it was in the past with Surinamese migrant women.

Transition across states boundaries: the emergence of transnational networks

What is so specific for our new era of globalisation is not migration in itself – people have been migrating ever since the early stages of mankind – but the speed with which international migration is taking place and the fact that through international air travel, telecommunication and global banking systems, distances are being compressed. This enables migrants to maintain intensive contacts with their family and friends that have stayed behind. Those contacts have created transnational networks through which people move back and forth, send money to each other, find their marriage partners and receive new or returned migrants. People tend to migrate to those countries to which their transnational networks stretch out (Staring 2001). The present research confirms these insights. For the two women who migrated under the family-reunion/formation program, the transnational networks functioned as a marriage market. The Polish women had travelled to Amsterdam at the request of a friend of her to take care for his sick brother who lived in Amsterdam. This sick brother later became the Polish woman's husband. At the time when Sara was married off she was living with her father and his second wife in Brussels, Belgium. Her father used his transnational network to find her a husband. A friend of his who lived in Amsterdam was prepared to marry his daughter. With the opportunity of the engagement, during the holidays, Sara travelled to her family in Morocco where she met her husband for the first time.

For the Surinamese and Antillean women, the existence of the transnational networks was an important motivation to migrate to the Netherlands. As I have stated before mutual support between female relatives characterizes the matrifocal family system. Family members may facilitate the voyage of new migrants, both by offering support upon leaving Surinam and the Antilles and by settling down in the Netherlands. As the case of Philomena shows, she left her children in the care of her sister in Paramaribo and built up a life in the Netherlands before she sent for her children six years later. Also migration may be motivated by the wish to live close again to migrated family members. A Surinamese woman of 41 years old who migrated at the age of sixteen, answered our question of why she migrated to the Netherlands as follows:

> 'Well, for a better future. Because you live in Surinam and your sister lives in the Netherlands. You hear about the Netherlands in Surinam: 'You have better chances there'. You are born in Surinam and you don't belong to the highest classes. My mother was a single mother. Then you

---

[3] Dutch government has taking into consideration granting residence permits to battered wives on humanitarian grounds (NRC, 18-10-2003, 'Mishandelde partner krijgt verblijfstitel' page 3). Women who are divorced for the Dutch law have to start a separate divorce procedure for Moroccan law, which will take 6 month (NRC, 10-02-2004, 'Vrouw kan niet meer worden gedumpt' page 5).

are poorly off. And you have an older sister who says: I will send for you, so you can go to school here and study better. So she sends for you and in that way you arrive in the Netherlands.'

The migrated family members gave information about the Netherlands and their life-style. They may stimulate and actually support other family members to migrate too. Many women related that after their arrival in the Netherlands, they started living in the houses of their female kin. The already migrated family members served as a safety net and a springboard for the recently arrived. New migrants receive shelter, emotional and practical support that made it easier to start a new life in the Netherlands. Having family in the Netherlands made the step to migrate smaller.

Migrants' experiences in the receiving countries: gender dynamics

The Netherlands may be characterized as a rapidly changing society where gender relations undergo a constant process of reformulating and redefining. In the 1960s marriages between women and men and the traditional division of labour between them was regarded as normal and socially desirable. Married women were responsible for household chores and childcare, while their husbands had jobs outside the home to support the family. Since then, women have entered the Dutch labour force in massive numbers. Marriage as a socially desirable and lifetime form of coexistence between women and men has become the subject of heated debates. Nowadays, one third of marriages end in divorce (Hooghiemstra 1997: 35). Alternative forms of coexistence, such as 'living-apart-together' relationships, unmarried cohabitation and single-mother families are on the rise. Although the sexual division of labour has changed significantly, the trend has not entirely eroded traditional notions. In fact, studies reveal that even though the daily activities of women and men are becoming more similar, women remain responsible for most of the childcare, while men perform the lion's share of paid employment. Women may take paid jobs but tend to consider this a matter of choice. The idea that nobody can take care of the children like the mother is still very vivid (Hooghiemstra 2000: 106/121; Hooghiemstra & Keuzenkamp 2000: 125).

Social policy tends to reflect gender discourses and transformations, and the Netherlands isn't an exception. In the literature, the Dutch welfare system has been defined as a strong male breadwinner state, though the system is currently being reformed at a rapid space (Plantenga 1999). Social provisions were initially designed based on the notion of the male breadwinner and the caring wife. If a husband's income was lost through his death or the couple's divorce, the state replaced the income of the male breadwinner. Between the 1960s and 1980s single mothers' income was rather steadily secured by a general policy that facilitated full time care. This strong focus of the state on women as caretakers and men as breadwinner has also contributed to the definition of care as a private matter of the family and of women, which subsequently results in the scarcity of public care provisions. With the New Assistance Act of 1996, the position of single mothers has changed. The state no longer automatically replaces the income of the male breadwinner and the status of full time motherhood is no longer undisputed. Nowadays, single mothers are increasingly considered to be workers, and, to be entitled to benefits they are required to be available for entrance into the labour market (Bussemaker et al.1997: 48-49, Plantenga 1999:14-15).

Women who migrate to the Netherlands, arrive in a society were gender discourses express ambiguity and contradictory messages. Women's importance for the labour force is stressed as well as their traditional roles as full-time caretakers, mothers and wives. And in case of single mothers, it is true that they are entitled to welfare benefits, but the conditions are becoming more and more strict and their welfare is increasingly meant to only cover a short period without work. For migrant single mothers such as Sara, Philomena and Shirley who come to the Netherlands with their own interpretations of gender relations, the ambiguity and contradiction that they encounter in the Netherlands may offer space to grab opportunities and result in a variety of reinterpretations and redefinitions.

Within the matrifocal family-system of the Caribbean, motherhood is defined as emotional as well as material care. From a young age onwards, Antillean and Creole-Surinamese women are being prepared for their future role as mothers and providers. 'Your diploma is your husband' is a popular saying used by the interviewees (*cf.* Distelbrink 2000: 44). It expresses the need for women to rely on themselves and earn their own living instead of counting on a husband's support. The fact that mothers have a job and combine care with income generating activities is necessary, socially accepted and considered to attribute to the autonomy Antillean and Creole-Surinamese women strive for. Philomena, for example, migrated from Paramaribo to

Rotterdam, the Netherlands' second largest city. She lived there for several years and tried to find a job without success meanwhile living off her welfare benefits. Then she heard of a subsidized job program in Amsterdam. Since she was very determined to find a job, she decided to move to Amsterdam and to try her luck there. During the interview she expressed her happiness that she was able to get a job as a city-guard.

It is not without reason that Creole-Surinamese single mothers participate at the Dutch labour market in large numbers (Mérove & Merens 2004: 91, Niekerk 2000: 233). From their self-definition of caretakers and income-providers, they take advantage of the opportunities offered by the Dutch labour market.

Interviews with other Creole-Suriname and Antillean respondents demonstrate that – within the Dutch contexts - they have reinterpreted and redefined notions of motherhood and parenthood. Given the deplorable economic conditions in Suriname and on the Antilles, women are often unable to subsist without financial assistance from a male partner, despite their pursuit of economic and emotional independence. Financial contributions from male partners need to be reciprocated by what Creole women refer to as 'bedroom duties', i.e. a woman's sexual obligations toward her partner in exchange for the goods and services received from him (Wekker 1994: 127). Because men often dominate women, women genuinely fear that they will lose control over their lives by accepting such financial contributions. In the Netherlands, as mentioned before, single mothers with small children are entitled to welfare benefits and this protects women from becoming financially dependent on men. Shirley, who is on welfare, explained that she had lived with one of the fathers of her two children. She had kicked him out when he became involved with another woman. For a long time he didn't give her any support, because he was upset that he had been dumped. He had recently started giving her money, hoping to resume sexual relations with her. Shirley, however, was not interested. Her welfare benefits enabled her to break the vicious cycle of financial contributions from men in turn of sexual favours. It also improved Shirley's negotiating leverage with respect to the father. She said that she might resume sexual relations with the father in the future, but that first she wanted him to become more involved in raising her child. As a mother, she was using her sexual favours to renegotiate the matrifocal values with respect to fatherhood. Her benefits enabled her to increase her autonomy towards her child's father.

The benefits single mothers are entitled to in the Netherlands enable them to be full time mothers. Some women experience their welfare benefit as an opportunity to fully concentrate on care. This tendency, however, has little material basis to develop into a general redefinition of motherhood among Surinamese and Antillean women, because the Dutch state is increasingly questioning single mothers' entitlement to welfare benefits. Besides, full-time care may not always be the result of a free choice. Since public childcare facilities are scarce in the Netherlands, single mothers – especially those without a support network - may find it hard to combine care and paid work. Other women are full-time mothers because they cannot work for health reasons. One woman interviewed was a kidney-patient, another one had breast cancer and two women had seriously sick children who needed their full-time care. The migration of these women gave them access to health care and financial basis through their welfare benefit.

Literature concerning the Moroccan gendered notions of honour and shame make clear that through migration, cultural notions may receive different accents in the context of the Dutch society. Moroccan migrants, men as well as women, consider the behaviour of autochthonous Dutch women as indecent and shameful. Bartels argues that because of the threat of dishonourable femininity within Dutch society the sexual morality of Moroccan women is especially stressed. This leads to a further limiting of mobility and autonomy of women. As stated before, the migration process of Moroccans is characterized by a stepwise rhythm. First, the men migrated as guest labourers. Years later, their wives and children follow under the family-reunion/formation program. The women's fathers and husbands have missed the modernization and transformations that have occurred in Moroccan society. They may take a very traditional and strict attitude towards the behaviour of their daughters and wives. Women, who may have had some liberty in Morocco, who have followed an education and who had paid work, are very dependent on their fathers and husbands after their arrival in the Netherlands. They do not speak the language and they are unfamiliar with the structures of Dutch society. On a daily basis they have to adapt to their fathers and husbands who they do not know very well. Because of all this, women and then especially the mothers may become very isolated, especially in the early stages after their migration to the Netherlands (Bartels 1993: 197-199). Severe marital problems and husbands who mistreat their wives are often reported among Moroccan couples. Sara who divorced because of her abusive husband can only relate to this period of her life with tears in her voice. However, she has no intention of returning to Morocco. Not only because her Dutch divorce isn't valid

there, but also because she enjoys the freedom of Dutch society, her financial autonomy through her welfare benefits and the opportunities to develop herself (cf. Eldering & Borm 1996: 62). She had intensive contacts with welfare workers whom prepared her for the labour market through a Dutch language course and other training. The Dutch juridical system enabled her to divorce her husband; the Dutch welfare system enabled her to become financially independent and to get an education.

Moroccan women who came to the Netherlands as daughters show a different pattern. More often than their mothers they grab opportunities offered by Dutch society, follow an education and find a job. Gender relations may be especially challenged when they marry a male from Morocco, which many young Moroccan women intend to do (Hooghiermstra 2003). Under the Dutch family-reunion/formation program the partner in the Netherlands needs to have an independent income from work. As research shows during their marriage these women keep working. Their new husbands need to learn the language, to integrate in the Dutch labour market and are dependent on their wives for their residents permits (Jonkers 2003). The migration policy confirms the daughters wishes for autonomy and in the process Morrocan patriarchal relations are being undermined.

Migrants' experiences in the receiving countries: transnational networks

The interviews with the majority of the interviewed single mothers show proof of the exchange of emotional, material and practical support between family members whether migrated or not. Many of the interviewed Surinamese and Antillean women made references to the social support they received from their female family members who also lived in the Netherlands (Ypeij & Steenbeek 2001). As stated before, within the matrifocal family system mutual support among female kin and friends is very commonplace. Female family members feel responsible for each other's children and expect to help. The interviewees mentioned cousins, sisters, mothers and aunts as their main sources of support. The women are often as close to aunts on their mothers' side as they are to their own mothers, and the children of these aunts are like sisters to them. Several women have mentioned that they have deliberately moved near a sister, aunt or cousin, especially in the South-east of Amsterdam. During the peak of the migration from Surinam to the Netherlands (1973-1980), an enormous housing project was being completed in Amsterdam South-East. The project was not very popular under the autochthonous population, but offered the advantage that Surinamese migrants could rather easily obtain an apartment and could even indicate their preference for a certain apartment building.

Among Surinamese and Antillean female family members, the emotional involvement and trust in each other run very deep. An Antillean woman and mother of two children stated:

> 'We help each other, my family and I. The four of us form a unit: my aunt, my sisters, myself and my cousin. When I go to class in the evening, my cousin baby-sits for me. If one of us has problems, we get together. That's how we live. My sisters and my mother are the most important of all, but my mom lives on Curacao. She sends things for the kids, especially trousers''.

Her last remark shows that social support is being exchanged between migrants and family members who have stayed behind. Contacts between the country of origin and the Netherlands are maintained intensively in various cases. Gifts and money are sent back and forth, but since the intensification of the economic crisis in Surinam as well as in the Antilles, money flows have become increasingly one-way towards the Caribbean. The exchange of social support between female kin is related to notions of motherhood and the matrifocal family system. Many Antillean and Surinamese mothers raise their children without involvement of the father, but this doesn't mean that they are on their own (Dijke et al.1992, Wekker 1994). Referring to them as single mothers is in fact ethnocentric. As mothers they rely on people other than the father, especially their female kin, such as sisters, mothers, cousins and aunts. When a woman becomes a mother the exchange network is being mobilized. The efforts the women make to help their female kin to migrate to the Netherlands should be placed in this context. If their family kin live close by, they are able to receive the social support they need as single mothers and they are able to combine paid work with care more easily (Distelbrink 2000: 46). Also the formation of extended households, a common practice within the matrifocal family system, should be placed in the light. As the interviews show, after their migration to Amsterdam, the majority of the interviewed Surinamese and Antillean mothers had lived in an extended household with

other female kin during a certain period of time. The interviews with Surinamese and Antillean women make clear that the support networks may offer the women opportunities to migrate and build up their lives as single mothers in the Netherlands. Simultaneously, through the exchange of support, the notions of motherhood as emotional and material care, and in relation to the support of female kin are being reconstructed.

Not all interviewees are so well connected that they have access to support networks after their migration. Within the literature, especially the situation of Antillean single mothers has been described as one of social isolation and loneliness (Dijke et al. 1992, Zwaard, 1999). An explaining factor might be that migrant networks tend to be ethnically homogeneous. Because the migration from the Antilles only received a massive character during the last decade, Antillean single mothers might need more time to build up a satisfactory network. Another factor is that Antillean single mothers may find difficulties combining care with a paid job. In their countries of origin, many women were able to work because their female family help them with their caring tasks (Dijke et.al 1992). In the Netherlands, they may lack the support of female kin and friends, public childcare facilities are scarce and they are forced to live on welfare (Mérove & Meerens 2004: 125). Their relative poverty may complicate maintaining contacts with kin that live further away. Also, return migration to the Antilles is occurring at a relatively large scale and this may result fragmented, only partially functioning, networks at both sides of the ocean. Our own interviews don't show so much that Antillean mothers are isolated, which may be related to the small number of interviewees. However, social isolation does occur among the interviewees. In some cases it may be compensated through the support from family members abroad, as is the case of the Polish woman. At the time of the interviews she lived rather on her own because of the lack of a Polish community in her neighbourhood and her limited knowledge of the Dutch language. Whenever possible she travelled back and forth to her mother in Warsaw, some 1.200 kilometres away. She even brought her children to her mother in Warsaw when she had to be hospitalised in Amsterdam. Despite her loneliness she didn't think of returning to Poland because she considered the chances for her children better in Dutch society.

Also Sara's interview gives many references to the fact that her life was characterized by long periods of social isolation and loneliness. When she arrived in Amsterdam with her husband at the age of sixteen, they moved into the house of her parents-in-law. Despite her husband's infidelity, long periods of absent, aggressiveness and unwillingness to give her money, her mother-in-law persuaded her time and again to stay with him. Only when Sara moved with her husband to another house where she became friends with a Dutch couple next door, she realized that she could change her situation. With their support Sara managed to get police protection against her violent husband, to divorce him before the Dutch law, to apply for welfare and to move to another house again, this time in her own name. She continues:

> "My whole life was in the dark. I was always closed in the house, always in the dark. I was always scared. But I did two things, I got the divorce and I moved in the new house. Now I am not scared anymore. I am free. Nobody is the boss about me. I feel strong. I am going to give my children a future. I am a mother and a father for my children. I am a man in a women, because I want to live alone with my children."

Being free and having a new future came at a high price for Sara. She had to break with her parents-in-law and her father. The Moroccan community that may have offered her friendships and support during the difficult time of her divorce, stigmatised her. Moroccan women started gossiping about her and called her a 'bad woman'. Sara turned her back on the Moroccan community and did her utmost to make new contact with people from other ethnic backgrounds (cf. Eldering & Born 1996: 91, 107). At the time of the interviews she had a Pakistan friend who proposed her for marriage. Sara's forced isolation from her community and family made her very sad. But simultaneously it opened up ways for a new life, for a new future and for friendships outside her community. As an independent mother with many responsibilities and a welfare-income she might not be willing to give up her autonomy for a marriage based on traditional gender roles and the subordination of the wife.

Final remarks

To understand the lives of migrant women it is important to analyse their migration as a process and to realize that gender directs all stages of that process. As this comparative study has shown, Surinamese and Antillean women have been able to migrate as autonomous persons. In their countries of origin the matrifocal value system attributed to the fact that they could take the decision to migrate as an individual, a position that was reconfirmed through the immigration policy of the Dutch State. In the Netherlands, they have been able to rebuild their support networks of female kin. Due to their networks they have been able to reconstruct the matrifocal notion of motherhood as a combination of material responsibility and care. But the Dutch context also gave room for reinterpretations of gender notions such as the redefinition of motherhood as full-time care. As the case of Sara shows, for Moroccan women it is much harder to migrate to the Netherlands as individual. The patriarchal interpretation of gender notions is reconfirmed through the family-formation/reunion policy in the case it is the women who migrate. Once in the Netherlands Moroccan women may have difficulties with their residence permits and to divorce before the Dutch and Moroccan law. When they are able to overcome all these limitations, they may be entitled to a welfare allowance. However stigmatisation by other Moroccan people may lead to social isolation. Fortunately, Sara had the strength to become 'a man in a women' and to build up a new live including a multi-ethnic network. Also the transnational networks of Antillean women may be so fragmented that it leads social isolation, feelings of loneliness, welfare dependency and poverty. These cases make clear that we should not be to romantic about migrants' transnational networks.

The ambiguity and contradictions within the autochthonous gender discourses that migrant women encountered in the Netherlands may offer space for new interpretations and reconstructions of existing meanings. As daughters migration policy may enable women to marry a men from their country of origin and in doing so challenging traditional gender relations. Because of their entitlement to welfare, married women have possibilities to leave their husbands and become single mothers. As single mothers they are able to choose between a combination of work and care, or to be a full-time mother. Through their migration their gender interpretations may have been shuffled, redefined and reinterpreted. This may enable migrant women to grab opportunities unknown in their country of origins. However, the Netherlands is not a country of milk and honey. Migration policies are characterized by ever increasing restrictions. Nowadays Surinamese can only migrate under the family-reunion/formation policy, in other words as dependent men and women, as daughters and wives. Welfare transformations threaten the position of single mothers, regardless of their ethnicity. Single mother's access to welfare has severely been reduced. The state doesn't want to replace the role of the male breadwinner anymore and forces single mothers to work, but public childcare provisions are scare. And last but not least, the economic recession have reduced job possibilities.

Bibliography

*Bartels, Edien, 1993, *Eén dochter is beter dan duizend zonen. Arabische vrouwn, symbolen en machtsverhoudingen tusen de sexen*, Utrecht; Jan van Arkel.

*Boyd, Monica & Elizabeth Grieco, 2002, 'Women and migration: Incorporating Gender into International Migration Theory', Migration Policy Institute.

*Bussemaker,J. A. van Drenth,T. Knijn and J. Platenga, 1997, 'Lone Mothers in the Netherlands' in: J.Lewis (ed.) *Lone Mothers in European Welfare Regimes. Shifting Policy Logics*, London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, pp. 96-120.

*Chant, Sylvia, 1997, *Women-headed households: Diversity and Dynamics in theDeveloping World*. London: MacMillan

*Clara Wichmann Instituut, 2000, 'Commentaar van het Clara Wichmann Instituut inzake Notie over de vreemdelingrechtelijke rechtspositie van vrouwen in het vreemdelingenbeleid', 8 mei, www.clara-wichmann.nl

*Dijke, A. van, H. van Hulst & L. Terpstra, 1990, *Mama soltera: de positie van alleenstaande Curacaose en Arubanse moeders in Nederland.* Den Haag: Warray

*Distelbrink, Marjolijn, 2000, *Opvoeden zonder man. Opvoeding en ontwikkeling in Creools-Surinaamse een- en tweeoudergezinnen in Nederland,* Assen: Van Gorcum.
*Eldering, Lotty & Julie-Anne Borm, 1996, *Alleenstaande Marokkaanse moeders*, Utrecht: Jan van Arkel.

*Graaff, Thomas de, 2002, *Migration, Ethnic Minorities & Networks Externalities*, Amsterdam: Thesis Publishers.

*Hooghiemstra, Erna, 1997, 'Demografische ontwikkelingen', in: M. Niphuis-Nell (ed.) *Sociale Atlas van de vrouw. Deel 4. Veranderingen in de primaire leefsfeer.* Rijswijk: SCP, Den Haag: Vuga, pp. 17-52.
-2000, 'Denken over verdelen', in S. Keuzenkamp en E. Hooghiemstra (eds.), *De kunst van het combineren. Taakverdeling onder partners.* Den Haag: SCP, pp. 101-24.
-2003, *Trouwen over de grens. Achtergronden van partnerkeuze van Turken en Marokkanen in Nederland*, Den Haag: SCP.

*Hooghiemstra, Erna & S. Keuzenkamp, 2000, 'Verdienerstypen en de kunst van het combineren', in: S. Keuzenkamp en E. Hooghiemstra (eds.), *De kunst van het combineren. Taakverdeling onder partners.* Den Haag: SCP, pp. 124-44.

*Hooghiemstra, B.T.J. & J.G.F. Merens, 1999, *'Variatie in participatie. Achtergronden van arbeidsdeelname van allochtone en autochtone vrouwen',* Den Haag: SCP.

*Hooghiemstra, Erna & M. Niphuis-Nell, 1995, Sociale atlas van de vrouw: deel 3: allochtone vrouwen, SCP: Den Haag

*Hulst, Hans van, 1997, *Morgen bloeit het diabaas. De Antilliaanse volksklasse in de Nederlandse samenleving,* Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

*Jonkers, Marina, 2003, *Een miskende revolutie. Het moederschap van Marokkaanse vrouwen,* Amsterdam: Aksant.

*Mernessi, Fatima, 1987, *Beyond the Veil. Male-Female Dynamics in Modcern Muslim Society. Revised Edition,* Bloomington and Indianapolis:. Indiana University Press.

*Mérove, Gijbert & Ans Merens (eds.), 2004, *Emancipatie in estafette. De positie van vrouwen uit etnische minderheden*, Den Haag: SCP, Rotterdam: ISEO.

*Moore, Henriette, 1994. *Is there a crisis in the family?* Geneva:: World Summit for Social Development, Occasional paper 3.

*Niekerk, Mies, 2000 *De Krekel en de Mier. Favels en Feiten over Maatschappelijke Stijging van Creoolse en Hindoestaanse Surinamers in Nederland*, Amsterdam: Spinhuis.

*Oostindie, Gert & Inge Klinkers, 2001, *Het Koninkrijk in de Caraïben. Een korte geschiedenis van het Nederlandse dekolonisatiebleid, 1940-2000.* Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

*Plantenga, J., 1999 *Alleenstaande moeders en de systematiek van de verzorgingsstaat: Een vergelijkend onderzoek naar de sociaal economische positie van alleenstaande moeders in Nederland, Denemarken, Duitsland, het Verenigd Koninkrijk en Italie*, Utrecht: AWSB.

*Staring, Richard, 2001, *Reizen onder regie. He migratieproces van illegale turken in Nederland,* Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis.

*Wekker, Gloria, 1994, *Ik ben een gouden munt. Constructies van subjectiviteit en seksualiteit van Creoolse vrouwen in Paramaribo.* Amsterdam: Vita.

*Venema, Tijo, 1992, *Famiri Nanga Kulturu. Creoolse sociale verhoudingen en Winti in Amsterdam*, Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis.

*Ypeij, Annelou & Gerdien Steenbeek, 2001, 'Poor Single Mothers and cultural Meanings of Social Support' *Focaal – European Journal of Anthropology,* no 38, pp. 71-82

*Zwaard, Joke, 1999, *Met hulp van vriendinnen. Moeders uit lage inkomensgroepen over rondkomen en vooruitkomen*, Utrecht: SWP.