

Turkish-Dutch and Moroccan-Dutch female professionals in social work

The self-perception and positioning of young,
newly-started professionals in social work

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CHAPTER 1

General introduction

This research, carried out at the Utrecht University of Applied Sciences (HU) in the Netherlands, explores the experiences of newly-started Turkish-Dutch and Moroccan-Dutch female professionals in social work. The last section of the research will also discuss and explore the experiences of social work educators by including their perspective. The key research question examines how young, newly started, female Turkish-Dutch and Moroccan-Dutch professionals in social work perceive and position themselves in relation to the social work profession. Chapter 3 explains how the key and subsidiary research questions were developed.

The research comprises four sections, each with its own methodology and theories, resulting in four separate publications (Chapter 4-7). The general introduction focuses on the background of the Turkish-Dutch and Moroccan-Dutch professionals and the fields of social work practice and education in the Netherlands. As such, it sketches the context in which this research is situated.

In times of liquid modernity (Bauman, 2000) it is remarkable to see how, at all levels of society, rigid boundaries and traditional barriers have begun to dissolve and uncertainty now seeps into people's lives. The role of the nation-state has weakened and debates about national identity, culture and belonging have emerged. Similar developments can be identified in work and professions, certainly also in social work. The social work profession needs to reposition itself in the new context of the neo-liberal, increasingly diverse society. Flexible, short-term work contracts lead to increasing uncertainty in working life. Work and jobs are permanently changing. An example of increasing work uncertainty was released by Statistics Netherlands (CBS, 2016) in a publication on the Turkish-Dutch and the Moroccan-Dutch employees.

As it turns out, they tend to be employed under flexible contracts more frequently than other Dutch citizens, and therefore risk losing their job sooner, and they have also been hit harder by the economic crisis.

Dilemmas and disturbing debates revolve around values and national identity, professional identity and normativity. This implies that this research is connected to discourses on social integration, Islam and multiculturalism and at the same time to debates on the professionalisation of social work. In the context of this research, two major phenomena can be identified that challenge the social work profession and social work education:

- A 'transition' (or multiple transitions) in the field of social work practice with an impact on social work education, due to welfare state reforms in the Netherlands, characterised as a transformation from welfare state to participatory society.
- Increasing diversity or superdiversity (Vertovec, 2007), leading to a state of 'unsettlement'. The reality of increasing diversity can be considered a positive dimension but it also disturbs, disrupts or causes unsettlement.

Both phenomena cannot be identified as essentially negative or positive, but mark a process of change. A process that comes with challenges that impact on the social work profession and professional identity. These challenges need to be addressed. This chapter highlights some of the salient themes connected to 'transition' and 'increasing diversity', which will then be explored further in the different research sections.

1.1 The second-generation migrant daughters of Turkish and Moroccan descent

The city of Utrecht in the centre of the Netherlands is the fourth-largest city in the country with a highly diverse population. The city has about 340,000 inhabitants (CBS, 2016) of which 22% derive from a non-western background (Utrecht Monitor, 2015). Since 2000, the

numbers of the so-called 'second generation from a non-western background' in Utrecht have increased, especially in the twenties and thirties age bracket (Ibid). Most of the second and third generation migrants live in urban contexts. Of all Muslims in the Netherlands, about 75% are of Turkish or Moroccan origin, and more than 90% of the Turkish and Moroccan-Dutch identify as Muslims (Forum, 2010; SCP, 2012). Many differences exist between and among the Turkish-Dutch and the Moroccan-Dutch population groups, identifiable as 'in-group' and 'inter-group' differences. In general, the inter- and intra-ethnic diversity of both 'groups' tends to be neglected, which may contribute to processes of homogenisation and stigmatisation (Eijberts, 2013). Studies that examine inter-group differences point to differences in terms of religious behaviour, such as dealing with rules or wearing a headscarf (Van der Valk, 2016). Dagevos and Huijnk (2016) also point out differences relating to command of the Dutch language. According to this study, the Turkish-Dutch more often have difficulty with the Dutch language. The Moroccan-Dutch seem to have fewer problems with Dutch and more often use it in the domestic setting (Ibid: 286). Moroccan-Dutch women tend to embrace traditional gender roles to a lesser extent, marry and have children later and more often continue to work after getting married (Dagevos, 2001; Eijberts, 2013). In both groups there is a tendency to marry someone with the same background, but especially for women with a higher level of education, finding a spouse of the same ethnicity in the Netherlands can be quite a challenge (Bijl et al., 2005).

'Migrant daughters' (Buitelaar, 2009) of Turkish and Moroccan descent share communalities related to their family history, their cultural and religious background, as daughters of migrants who came to the Netherlands as guest workers in the 1960s and 70s. These guest workers from underdeveloped areas in Turkey and Morocco were contracted for temporary work and were expected to return home after completing their work. However, many decided to stay and brought their families in the 1980s through family reunification legislation. Not all immigrants were recruited from poor areas. After the 1980 military

coup in Turkey, Turkish immigration increased as many sought asylum. Most of these immigrants were literate and came from developed areas (Weiner, 2010).

With a choice for higher education, many 'migrant daughters' are aiming at a higher educational level than their parents. The first-generation migrants, of whom many are lowly educated or illiterate and have a low class status, were predominantly recruited from rural areas. In the process of social mobility, many of their children find it difficult to maintain the connection with their communities while feeling insecure about the values, rules and codes of behaviour in their new educational or professional environment. According to Crul and Heering (2008), migrant women chose jobs in social work, education and health, which were at that time in dire need of employees.

'Migrant daughters' from Turkish or Moroccan descent belong to the two largest ethnic minority groups in the Netherlands, and at the start of this research in 2011 they also formed the two largest ethnic minority student groups in social work education at the Utrecht University of Applied Sciences (HU). Most of the Turkish-Dutch and Moroccan-Dutch female students in social work at this university are found in one of the specific profiles of Bachelor social work education, the directly accessible general social (case) work.

A striking feature of the academic literature on second-generation women of Turkish and Moroccan descent is the recurring double-sided image, constructed by outsiders. On the one hand they are stigmatised as oppressed, non-emancipated and incapable of agency, while burdened with high claims and expectations on the other. They are the primary caretakers of their children and other family members in need. However, in terms of the so-called 'failed integration', high expectations from outsiders also include a responsibility to remake the mainstream (as the 'in-between' generation), including the dominant negative image of their male counterparts. Migrant daughters are considered powerful role models for others, having grown up with more cultures. Tensions appear in the complexity of combining

'western' values related to individuality and autonomy with expectations relating to loyalty and obedience in the private domain.

Some of the most heated public debates on migrant women from Turkish or Moroccan descent concern the assumed stagnating integration or participation in Dutch society (Buitelaar, 2009). This assumed failed integration is directly related to the dominant idea of the failed multicultural society. The optimists in the debates emphasise the progress that has been made, in spite of the considerable disadvantages; for instance in terms of the growing number of especially female students entering higher education (Crul, Schneider & Lelie, 2013). The pessimists highlight the problems, and particularly point to the factor of faith. In the Netherlands religion seems to have lost its importance, both in public and everyday life, and a renewed attention for religion feels like a step backwards. An example of this pessimistic or optimistic perspective is the confusion on how to understand the 'headscarf', often seen as a symbol of a failed integration process (and as a powerful reason for exclusion in the labour market) and the expectation that integration should go hand in hand with increasing secularisation. Or should it be seen as a symbol of growing confidence or self-awareness of an emancipating group, or maybe both? The debates on integration entered the universities and caused confusion.

This confusion was also felt at the institute of social work of Utrecht University of Applied Sciences (HU). Young female Muslim students started to dress more rather than less 'traditional', which was quite unexpected from the educators' perspective. This was also confirmed by some of the students and professionals involved in this research. It was as if these students started to behave and dress according to the image projected onto them by society at large.

According to Schmidt (2005) and Mansson Mc Ginty (2007), young Muslim migrants increasingly become absorbed in their parents' faith because they were continuously addressed as 'being different'. Their parents' faith became an important part of their identity. Exclusion and tension 'can cause migrants to withdraw into their own ethnic or

religious group, reinforcing the symbolic boundaries and their external manifestations' (Dagevos and Huijnk, 2016: 295). A study by Van der Valk (2016) among highly educated Moroccan women in the Netherlands shows how a strong religious identity also offers them self-awareness, self-esteem and protection against discrimination and stigmatisation and supports their connectedness with their parents and family background. For their study and profession, their religious identity also contributes to their ability to concentrate (Van der Valk, 2016).

1.2 Challenges in social work practice

The 'transition' in the field of social work practice in the Netherlands is often identified as a 'transformation' in which major welfare state reforms are developed and implemented, with a strong impact on the social domain and the social work professional identity. It is part of the transformation from welfare state to participatory society. The 'unsettlement' in social work practice will be addressed under 'increasing diversity in social work', by examining developments in the professional help given to service users from a migrant- or refugee background and the increasing diversity among professionals themselves. This paragraph concludes with some of the dilemmas connected to professional identity.

- The transformation from welfare state to participatory society

The first transition concerns a development that started several decades ago and can be identified as a move toward 'decentralisation'. Decentralisation of responsibilities for the social domain takes the form of a shift from the national to the municipal level. This shift means that the state is delegating responsibility for the implementation of social policies to the market, civil society and the local government level. Another transition pertains to the process of 'deinstitutionalisation', based on the ideal of an inclusive society in which the disabled, the sick

and the elderly are taken care of within mainstream society, rather than outside society in institutions. The healthy and able-bodied population is asked to help, and the advantages of inclusion into mainstream society are obvious. Deinstitutionalisation requires active solidarity. The move from the traditional welfare state to a participatory society means that everyone has to participate in providing care, rather than just paying taxes and leaving the actual care to professionals. It implies a reform of public services in favour of voluntary organisations and the promotion of a more active involvement by citizens. This active involvement of citizens and volunteers challenges the professional expertise and may result in an unwanted process of de-professionalisation. Besides all the benefits of the move towards decentralisation, the risks of this process are also becoming more apparent. Margo Trappenburg (2013), a Dutch professor in social work, points out the risk that active solidarity burdens those who are already burdened. For professionals it means that they will be challenged by the increasing complexity of their work and by the claims and high expectations from others. In the participatory society, which is a strengths-based approach, citizens need to appeal to friends, family and neighbours first, before professional support will be considered. Some paid work that was done professionally in the welfare state has to be done unpaid by others in the participatory society, sometimes receiving an allowance or social benefit in return. In the near future, providing help will increasingly become an activity that all citizens have to undertake. It challenges the boundaries between professionals and non-professionals (such as volunteers) and service users. One of the positive outcomes is that citizens become co-producers of social work on a more equal basis. The knowledge of service users needs to be taken more seriously, as has been advocated for much longer already. It is in this context of transformation that professionals and the profession need to reposition and include 'non-professionals' such as volunteers in their decision-making.

The transformation to the participatory society has major consequences for the female Turkish-Dutch and Moroccan-Dutch of

this study. In general, women are increasingly burdened with caring obligations and the female professionals in this study also point out how these obligations impact on their sense of freedom within their communities.

A recent study analysed how professionals and volunteers deal with their potentially blurred boundaries (Bochove et al., 2016). According to this study, demarcation work is performed, emphasising differences between professionals and volunteers (Ibid). However, the study also identifies 'welcoming work', with volunteers being invited to take over certain responsibilities so that professionals can focus on more specialised tasks.

- Increasing diversity in social work

Social work organisations are increasingly committed to improving the professional help offered to service users from a migrant or refugee background. Social work professionals in general struggle to work with these service users, however: they are perceived as 'difficult and different' and their problems are identified as highly complex (Van der Haar, 2007). Traditionally, many social work approaches to migrant service users are based on the idea of 'deficit'. Migrants or refugees belong to the most vulnerable groups in society and are less healthy, have less education and a lower socio-economic position (Bakker, 2010; Uunk, 2002). The risk, in social work, is that professionals fail to connect to these service users or misunderstand their needs. That is why many of the service users with a migrant or refugee background pull out prematurely (Ince & Van de Berg, 2009). Social workers are inclined to attribute difficulties or failures in their work with these service users to 'cultural difference'. This is one of the reasons that they fail to recognise other aggravating factors, such as poverty, unemployment, poor housing conditions, homesickness or legal problems (Van der Haar, 2007).

The increasing diversity among professionals underlines the need to recognise that professionals are not only white, not only middle-class,

and not culturally neutral. One of the dilemmas in social work practice is that organisations often believe that ethnic minority professionals, such as the Turkish-Dutch and the Moroccan-Dutch professionals, are better equipped to work with service users from the same background, notwithstanding the high complexity of the service users' problems. This assumption is based partly on their ability to speak the same language and on the fact that they are familiar with their cultural and religious background. Professionals do not need to affirm a service user's self-understanding in order to provide effective support, but some professionals have 'a better insight than their colleagues into certain needs or particular communities' challenges because of a better fit of values and experiences' (Carlson-Thies, 2017: 108). However, effective social work does not depend on ethnically matched service users and professionals.

An 'ethnic match' carries the risk that the complexity of working with migrant or refugee service users is placed on the shoulders of professionals with the same background. Differences but also communalities between social workers and their service users can cause tensions. A study by Chung Yan (2008) shows how service users from the same background can reject ethnic minority professionals because they question their expertise, which may adversely affect the professionals' confidence.

- The professional social work identity

The welfare state reforms challenge the boundaries between professionals and non-professionals such as volunteers and service users, raising issues with respect to professional identity and normativity. The professional social work identity is not a stable entity. It is shaped by contextual factors, as described above. It is not a professional role that can simply be adopted. Professionals work in complex contexts with ample room for taking own decisions (discretion) and with a recognisable and recognised profession (Taylor & Kelly, 2006). Professionals make moral choices and social work, as a normative

profession, is especially connected to moral commitment and existential meaning. Normativity refers to the importance of values and norms in professional performance, not as a specific domain but as permeating all elements of professional practice (Van Ewijk & Kunneman, 2013). Professionals in social work do not 'simply' carry out their work in a strictly regulated way, steered by top-down instructions and protocols; they have a certain freedom and are expected to be innovative, to improve and to have an impact on what is considered 'good work'. If professions are co-created by professionals, and professionals have an impact on what is viewed as the identity of the profession, then the increasing diversity among professionals must also impact the profession. A further assumption is that, to be able to identify with and to connect to the profession, professionals need to see their own personal values somehow represented in the professional field. Personal commitment and the beliefs and values of the ethical communities from which the professionals come cannot be ignored (Carlson-Thies, 2017). How else can professionals be committed or dedicated to their work? The professional identity is becoming more subjective, as a self-definition of one who is seeking to contribute to society, which will change the nature and the purpose of professional identity.

Social work is clearly a normative profession, but the influence of personal versus professional values and convictions can be debated. One of the risks of blurred boundaries is that it may lead to increasing individualisation within the profession. This seems inevitable in a process of co-creation, and commonalities need to be found in a process of continuous deliberation. Social work professionals from a non-western background may question the dominant normativity of the profession, but does this mean that 'anything goes'? According to Lorenz, 'it is its paradigmatic openness that gives this profession the chance to engage with very specific (and constantly changing) historical and political contexts while at the same time striving for a degree of universality, scientific reliability, professional autonomy and moral accountability' (IFSW, 2012).

1.3 Challenges in social work education

In the wake of the described challenges in the field of social work as a result of the multiple transitions, social work education needs to follow suit and adapt to its changing professional context. For social work the transformation implies confronting its fragmentation and specialisation.

At the Utrecht University of Applied Sciences (HU), as in most other universities, the need for a broader and more generic conception of social work had to be translated into new curricula. The three different existing profiles in social work – social pedagogy, community work and social case work – had to be integrated within one generic profile, with options for specialisation in youth care, social care and social cohesion. Social workers can be positioned as generic workers in social (interdisciplinary) teams, as specialists in institutions, and as independent entrepreneurs. As argued before, in all positions the identity of the profession is being challenged, while social work education is unable to offer immediate solutions. One example relevant to this research concerns female Moroccan-Dutch professionals who indicate that their choice for social work is motivated by the specific social casework profile that is the more ‘traditional’ face-to-face individual work. Will they also be motivated by a more generic profile in the near future?

Social work education has to adapt to the many social changes in society, the transition of the welfare state and the decentralisation of the social domain, and accordingly to the new role of the generic social worker. The rapid changes in society and in the profession impel educators to move beyond traditional and once self-evident concepts. Professional education is constructed and relies on a fairly rigid image of a profession that often doesn’t exist anymore. This image is the starting point for a quest to determine what students need to learn. As said before, the transition in social work and in society at large means that the near future of the profession is rather uncertain or fluid. Organisations increasingly seem to think in multiple roles or competencies for professionals and less in clear-cut professions.

Increasing complexity and claims require a higher degree of competence (Noordegraaf, 2015). For many students who often grew up 'within one's own group', education and work are the places of inter-ethnic contact. From this perspective, misunderstanding and conflicts are likely to enter education and will at the same time offer rich possibilities for learning. Higher education tries to find ways to give refugees access to education, it has to reduce social inequality and the high number of non-western early school leavers, and it has to learn to deal with polarisation in the classrooms. The disadvantaged starting position of many ethnic minority students can be explained by a combination of deficits in language, social and study skills. Most of these students grew up in families with low-educated parents who could not help them with their schoolwork but at the same time had high expectations of their children. Research by Severiens (2006, 2010) shows that ethnic minority students feel that support by educators really matters, because this support was less available in their family. This focus on students' deficits may result in a one-sided perspective, while integration should be a more balanced two-sided process in which the student and the institution both have a role to play and are expected to change. For ethnic minority students, a safe and caring environment is considered a high priority in education. There are some similarities with how higher education in the Netherlands has traditionally struggled to connect to the working class. Similar to how social workers perceive their ethnic minority service users, there are indications that educators perceive their ethnic minority students as 'different and difficult'. Research into the increasing diversity in higher education in the Netherlands shows some of the challenges posed by this development (De Jong, 2014). The number of ethnic minority students entering higher education is growing, but the high rate of early school leavers among these students indicates the importance of recognising that, aside from the students' context, the educational context can also pose an impediment to their success. High priority is given to a 'sense of belonging' among ethnic minority students, as the lack of this sense is seen as a major reason for their premature

departure. The first hundred days in higher education are even considered a strong determinant of a successful study. Many ethnic minority students enter higher education following a longer alternative study route that increases the risk of an early 'dropout'. Crul (2013) argues that this longer route is not always beneficial, since talents and competences are not always recognised by educational institutions.

The 'global standards for social work education and training' (IASSW, IFSW, 2004) includes specific standards with regard to cultural and ethnic diversity and gender inclusiveness (8.1-8.6). Universities should make 'concerted and continuous efforts to ensure the enrichment of the educational experience by reflecting cultural and ethnic diversity, and gender analysis' in their programmes. One of the emerging questions is how to make religious diversity a part of the curriculum that acknowledges not only the religious dimensions of the lives of many service users but also of the professionals, in and outside faith-based agencies.

Foucault (1980) and Bourdieu (1984) already pointed at how schools reproduce the social structure and its inequalities instead of removing them, and ever since equal education opportunities for diverse groups have been discussed. Catarci argues that students must be considered as change agents and identifies a few essential dimensions of 'multicultural education' (Catarci & Fiorucci, 2015: 3):

- assuring the use of content from a variety of cultures in education;
- deconstructing the implicit cultural assumptions in the construction of knowledge;
- promoting the educational achievement level of students from diverse socio-cultural background; and
- an empowering school culture, aimed at increasing the strength of students from diverse socio-cultural background (Banks, 1993: 20-23).