Muslim women navigating marriage. A study of women in Northeast Morocco and Dutch Moroccan and Turkish women in the Netherlands
Storms, O.L.

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Introduction: Muslim women, marriage and social navigation
1.1 Introduction

Nesrin is a second generation, twenty-six year old, Dutch Turkish woman, who is married to her maternal first cousin, who was born and raised in Turkey. Their families introduced Nesrin and her husband to each other as possible marriage partners, and after getting to know one another, they fell in love and married. Here are a few excerpts from the interview I conducted with Nesrin:

Oka: Marrying your cousin, did it ever occur to you before your marriage? Nesrin: No, not at all! Because, [...] I saw my cousins and I played with them when I was little. And when you’re raised together, you quickly view them as brothers and sisters. Like real family members. And yes, that is why I could not support it at all. I could not imagine that we could possibly fall in love. [...] You view each other more as brothers and sisters than boyfriend and girlfriend. [...] And he [husband], I didn’t know him or his parents. [...] Oka: When were you introduced? Nesrin: I didn’t view him as my cousin. [...] Well, I still don’t view him as a cousin. So, yes, it’s a fact now, but I never got to know him as a family member. [...] Oka: When the family tie is the same, why is it different to marry a cousin with whom you grew up, from a cousin with whom you didn’t? Nesrin: Because feelings are more important. Of course! Because when you get married, you do not look at the blood tie, you first consider your feelings: do you love somebody? Of course you do have to get tested, that is compulsory in Turkey, whether it’s a family member or not. You have to do a blood test to see whether you have the same blood type, otherwise you’re not allowed to get married. [...] Because then you could have an increased chance of having children with disabilities.

Here, Nesrin refers to the increased medical risk for consanguineous couples of giving birth to a child with an autosomal recessive disorder. In essence a 4-6% increased risk of having children with a genetic disorder (this is 2-3% higher than in unrelated couples, Bennett et al. 2006). This is an average percentage, the risk for most consanguineous couples is comparable to that of unrelated couples, while some consanguineous couples (10-12%) have an increased risk of 25% or more. Nesrin continues about the medical risk in relation to partner choice:

I understand the purpose of it [the compulsory tests in Turkey], but nobody is going to choose a partner because of the same blood tie. You choose a partner because you think you can spend your life with this person and because you love this person. And some, they are forced into cousin marriage, that is also possible.

Oka: Do you see differences between the first and second generation, in how they view cousin marriage? Nesrin: Yes, enormously! The first generation finds these kind of marriages much more normal. And the second generation doesn’t. I see it much less among them. [...] Oka: Why do you think there is this difference? Nesrin: Well, I think, look, in the past it was normal everywhere, to marry within the family. Because the property stayed in the family and it was only good, it had a lot of advantages. [...] But we youngsters, who live in the Netherlands, we have no stake in this, the property in Turkey, it doesn’t interest us. Or the money there, it is not ours or it’s not for us. And for the first generation this was of more importance I think. I think the norms and values have changed from the first to the second generation. Because the first generation has kept their norms and values more and have integrated less and the second generation is more integrated, some even assimilated, which is why they have other stakes. I think that is why [the second generation] perceives cousin marriage as weird.

Cousin marriage has a long history, which Nesrin refers to, however the meaning of cousin marriage changes over time, between contexts and generations, as she describes. In the
Netherlands, in political and public debates, marrying your cousin often evokes reactions of disgust, this primary reaction is mostly founded on the view of cousin marriage as incestuous (De Koning et al. 2014; Storms, Bartels 2015; see also Kuper 2008). Nesrin goes on to comment about the public and political views on the law to counteract forced marriage, including cousin marriage, which was currently pending:

Nesrin: Yes, it is almost perceived as incest. [...] Oka: And regarding politics? Nesrin: Politicians have other issues that should concern them, that’s my opinion. [...] Because I see these sorts of proposals as not enhancing the wellbeing of allochthonous groups in the Netherlands, or in the end also of autochthonous groups. But I see it more as a barrier to counteract marriage migration, to make it more difficult. And they cannot forbid it. You can choose your partner yourself. It does not matter where he/she lives. They cannot forbid that, so they start looking for ways to reduce it. [...] I mean, who cares? Whose business is it whom you marry and whom you love? You also have many parents who can’t care for and who don’t show love for their own child, take that up! I think that is more important than worrying about cousins who love each other. I find it very strange that they talk about that.

This case raises various issues that are of importance for this thesis. In this article-based thesis I address a variety of subjects of which partner choice and cousin marriage in the Netherlands as illustrated by Nesrin, albeit an extensive part, is one.

The compilation of articles in this thesis resembles my academic journey. It started in the Netherlands when I was studying Cultural Anthropology and took a minor Islam studies because I was struck by the constant political and public debate in the West about the position of Muslim women and the role of Islam, especially after 9/11. This interest took me to Morocco, the country of descent of a large population of immigrants in the Netherlands and where, just a few years earlier, Islamic Family Law had been radically reformed in favour of women’s rights. In Morocco I studied women in the Northeast who were undergoing divorce proceedings after this reform. Back in the Netherlands, my interest in Dutch Moroccan women and subjects related to marriage increased and together with Edien Bartels I started studying subjects related to marriage. Not only among Dutch Moroccans, but also among Dutch Turks, who although being a very distinct group, do have a comparable migration history and social position in the Netherlands. Further research took us back and forth between Morocco and the Netherlands. Such as the research into abandoned Dutch Moroccan children and their mothers in Morocco, and the extensive interdisciplinary research project conducted into cousin marriage among Dutch Turks and Moroccans which again took us to Morocco to explore the meaning of cousin marriage there. The chapters in this thesis are organized geographically: Part One is set in Morocco and Part Two in the Netherlands; the chapters in both parts are organised thematically around marriage: partner choice, having or longing for children and divorce.

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1 The law to counteract forced marriage: the Wet tegengaan huwelijksdwang (Act countering marriage force) was put into effect November 2015. It consists of four items, of which one is the complication of marriage between cousins. The law is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

2 I will elaborate on the study of Dutch Moroccans and Turks in the methodology section. Furthermore, although Bartels and I have also conducted exploratory research in Central Turkey, where a great part of Dutch Turks come from, we have not published about this and it is thus not included in this thesis.

3 The research into cousin marriage was an interdisciplinary research project consisting of Community Genetics, Medical Humanities (VU University Medical Center Amsterdam) and Anthropology. More information about this will be given in the methodology section.
In this introductory chapter I collate this group of chapters, set in different contexts, based on several research projects and written at different points at time. However distinct the chapters might seem at first sight, they all contain two interrelated themes: ‘Muslim women’ and marriage.

The first theme, *Muslim women*, is one which is hotly debated in both public and political spheres, spheres in which these women are often portrayed as merely passive victims of their culture and religion (e.g. Abu-Lughod 2002). Indeed, this has been a recurrent political and public theme, as well as a social scientific one, for decades now. That this portrayal is a stereotype goes without saying. In social sciences, as I will discuss in this introductory chapter, ideas on agency and confining structures regarding Muslim women may differ, but this difference extends beyond these stereotypical images. The stereotype representation however, is deeply pervasive in both public and political debates, which makes it ever more relevant today.

However, the topic of discussion in which the position of Muslim women is subsumed (sometimes concealed) changes over time, at the moment it seems to be marriage. Therefore, *marriage* is the second theme of this thesis. In primarily Muslim majority countries – such as Morocco – the position of women is discussed in terms of the extent to which Islamic law can provide for equal rights between women and men. In Europe, and specifically in the Netherlands, the marriage patterns of Muslim minorities have been on the political agenda since their arrival in the sixties. First in relation to migration marriages and integration, i.e. family reunification of the first generation. Later the preference of the second generation for a partner from the country of origin of the parents. Nowadays in the Netherlands, discussions on the position of Muslim women are especially about marriage and are central in debates and policies about women’s rights such as migration, citizenship and transnationalism (De Koning et al. 2014). As well as it being the focus in discussions on immigration, the position of (especially) Muslim women is echoed in current discussions on partner choice, arranged and forced marriages, consanguineous marriages, forced abandonment of especially women and children in the (parental) country of origin, polygamy, religious marriage, marital captivity and child marriage.

The common thread running through the following chapters is the description of the changing contexts on the one hand and the narratives of Muslim women on the other. Specifically I explore the relationship between the two: How do these women lead their lives in rapidly changing societies? What choices do they make in these changing circumstances? And how do they position themselves within these discussions? In so doing, I aim to contribute to the social scientific debate and therefore also to the political and public debate. As Abu-Lughod (2011: 2) writes, through the lives of women, dominant ideologies, intellectual and political can be challenged.

In this introductory chapter I will further explain my research and conceptually connect two bodies of literature, one on Muslim women and one on marriage. In paragraph 1.2 I show how, in social sciences, (in response to the political and public debate) the position and portrayal of Muslim women and the role of Islam has been a recurring theme throughout history and is still debated today. In paragraph 1.3 I turn to marriage and illustrate how the classical principles of marriage in anthropological theory are still relevant to analyses of current marriage patterns. Next I move to the relevance of marriage today and the
anthropological studies and discussions regarding this theme. The focus on marriage in migration studies and studies on (worldwide) ideals of romantic love and ‘modern’ marriage is very relevant to this thesis. The position of Muslim women and the focus on marriage differs in various contexts. Therefore, in paragraph 1.4, I provide an (historical) background of (Northeast) Morocco and the Netherlands in order to contextualise the empirical findings. This paragraph provides the context in which to discuss the connection of Muslim women and marriage which is made in paragraph 1.5. In paragraph 1.6, I return to the complex structure-agency debate and relate it to Muslim women and marriage. As an overarching concept for the chapters in this thesis I use the concept of social navigation (Vigh 2006, 2009) to position myself in this debate. In the final paragraph of this introductory chapter (paragraph 1.7), I discuss the methodology and offer more detail about the research.

1.2 Representations of Muslim women

Discussions about the West versus the east and/or Islam have a long history. In 1978 Said published his famous book Orientalism, in which he discussed the fictional depictions of the east by the West, putting them in an historical perspective. Said argued that, in colonial times, westerners viewed themselves as being superior to the Other and it was from this perspective that the Orient was depicted. By pointing to the errors in early studies of the Orient, Said criticised the portrayal of this vast and diverse region as homogeneous and the perception of the superiority of the West. The portrayal Said criticised was yet again described in the influential article The clash of civilizations. In this study, Huntington (1993) predicted that there would be a cultural clash between western and non-western civilizations, emphasizing the clash with the Islamic civilization. This debate about Us versus Them, the West versus Islam received new impetus after the terrorist attacks of 9/11 in the United States and the subsequent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Time and time again the question is raised as to whether, and to what extent, Islam is reconcilable with modernisation, a question in which the relationship between modernity and secularisation and democracy was increasingly emphasised. Shortly following the 9/11 attacks, Said (2001) responded to Huntington’s stand in an article in the newspaper The Nation, entitled: The clash of ignorance, critiquing the depiction of the West and Islam, saying that Huntington “wants to make ‘civilizations’ and ‘identities’ into what they are not: shut-down, sealed-off entities that have been purged of the myriad currents and countercurrents that animate human history”. Said argued that “how finally inadequate are the labels, generalisations and cultural assertions” to explain the world and that this depiction was dangerous and “ignorant” with regard to history when, in reality, any supposed clash or conflict is the product of this simplification, rather than an inevitable outcome of the clashing civilizations themselves (Said 2001).

These public discussions of the West versus Islam often take place in terms of gender and gender relations. Within this discourse, Muslim women are portrayed as homogeneous, unchanging entities, without internal diversity and suppressed by their religion and culture. Islam is associated with suppressing men versus suppressed women and in this discourse power is situated opposite powerless. Similar to the depiction of Islam, the image of Muslim women in the West has a long history, as described by Ahmed (1992) in her book Women and gender in Islam; a book which retraces the condition and lives of women in Middle
Eastern Arab history and challenges the assumption that Muslim majority societies are inherently oppressive to women, by pointing for instance – like Said (1978) – to where our histories overlap. Furthermore, Tucker (e.g. 1993, 2008) contributed greatly to the (historical) description of the legal position of Muslim women in Islam. Tucker (2008) gives, as Probert (2011: 102) points out, “a careful and nuanced description of the way in which topics such as marriage, divorce, legal capacity and social space have been understood in different Islamic traditions at different points in history”.

Discussions on Muslim women are often positioned in the everlasting (and complex) structure versus agency debate. In the views on the position of Muslim women, there are roughly two stances which can be distinguished: secular feminists argue that the confining structures of religion and culture (patriarchal society) make it difficult for women to make choices on their own accord and they question the extent to which feminism can be reconciled with Islam in practice (e.g. Mohiuddin 1999). Others, acknowledge the confining structures but also stress and position Muslim women as active agents. Abu-Lughod (1986, 1993) played an important role in the depiction of Muslim women as active individuals. She described the lives of Bedouin women in Egypt on the basis of the stories and poetry they told and the songs they sang and portrayed them as active agents in daily life, contesting the stereotypical image of Muslim women as merely victims. Mahmood (2005) in her ethnography on grassroots piety women’s movements in Cairo (Egypt) mosques, reflected on agency in regard to Muslim women. In policy and popular debate these piety movements are perceived as sustaining aspects of female subordination; Mahmood argues for a redefinition of agency, arguing that people are shaped by history. She goes beyond the idea of agency as only an expression of resistance (to men, culture, religion etc., see also Ouguir 2013). Rather than viewing the women in her study as reproducing structures of their own subordination, Mahmood stresses that you cannot use secular-liberal ideas (of freedom) universally when discussing agency, but you should see it more broadly so that other forms of agency come to light. Mahmood’s work is praised for its criticism of Eurocentrism by some, and criticised for being too close to cultural relativism and essentialism. For instance by Bangstad (2011), who observes that there is a form of cultural relativism in the sense that Mahmood retraces history to suggest that people are shaped differently, but then prioritizes the “preservations of life forms” over women’s rights (Bangstad 2011: 42). Waggoner (2005: 249) addresses the essentialist critique by arguing that Mahmood suggests “that there are fixed desires, goals and subject forms unique to specific cultures”. Concluding that “Mahmood’s method lends itself to the same kind of cultural essentialism she has sought to avoid”.

The position of Muslim women is discussed through different topics. For a long time, in western multicultural societies, the position of Muslim women has been strongly fixed on so-called symbols of oppression like the headscarf. The covering of women’s hair and faces (by a headscarf, niqāb, or burqa) is a recurring theme in these discussions and often seen as an expression of women’s suppression and their submissiveness towards men, based on the assumption that Muslim women are pressured and forced to wear these items. From 2000 onwards, in particular, this topic was a frequent one in public debate. In Europe, debates on the headscarf were particularly intense in France, where symbols of religion clash with the ideal of laïcité (secularism). In 2012, in the Netherlands, similar debates resulted in the imposition of a legal ban on face-covering clothing, popularly referred to as ‘the burqa ban’. Over the years many social scientists have countered the idea that head covering is merely
an act of submission (e.g. Ahmed 1992; Abu-Lughod 2002; Bartels 1993, 2005; Sauer 2009; Fadil 2004; Hadj-Abdou 2013; Moors 2011, 2014a; Saharso 2007; Shadid et al. 2005). Abu-Lughod (2002), for instance, points out that not only are there very different forms of covering which have different meanings in different settings but that veiling should not be equated with a lack of agency either. Here, Abu-Lughod (2002: 786) points to the modest Islamic dress of today. She refers to Mahmood (2001) who showed how women in Egypt mosques make a deliberate choice to wear a veil which can be seen as “publicly mark[ing] piety and can be read as a sign of educated urban sophistication, a sort of modernity”. While in Europe political and public debate on the headscarf now and then resurface, the focus in the debate seems to have shifted to marriage practices (e.g. Casier et al. 2013). In this debate about marriage, the position of Muslim women is discussed in the same terms yet again, a point I shall return to later.

Furthermore, the position of Muslim women is discussed in terms of the multicultural ideal of equality of cultures versus women’s rights: in other words, the tension between women’s rights and group (minority) rights. The latter supposedly overshadows gender equality. Okin’s (1999) essay *Is multiculturalism bad for women?* and the responses from various leading theorists formed an important contribution to this debate (Cohen et al. 1999). Okin (1999) stated that some group rights endanger women, such as permitting polygamous family reunification in France, and that they would be better off being freed from these suppressive cultures. Some other contributors criticised Okin’s use of gender and argued that group rights should not be dismissed outright. But I would like to turn here to the issue of ‘freeing Muslim women’. Again, Abu-Lughod made a clear statement in the article *Do Muslim women really need saving?* an article, written in 2002 which is still very relevant today. In this article, she discusses the position of Afghan women, the way they are portrayed (in *burqa*) in the United States (the West) and the question as to whether they need to be saved. Through a western lens, the position of Muslim women is often looked upon in terms of freedom and personal choice, and the western world gives a good alternative for their perceived submissive lives. Abu-Lughod (2002) touches a delicate subject: that the possibility exists that women, after their ‘liberation’ can make choices as they see fit, which might not be in line with what We (from a western feminist perspective) had in mind. Thus, reminding Us that people do not all want the same things.

Additionally, in social sciences the position of Muslim women is debated in regard to cultural framing: a process of Othering based on culture. Cultural framing points to the social construction, especially in regard to politics and media, of issues like forced marriage, honour killings and cousin marriage as merely cultural and everything We are not. In this Muslims are framed as cultural Others and, in this, the position of Muslim women plays a crucial role. The problem with this frame is that it distracts our gaze from any other explanatory elements and from reflecting on Our own position (see e.g. Abu-Lughod 2011). The process of reflection on our own position is summarised in the dichotomy: culture versus autonomy. De Koning et al. (2011) describe how migrant culture, especially in Muslim groups, is associated with gender inequality, which results in the creation of a false dichotomy between autonomy and culture. This dichotomy flows logically from the idealised version of freedom and autonomy among native citizens and the denial of agency, of particularly Muslim women (De Koning et al. 2011). De Koning et al (2014: 234) follows Merry (2003) who points out that:
[...] this tendency to culturalise problems shifts the responsibility for the problems that women in wealthy countries face to local groups and, in particular, to the men in those groups who ‘after all’ oppress the women. No consideration is given to the fact that these women might also have a range of different motives for maintaining certain practices.

The public and political debate about the position of Muslim women has by no means subsided. Negative and stereotypical representations of Muslim women are spread by the media, in public and by some politicians and this has a major impact on these women, as a recent European study shows (Jung 2016; Šeta 2016). It is, in fact, becoming more and more intense. The so-called Arab Winter following the Arab Spring, which was full of hope for women’s rights, seems to have had the opposite effect (e.g. Totten et al. 2012). And the rise of the Islamic State (IS) and the recent attacks in the heart of Europe – Paris and Brussels, together with the recent arrival of primarily Syrian refugees (for a great part young males) to Europe has reheated the debate. In the Netherlands, for instance, (temporary) refugee shelters in various villages, towns and cities elicit (sometimes violent) protest and threats towards the local politicians. In the arguments frequently put forward against the arrival of refugees, the fear that there could be IS-militants among these refugees is often mentioned and anxieties about the safety of women and girls in Dutch communities are raised. These events, have once again placed the focus on the view that Islam is comprised of men who oppress and women who are oppressed and the implications that this has for European, multicultural societies.

1.3 Marriage: classical principles, changing meanings

I argue that the position of Muslim women nowadays is discussed specifically through the topic of marriage. Marriage is a classical anthropological research theme. In nearly every society you can find some form of what we typify as marriage (e.g. Stone 2000). A definition of what a marriage is that is valid across the world has, however, proven to be difficult. Unions range from heterosexual to homosexual, to forms of polygamy and to the use of marriage as a way of creating alliances and, in some parts of the world, there are forms which preference marriage between (cross or parallel) cousins. Although the theme of marriage has been pushed into the background in current anthropological practice, it is relevant to discuss these classical principles and the theory of marriage here as these principles are still important today if we are to understand and analyse the changes in marriage patterns over time.

Recently public and political discussions on marriage have taken place which have stimulated its scientific study. First in migration studies: the West is confronted with marriage patterns ascribed to (primarily Muslim) migrants which evoke disapproval and rejection, such as polygamy and cousin marriage (e.g. Storms, Bartels 2015). At the same time these marriage patterns are seen as ‘proof’ of the suppression of women. This is supported by the worldwide attention given to the ideal of romantic love in courtship and partner choice and companionate marriage (e.g. Hirsch & Wardlow 2006; Donner 2012) which is the second theme I address.
1.3.1 A note on classical principles of marriage

Traditionally, in most societies, it is marriage (or a form of marriage) that structures a society. Marriage is a way of dealing with sexual relations and the care for children. Worldwide the conjugal union is interpreted differently. For example, the recent much debated practice of polygamy; specifically polygyny where one man has a union with two or more women. This forms is often directly associated with Islam, where a man can (legally) marry up to four wives. But it is not only Muslim men who can marry more than one woman, it is also practiced among Nepalese Brahmans (Stone 2000: 184) and by some Mormons in the United States.¹

In many societies parents or relatives take care of children and then children take care of their parents in old age. In this manner, the well-being of societies is maintained for generation after generation. What is important in marriage choice is that partners are willing to take the responsibility for this care. As Stone (2000: 183) pointed out, one of the very few generalisations that you can make about marriage, is that relationships between spouses create in-laws. So, the choice of a suitable prospective spouse is not only of importance for the future spouses, but also for their family. Marriage is an interconnection between family groups and this has consequences. “Because marriage is a commitment between families, families search spouses that are most suitable to marry. Exactly to secure a good relationship between families. When an unsuitable spouse is chosen, this can lead to an argument between family groups, which limits the survival possibilities of parents and children” (Bartels 2007: 29-30). Although, of course, sexual relations outside the marriage have always existed, it is only recently that one could view them as being separate from reproduction. In many societies, having sexual relations and children are still the primary purposes of marriage (Storms, Bartels 2008).

Marriage is a way of creating alliances. This used to be of importance all over the world, and still is important in many parts of the world today. Families or kin groups arrange marriages to secure social, economic or political interests (Levi-Strauss 1969). In general we distinguish two marriage patterns: endogamy and exogamy; in-marriage versus out-marriage. The latter means that a family or group looks outside their own group for a spouse. This marriage form supports the creation of alliances and networks between groups in order to continue and survive. According to the classical anthropologist Levi-Strauss (1969), people are pushed towards exogamy because of the incest taboo (also known as the alliance theory). Thus, it is prohibited to marry some kin, however where the line of incest is drawn, differs from society to society. Cousin marriage, for example, is a preferred form of marriage in many parts of the world, but is often perceived as incest in the Netherlands (Storms, Bartels 2015). The other marriage pattern, endogamy indicates marriage within the ethnic, religious or family group. Rather than creating alliances with others, it focuses on the survival and strengthening of the family of origin, or the ethnic or religious group.

One form of endogamous marriage is cousin marriage, or consanguineous marriage. Consanguinity is a combination of two Latin words: ‘con’ meaning same, and ‘sanguin’

¹ The practice of polygamy is prohibited by law in many countries, such as in the mentioned examples: Nepal and the United States. With few exceptions, polygamous marriage is mainly legal in countries in which the law is (partly) based on Islamic religious law.
meaning blood, people from the same blood so to say. Although at first sight, one would assume that cousin marriage is endogamous, because you marry someone from the same family, it can also be typified as exogamous. This has to do with where the boundaries of the group are drawn. In, for instance, Arab societies, when a marriage is concluded within the same kin group or patrilineal clan, this is endogamous, however one can also marry a cousin outside the patrilineal clan, which is exogamous (Goody 1983: 31). Two types of cousin marriage can be distinguished. First, cross cousin marriage – marriage between the children of a brother and sister as opposite-sex siblings. For example, Shaw and Raz (2015: 6) refer to the matrilateral cross-cousin marriage in the South Indian system in which a man marries his Mother’s Brother’s Daughter (MBD). Another example of cross cousin marriage are the cousin marriages among the European Royal houses from the Middle Ages to the early 1900s. They can be typified as exogamous because they created or reinforced political alliances between monarchies. Second, parallel cousin marriage – marriage between the children of same-sex siblings. This is common in the Middle East, more precisely, the preference for Father’s Brother’s Daughter (FBD), also referred to as bint ‘amm (Storms, Bartels 2013). In this form of marriage the woman stays within the patrilineal group and it is therefore an endogamous marriage form. Goody (1983) points out that there is no rule of endogamy in Arab societies. Following Bourdieu (1977), Goody argues that exogamous matrimonial strategies are also practiced to form political alliances (Goody 1983: 32). There are however, as described in Chapter Two (Storms, Bartels 2013), many advantages related to marrying within the kin group of origin, such as: (1) women and children stay in the family, rather than leaving to belong to the family of the husband, (2) the inheritance of the girls stays in the family (Guichard 1977 in Goody 1983), (3) social status and family honour is protected within the family, and (4) safety for the women and their children is secured because, when a woman marries someone outside the family, she belongs to her husband’s family after marriage (patrilocal), and then she lacks the protection and support from her own family, during her marriage or in case of divorce.

Consanguineous marriage is practised in North African and Middle Eastern countries, Turkey and countries such as Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. Commonly associated with Islam, it is also, for example, practised among Hindus as a preferred form of marriage (Bittles 2001; Shaw 2009). Anthropological theory and (recent) history on cousin marriage is discussed by Tillion (1983), who describes the genesis of the inferior social position of women in countries surrounding the Mediterranean explaining the rise of endogamous cousin marriage from this oppression of women. A central argument in her work is that when women have inheritance rights (as is the case in Islam), it is preferred that they marry within the kin group to keep property within the family. Tillion also points out that, although

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5 Consanguinity or consanguineous marriage is broader than first or second cousin marriage, it involves people who are descended from the same ancestor. Degrees of consanguinity are used to define who you can and cannot marry, in other words incest boundaries. In some societies it is, for example, only prohibited to marry parents, siblings and half-siblings, in others you’re also not allowed to marry uncles and aunts, and another line is, in some countries, drawn at cousins. As Shaw and Raz (2015) describe, cousin marriage and consanguinity are analytically distinguishable. Marriage or a union between second cousins or closer is defined as consanguineous by geneticist. I follow Shaw and Raz (2015: 5) who write that “the study of cousin marriage is not solely the study of consanguinity but may instead entail an exploration of the socio-economic and political forms and cultural meanings of the practice”.

6 Morocco the term qarib(a), literally meaning close ones’, refers to marriage within the family. If you marry for instance a neighbour it is called qarib oliya. That means someone who is close to you but it is not self-evident as family would be.
primarily associated with Islam, the origin of cousin marriage can actually be found in pagan prehistory, a prehistory that influenced Christianity as well as Islam.

Hence, in Western Europe and North America (as primarily Christian) cousin marriages, although few in number, also exist today, particularly in small closed communities (e.g. Taussig 2009; Shaw, Raz 2015) and when you look back at recent history, cousin marriage was commonplace. In *incest and influence* Kuper (2009) discusses Victorian England, where cousin marriages were common and played a crucial role in the rise of the bourgeoisie. It was also around this time that doubts were raised about the medical risks, by, among others, Darwin, who himself was married to his cousin.

1.3.2 Marriage today: ‘new’ (traditional) marriage patterns?

By no means do I want to suggest that marriage is an unchanging institution: marriage patterns are undergoing change worldwide. Marriage as an institution in itself is changing as the number of people cohabiting, living alone and in one-parent households rapidly increases, especially in the West. But this is for instance also happening in Morocco where more and more young people are postponing marriage (Jaouad et al. 2009). Furthermore, under the influence of migration old marriage patterns regain new meanings as I’ll describe in the following. Thus, the classical marriage explanations are relevant in an analysis of partner choice and marriage today. In the following I discuss two emerging research fields: marriage in migration research and research on romantic love and modern marriage. I’d like to argue here, following Kuper (2009) that we should abandon the supposed opposition between modern and traditional, “the west and the rest”. This opposition cannot account for the evolution of marriage patterns: for the changes over time, the different contexts and differences between generations.

Marriage in migration research

Marriage migration has renewed anthropological interest in marriage (Kuper 2008; Casier et al. 2013). I categorise these studies on marriage and migration roughly in two categories. First there are studies focusing on how and where immigrants, especially the second generation, find a marriage partner (e.g. in the Netherlands: De Koning, Bartels 2005; Smits van Waesberge et al. 2014; Sterckx et al. 2014; Sterckx, Bouw 2005; Storms, Bartels 2008). The question as to how immigrants find a spouse, i.e. the practice of arranging marriages is studied among migrant groups. Regarding where immigrants find a marriage partner the question is: is that the country of settlement (or birth) or the country of descent (of the parents)? The degree of integration is often derived from the percentage of migration marriages on the one hand, and mixed marriages - in literature and policy usually defined as a marriage between an immigrant and a native - on the other side (Hooghiemstra 2001; Esveldt, Van Poppel 2005; Van Huis 2008; Storms, Bartels 2008; Sterckx 2014). This classification of mixed marriages however is problematic as it ignores the development of mixed marriages between different immigrant ethnic groups. In the Netherlands, for example, Storms and Bartels (2008) observed a trend that ethnicity is becoming less important as a boundary marker for endogamy among Dutch Moroccan and Turkish women. Religion, Islam in this case, seemed to be becoming more important in partner choice. In her
study on mixed marriages among Dutch Turks and Moroccans, Sterckx (2014) found this
similar pattern of religious endogamy.

In many European countries there was a strong belief that if migrant groups stayed in a
particular country for a long time they would integrate automatically, have a mixed marriage
and become assimilated. The reality, however, was rather different. Shaw (2001, 2009;
Shaw, Charsley 2006) and Charsley (2007), for example, describe how in the United
Kingdom, second generation Pakistanis most commonly married cousins from Pakistan, who
then usually migrated to the United Kingdom to join their spouses. The incidence of cousin
marriage being higher among the British Pakistani compared to the regions in Pakistan
(Shaw 2001). Migration has given cousin marriage “a new rationale for an old practice”
(Reniers 2001: 37): the traditional explanation of keeping wealth in the family has, for some,
been completed or replaced with a transnational strategy for bringing family members to
the country of settlement. This is the case for cousin marriage, but also for transnational
marriages in general: in a migratory transnational context, arranged marriage has gained a
new meaning.

The second focus of my research is on cultural framing and the way that European
governments deal with migration marriages and marriage customs associated with
(primarily) Muslim immigrants. A first example of cultural framing is that cousin marriage is
almost always discussed in relation to consanguineous unions among migrant communities
in Europe, and rarely in relation to current practices and our history as I’ll describe in
Chapter Five. Shaw and Raz (2015: 24-25) write that Kuper’s (2009) historical account of
nineteenth century England “shows us that much of the contemporary discussion of cousin
marriage is also part of our past, with the significant difference that today’s discourse tends
to be focused on Muslim minority populations in Europe, and on ‘tribal’, ‘traditional’, ‘rural’
and ‘uneducated’ populations in other parts of the world”.

A second example of cultural framing is the emphasis in Dutch policy on the freedom to
make one’s own choices (De Koning et al. 2011); in other words, self-determination. An
argument which is frequently used in the integration and Islam debate in the Netherlands. It
is specifically discussed regarding (among others) veiling, female circumcision, forced
abandonment and forced marriages. The United Nations first summarised these in 1995
using the term Harmful Traditional Practices (HTP) and relating it to integration (Leye,
Longman 2011). This emphasis has been heavily criticised because of the simplistic binary
opposition that is made between culture and autonomy; They have culture, We have
autonomy. A way of framing which suggests that We have no culture and They are solely
steered by culture (e.g. Abu-Lughod 2011; De Koning et al. 2014). Since 2002 the United
Nations has used the term ‘harmful practices’ or ‘cultural practices’, a term which includes
issues like the idealisation of female beauty in the West as a practice that also harms
women. The superior position from which these practices are addressed, however remains

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7 Abu-Lughod (2011: 10-11) does not only refer in this discussion to the West or more specific Euro-American
feminists, but also to national elites in for example Egypt, who are striving for women’s rights. She questions on
whose behalf they are working. Not aiming to dismiss their work and contributions, nevertheless Abu-Lughod
(2011: 10-11) “insists that in addition to being more attentive to the intersection of rights work with global and
class inequalities, and being more realistic about what rights work actually produces in the world (especially for
Romantic love and modern marriage

Giddens (1992, 1999) and Bauman (2003), among others, have argued that unions based on romantic love typify “the late modern world”. In recent anthropological publications romantic love and what is referred to as modern marriage in a transnational world has been a major issue under discussion (e.g. Donner 2012; Hirsch, Wardlow 2006; Jankowiak 2008; Lindholm 2006; Padilla et al. 2007; Patico 2010; Venteskan et al. 2011). Hirsch and Wardlow (2006) use the term companionate marriage instead of modern marriage and stress the difference between love as a defining aspect and something to strive for in a companionate marriage⁸ and romantic attraction and individual choice in finding a spouse. In music, on television, in films, on the internet, in magazines and advertisements one is constantly confronted with views on how romantic love ‘should be’. From the Indian Bollywood films, the marketing surrounding Valentine’s Day to a Dutch TV programme called “All you need is love”, named after the famous Beatles song. Lindholm (2006: 5) notes that romantic love can be best understood “as a form of the sacred”, referring to the need of humans “to exceed their concrete lives and be more than rational maximisers of valued cultural goals”. He calls it a “human yearning for the sacred”, “even if only sporadically and in fantasy” (Lindholm 2006: 17). One way or another, talk about love is everywhere. Wardlow and Hirsch (2006: 1) comment “around the world, young people are talking about the importance of affective bonds in creating marital ties, deliberately positioning themselves in contrast to their parents and grandparents”, as I will describe in regard to Dutch Moroccan and Turkish young people in Chapter Five. In other words: love is the norm, although there may be differences in how it is understood and experienced.

At first glance, practices such as arranged marriage, polygamy and cousin marriage do not fit this description. On the surface, what is perceived as modern marriage is in stark contrast to these traditional marriage customs. As I’ve described above, historically marriage is not an individual undertaking, but an alliance forged between families/kin groups or a way of strengthening the kin group. In this, it is not the search for true love that is a priority, but finding a partner of the sort that would guarantee the survival of the family. However, at this point I’d like to question the homogeneous interpretation of what is perceived as traditional marriage patterns in relation to ideals of love, or in other words, I would like to question the supposed opposition between traditional and modern marriage practices.

First of all, although the rise of marriage out of love has its roots in the western world, love in or outside marriage has always existed (Coontz 2005). Coontz (2005: 18) writes about love in an historic perspective and worldwide, that “whether it is valued [in a society] or not, love is rarely seen as the main ingredient for marital success”. Love however is often seen as a desirable outcome of marriage, but not as a good reason for getting married (Coontz 2005: 18). Amorousness or feelings of love, in this line of thought, are temporary feelings, they can

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⁸ Wardlow and Hirsch (2006: 4-5) use the term companionate marriage to suggest two themes. First, “companionship as a deliberate goal of marriage” and “the idea of marriage as a project, the aim of which is individual fulfillment and satisfaction, rather than (or in addition to) social reproduction”. Second “the way the modern discourse of love provides a window into emerging concepts of individuality – for example, the idea that one particular person would be a more satisfying and pleasurable partner than any other because of his or her specific characteristics”.

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fade away. Thus, this is not an indicator which can be used to select a marriage partner. That is not to say that romantic love is reserved for western societies: in or outside marriage, love exists everywhere. Some contributors to the edited volume by Jankowiak (2008) show “that passionate love is universally present in human societies, quite aside from any recent westernisation or modernisation of love” (Patico 2010: 380).

Second, I’d like to address the supposed opposition between traditional and modern marriage. Donner (2012: 2) writes that “increasingly, modernity is linked to intimate practices of various kinds, including pre-marital courtship, self-arranged marriages and monogamous unions. Affective ties have become the basis for a conjugality that is interpreted, by many ordinary people, as more egalitarian and modern than what came before”. Although there are differences in marriage patterns, but it is more complex than a simple opposition between traditional and modern. Discourses and practices on romantic love and modern marriage should be seen in a socio-historic context (Donner 2012). Donner shows (2012), based on Ahearn (2001) and Wardlow and Hirsch (2006), that companionate marriage means different things for different people. Storms and Bartels (2008), for example, also saw this in a study conducted on partner choice among immigrant groups in Amsterdam. It becomes more and more self-evident that Dutch Moroccan and Turkish youngsters choose their own marriage partner. Young people resist their parents’ attempts to force another way of choosing upon them. But the meaning of free choice marriage also sometimes differs between second generation migrants and native Dutch people. For the first group, free choice can also imply asking parents to look for a partner, but maintaining the right to accept or refuse him or her. Some individuals also want to choose a partner themselves, but to stick to certain rules during this selection process, not only because such rules are customary within their families, but also because they support these rules themselves (Storms, Bartels 2008). So there are shifts in marital ideals, but as Twamley (2013: 1) states: “global ideologies of romantic love are pervasive, but they are interpreted by individuals within local understandings of appropriate marriage and relationships”. In this light we should also view the idea of autonomy in partner choice. Autonomy is not something We have and They don’t. As De Hoog (2005) describes in relation to partner selection in the Netherlands, people usually search for someone who has similar characteristics to themselves. He also notes that parents indirectly steer partner choice as well as the social network of friends. Casier et al. (2013: 465 based on Fan, Huang 1998; Charsley, Shaw 2006; Lauser 2008) argue that “in recent views, it has become more and more accepted that romantic and pragmatic incentives are deeply intertwined”. So arranged marriages and romantic love are not mutually exclusive, they can coexist. The same is applicable to a so called traditional marriage pattern such as a cousin marriage, which can go hand in hand with romantic love, as described in Chapter 5.

### 1.4 Setting the stage: On (Northeast) Morocco, the Netherlands and transnational ties

Before I elaborate further on Muslim women and marriage, I set the stage for this thesis in two sections. Morocco as a country on the move in terms of the struggle for women’s rights and emigration and The Netherlands as a multicultural society in distress. I specifically focus on marriage and (the position) of Muslim women and transnational ties.
1.4.1 Morocco: a country on the move

Morocco can be typified as a country on the move in terms of openness to reform, of which the reform of the Islamic Family Law (Mudawwana) (Chapter 4) is an important and symbolic example. The reform of the Mudawwana can be seen as a revolutionary example on three fronts. First, because it is a modernisation process, in a Muslim majority country without secularisation. Compared to Family Law in most other Muslim majority countries, the Moroccan Mudawwana is progressive. Regarding modern Islamic Family Law in general, especially on divorce and polygamy, Cabré (2007: 142) observes “tension between the duties of modern states to uphold women’s rights and their alleged Islamic principles and the tension that exists between the state and religion”. The tension between the two has been evident since independence and the formulation of the Mudawwana: on the one side aiming to create a right and just society by returning to Islamic roots. On the other side trying to establish a modern nation-state in the French legal tradition. Second, it can be typified as revolutionary because of the decades-long resistance to reform on several levels in Morocco. Ever since the first text of the Mudawwana was written after the independence of France and Spain in 1956, there have been debates and revolts from modernists on one side and religious conservatives on the other. The women’s movements – secular and Islamic – have played an important role in the debates (see e.g. Ennaji in press). In the late 80s, the controversy over women’s rights became linked to human rights. Criticism and pressure from foreign countries contributed to the liberalisation of the political and intellectual climate and it became possible to speak openly about the need for reform (Buskens 2003). The eventual reform in 2004 can for an important part be ascribed to the current King, Mohammed VI, who is not only head of state but also amîral-mu’mînin, ‘Commander of the Faithful’. As amîral-mu’mînin the King has a decisive vote in religious issues and took the power to ‘open the doors of ijtihad’: to interpret the Quran and Sunnah for situations that are not explicitly described in these texts (Buskens 2003; Mir-Hosseini 2007). Whether performing ijtihad is allowed has been much discussed (Mir-Hosseini 2007: 1501; VanderWaeren 2010: 45-48), which is the third reason why the reform of the Mudawwana in Morocco can be seen as a revolutionary example. The general public sometimes blame the reformed Mudawwana for creating a marriage crisis, as an increasing number of the young generation postpone marriage, because of their studies, the costs of starting a family and the emancipation of women. The latter, enhanced by the rights given to women in the Mudawwana.

Morocco is also quite literally a country on the move. It is one of the world’s leading countries in regard to emigration, with an estimated four million migrants out of a population of 33 million, of which over three million reside in South and West Europe (De Haas, 2014). De Haas (2005) has characterised this emigration flow, specifically in Northern Morocco, as a “culture of migration”. Emigration to “the low lands”, Belgium and the Netherlands, started in the sixties of the last century (see the next section). The process of migration affects society as a whole, in the country of origin as well as in the country of settlement (Obdeijn et al. 2002). In this study of Morocco and the Netherlands, the

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9 The women’s organisations played a great role in opening ‘the doors of Ijtihad’ in Morocco, as described by Mir-Hosseini (2007).

10 At the same time, De Haas (2014) writes that Morocco is also becoming a country of settlement. Although few in number, migrants from European countries who are severely struck by the economic crisis, and migrants and refugees from Sub-Saharan Africa are currently settling in Morocco.
interaction between people in the country of origin, and migrants in the country of settlement, can be typified as transnationalism. Glick Schiller et al. (1992: 1) define transnationalism as the processes by which immigrants “forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link their societies of origin and settlement”. The people who have these multi-stranded relationships are called “transmigrants” and they “develop and maintain multiple relations – familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political – that span borders” (Glick Schiller et al. 1992: 1). De Haas (2014) describes how the Moroccan government encouraged emigration, in part because remittances from the nationals abroad “were expected to reduce poverty, unemployment, and discontent” (De Haas 2014). Remittances of this sort were, and are, still vital for Morocco’s economy (De Haas 2014). Other than that, high youth unemployment, low wages and limited opportunities continue to push the young generation to find a marriage partner elsewhere in the world.

The reform of the Mudawwana (Chapter 4) for example, has had great consequences for Moroccans in the Netherlands, as they often married in Morocco. When divorces occur they are often transnational divorces and subjected to two legal systems (e.g. Sportel 2011, 2013; Kulk 2013). The Dutch Moroccan migration pattern is also not one way, we identify return migration and circular migration. Return migration is the movement of emigrants back to their country of origin to resettle. For return migrants without the Dutch nationality this return is permanent, migrants with the Dutch nationality can always re-emigrate. Here, circular migration is relevant (e.g. Glick Schiller 2010): moving between places of (parental) origin and settlement in order to learn the mother tongue and culture and/or to remove them from what is perceived as the negative and undisciplined social environment in the country of settlement (Bartels 2005). Part of the return migrant and abandoned children (Chapter 3) can be seen in this light, as part of them has or will return to the Netherlands.

1.4.2 The Netherlands: A multicultural society in distress

Most Moroccans and Turks came to the Netherlands as guest workers in the sixties of the last century. After the second world war, the Moroccans and Turks helped resolve labor shortages in the Dutch industries. The guest workers were mainly recruited in Northern Morocco, home to Amazigh and Arabs, and mid and southeast Turkey. They were

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11 Amazigh literally means ‘free humans’, it refers to the original inhabitants of the Maghreb, including Morocco. A great part of Dutch Moroccans are Amazigh. In the 7th century the Arabs conquered the region and introduced Islam. The Amazigh in Morocco have been discriminated and isolated for centuries in Morocco, and it is only slowly changing since the reign of the current King, Mohammed VI in 1999. The Amazigh in Morocco are divided in three groups which have their own language and live in different areas in Morocco. For a long time there was hate and envy between Amazigh and Arabs. This exists still, however it is changing. For a great part this is due to the current King, who by infrastructure included the north by the rest of the country. Also there is more attention for Amazigh culture and language (see e.g. Asian 2015). For instance, in Rabat there is a royal Amazigh institute (Institute Royal de la Culture Amazigh, IRCAM). Although different ethnicities play a smaller part in partner choice among our respondents, they were discussed at times as we described in Storms and Bartels (2008). Sometimes the differences in culture were stipulated and the Amazigh typified as ‘closed’ contrary to Arabs. However, religion, Islam, seemed to play an increasing important role in partner choice, for youngsters as well as their parents (Storms, Bartels 2008).

12 Turks in the Netherlands who came as guest workers come from different areas in Turkey, especially rural areas in central and south-east Turkey. Dutch Turks have been strongly organized in organisations and mosque associations ever since their arrival, the latter not only having a religious function but also to meet fellow
recruited, first by individual employers and later by the Dutch government. They obtained a temporary work visa; it was assumed that these young males would work in the Netherlands for a few years after which they were supposed to return to their country of origin. However, many guest workers settled in the Netherlands and their wives and children where brought here via family reunion (Bouras 2012; Obdeijn et al. 2002; De Koning 2008). In the sixties and seventies there was no integration policy, guest workers (and their families) were (still) assumed (and hoped) and expected to return. Over the years, immigration restrictions were intensified and as De Haas (2014) states, “paradoxically, increasing settlement was stimulated by increasing immigration restrictions”. De Haas (2014) argues that the increasing European immigration restrictions have played an important (unintended) role in “reinforcing the permanent character of Moroccan migration, as well as recent policy developments”.

While at first, the guest workers were welcomed, the processes that led to settlement, and the lack of attention to integration and the current problems ascribed to this are still debated today. The distress started mid-eighties, when with the increasing realization of the permanence of the immigrants, they should obtain a position in the Dutch society. Around the same time it became clear that these groups were lagging behind, compared to Dutch in general in terms of income, education and on the labor market.

The multicultural society as a fact, multiculturalism as an ideal, and lacking integration policy, were and are political sensitive topics. Especially since 2000, political and public debates and events mark the distress of the Netherlands as a multicultural society. Scheffer stirred the Netherlands in 2000 with the essay ‘The multicultural drama’. By some received as finally addressing the real issues, by others perceived as (further) stigmatization of Muslim minorities. Around the same time, the upcoming right-wing populist politician Pim Fortuyn (LPF) further emphasized the lacking cultural integration of primarily Muslim immigrants and questioning their loyalty to the Netherlands and Dutch culture. A catalyst of events followed: the murder of Pim Fortuyn in 2002 by environmental activist Van der Graaf; the years that Ayaan Hirsi Ali was a Dutch politician and strongly criticized Islam; the short film Submission about the submissive role of women in Islam by Hirsi Ali and writer and director Theo van Gogh and the assassination of Van Gogh by Dutch Moroccan Bouyeri in 2004. The rise, to this day, of right-wing politician Geert Wilders, strongly anti-Islam, enhanced the view of Islam as incompatible with democracy and ‘our way of living’. He portrays Islam as dangerous and inflamed by the recent arrival of refugees points to the ‘dangerous Muslim men’, pointing to the danger for Our women and therefore also reinforcing the position of Muslim women as oppressed.

In these years, and since then, marriage migration and marriage customs associated with (mainly) Muslim minorities (arranged and forced marriages, polygamy, cousin marriage, Turkish migrants. Later, the organisations and associations obtained also a social role, addressing societal issues (Sunier, Landman 2014). Storms and Bartels (2008) found that great differences were ascribed to people from different areas in Turkey, people from urban and rural areas, referred to as conservative or progressive. This played an important role in partner choice, especially for the first generation and the expectations towards their children (Storms, Bartels 2008). Also there is a group of Turkish Kurds in the Netherlands, who came primarily as refugees. This group is not incorporated in the chapters of this thesis (see e.g. Aslan 2015 for more on the position of Kurds in Turkey).
relational marriage, child marriages\textsuperscript{13} controlled the debate. Sunier et al. (2016) write that “according to the dominant integration paradigm, ties with the country of origin are considered counterproductive practices that hamper integration into host societies and should be discouraged as much as possible”, specifically referring to the continuous discussion on marrying a spouse from the country of (parental) origin. In the decades after the arrival of the guest workers, the number of transnational co-ethnic marriages were very high. Hooghiemstra (2003) wrote about the marriage patterns, end nineties and the start of the new millennium. Back then, the majority of the Dutch Turks and Moroccans found a spouse in the country of origin (of the parents): respectively 60% of the Dutch Turks and 55% of the Dutch Moroccans in 2001 (Dagevos, Peters 2014). But also at that time, Hooghiemstra (2003) found a decline in the preference for migration marriages, compared to the first generation. Nevertheless, because it was assumed that co-ethnic migration marriages contributed to integration problems and language deficiency of their children, the integration policy was intensified. In 2004, the law was changed in order to hinder partners coming from another country (minimum age 18 to 21; income condition 100 to 120% of minimum wages, Van Huis 2008: 3). The hindrance of marriage migration was also perceived as a way to counteract forced marriage. On several occasions it was attempted to raise the minimum age to 24, assuming that raising the minimum age would protect prospective marriage partners (especially women) from pressure of their family in partner choice (Sterckx 2014a, based on Regeerakkoord 2012; WODC 2009).

Nowadays, Moroccans and Turks constitute the two largest migrant populations from the so called non-western countries. The Netherlands has 17 million inhabitants, of which approximately 380,000 are Moroccan and 395,000 Turkish (first and second generation, CBS, January 2016). The majority of Dutch Moroccans and Turks live in the larger cities of the Netherlands. During the last decade, marriages with partners from Morocco and Turkey has declined strongly, especially between 2004 and 2008. This decline has more or less stabilized since 2008 for both groups. In 2012 about 15% of the Dutch Turkish and 17% of the Dutch Moroccan men and women married a partner from the country of origin (of their parents) (compared to 60% and 55% in 2001; Dagevos, Peters 2014). However, the percentage of inter-ethnic marriages increased considerably in this period (Dagevos, Peters 2014; Van Agtmaal-Wobba 2009). Van Agtmaal-Wobba (2009) reports that, for years now, about 80% of the Dutch Moroccans and Turks have been marrying a spouse with the same heritage. The intensification of the regulations on migration marriages has had a great influence on the lower numbers of migration marriages, especially in the period 2004-2008, the years which immediately followed this intensification (Dagevos, Peters 2014). However, this is not the only explanation for the decreasing numbers, other factors play a role as well. Storms and Bartels (2008), for instance, found that among the second generation Dutch Moroccans and Turks there is a preference for taking a spouse in the Netherlands who has roots in the same country as their own because of perceived cultural differences, the language barriers and the burden of responsibility associated with choosing a partner from the (parental) country of origin.

\textsuperscript{13} Rutten et al. (2015) recently published a study on child marriages and religious marriages in the Netherlands. A year earlier Moors (2014b) published a study on the motives to conclude a religious marriage.
1.5 Marriage, Islam and women

The paragraph on Morocco and the Netherlands provides the context for the discussion of the connection between Muslim women and marriage which takes place in this paragraph. Marriage is an important institution in Islam where, in general, relationships between men and women are socially and culturally restricted to family life. There are rules about who you can and cannot marry. **Mahram** is the term for people that Muslims cannot marry according to Islam (Surah An-Nisa, 4: 22-24). **Namahram** is the term for the people Muslims can marry. It is said in the Quran that men can marry a woman from the Book, meaning Christians (the Bible) and Jews (the Thora). Women on the contrary can only marry a Muslim. As I’ve described, first and second cousins are possible spouses, in fact the Prophet Mohammed married his first cousin Zaynab. Examples of forbidden marriages are blood-mahrams such as niece-uncle and nephew-aunt marriages and in-law mahrams such as father and mother in law and milk mahrams. In some Muslim majority countries there is no separation between church and state. This is the case in Morocco, for example, where a combination of religious law and secular (French) law is the basis of Family Law. Extramarital relationships and cohabitation are both prohibited by law, in a Family Law based on religious law, as in Morocco. In the Netherlands you see that sometimes only a religious marriage is solemnised, which can result in an array of difficulties for the wife as well as the husband (Rutten et al. 2015). Here I just give a brief description on the general notions in literature on marriage and the position of women in Islam.

Within Islam, sexuality is explicitly acknowledged, for men as well as women. Marriage acts as a (legal) way to manage sexual drift (Jansen 1997: 143-145). Jansen (1997: 145) argues that the ‘fear’ of sexuality in Islam affects both men and women, however, it has a different impact on women. Less self-control and a lower sense of responsibility are characteristics ascribed to women, which is why women are seen as ‘the most dangerous’, and likely to give rise to fitnah. The sexual vulnerability of the female body represents this danger regarding the loss of chastity, and thereby family honour. Therefore it is not only the woman, but above all the (male) family members who ensure that the chastity of women and the honour of the family is conserved. A family who has honour has social status, a family whose honour has been damaged, loses its social credibility (Bartels 1993: 48; Jansen 1997: 145). After marriage, a woman belongs to the husband’s patrilineage and forms the link between families. Families want to have women who are reliable and who won’t have extra-marital children. The importance of the reliability of women, is reflected in the importance attributed to virginity. The literal meaning of virginity is that one has not had sexual intercourse yet but, at a symbolic level, it also means ‘appropriate behaviour’ and having a good reputation. This means that male(s) (strangers) should be avoided as much as possible.

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14 Milk mahram’s refers to milk kinship: when a woman other than the mother nurses a baby, the children of the two women are prohibited from marrying as they are regarded as siblings.

15 For instance, Turkey and Albania do have a separation between church and state. A note on religious law as the basis of Family Law: there is no such thing as one legal system within Islam: Sharia. Sharia is derived from two holy texts within Islam: the Quran and the Sunnah. Fiqh literally means science; the science of Sharia by religious authorities performing ijihad (interpretation). Over centuries, different interpretations have led to different schools of law (Van der Velden 2016).

16 It is beyond the scope of this thesis, but noteworthy that there is a lot of discussion on the meaning of the term fitnah and how it is often ascribed to women. The meanings attributed to the term are for instance: charm, temptation, and sedition (Wehr 2007).
In the presence of men, a woman should be demure and display no interest in the opposite sex (Bartels 1993: 52; Buitelaar 2002: 464-465). It is the reputation of girls and women that is of utmost importance. The significance of virginity is typical for societies where marriages are a family affair and where there is patrilineal descent (Storms, Bartels 2008: 22).

In the process of migration, as for instance from Morocco and Turkey to the Netherlands, customary marriage patterns are not just set aside. On the contrary, migrants often tend to reinforce known patterns, by emphasizing them and creating boundaries with the surrounding society. Women and chastity are central to this, especially in a migration context (Storms, Bartels 2008). In her study of young Moroccan women in the Netherlands, Buitelaar (2000: 145) states that her respondents complain that Moroccans in the Netherlands gossip more than in Morocco and that teenage girls are more restricted than their peers in Morocco. Buitelaar argues that this reaction in migrant communities is not strange, gossip is about discussion of the moral order within the [subject’s] own community. She places this within a migration context: “it is precisely in a migration context, when people are confronted with codes of conduct that strongly diverge from their own, that debate about the [migrant’s] own moral code is stirred up. Setting one’s own values and norms in opposition to those of the dominant culture should be interpreted as a longing to get a grip on a society that is perceived as threatening”. Following Douglas (1966), women can be seen as gatekeepers whose boundaries of the body symbolise social boundaries. The behaviour of women is, in this light, a symbolic marker of the boundaries between the subject’s ‘own group’ and the Other (Timmerman 2003).

This does not mean that the social position of women is fixed. Not in a country like Morocco, or in a multicultural society like the Netherlands. In a migratory situation, it is foremost the youth, mostly the second generation, that explore, transgress and shift boundaries. This can be seen primarily in the upbringing of children and the freedom given to girls/women (e.g. Brouwer 1997; Buitelaar 2000; Pels, De Haan 2007). In research among Dutch Moroccans and Turks Storms and Bartels (2008) found that first generation parents often experience difficulties in raising their children according to the standards they know from their country of origin and allowing their children to participate in Dutch society. Some respondents described a rift developing within the family; the older children having strict rules, and the younger children enjoying much more freedom.

Partner choice can be placed within these shifting boundaries related to the upbringing of children (Storms, Bartels 2008). The 2008 research by Storms and Bartels shows how the influence of the family on partner choice among Dutch Turks and Moroccans is appearing to decrease. Young people more often select their partners themselves although they frequently keep their parents’ preferences in the back of their minds. The seemingly increasing religious endogamy and the decrease in migration marriages can also be seen in this light, especially when one considers that a spouse from the country of origin (of the parents) is sometimes viewed as a cultural other (as also described in paragraph 1.4). Remarkably, a newly accepted group has emerged, one that consists of young highly-educated women who are unmarried or not yet married. As a result of their high education and good position on the labour market, their unmarried status is more or less accepted.
1.6 Muslim women: navigating marriage

Homogeneous and unchanging depictions of Islam versus the West have a long history. And the position of Muslim women is a recurring theme throughout. This thesis aims to contribute to the debate about the position of Muslim women, especially with regard to marriage, at a point in time when the debate and the feelings of Us versus Them are becoming ever more tense.

As I’ve described in this chapter, social reality does not fit a black and white binary opposition of powerful versus powerless, the oppressors versus the oppressed is overly simplistic. When discussing the agency of Muslim women, Mahmood (2005) stresses that agency is much more than simply expressing resistance to what is perceived by Us as oppressive. Abu-lughod (2002) points to the possibility that Muslim women, after they are ‘freed’ by the West may choose lives that is not what We from a western feminist perspective had in mind. I argue that we should go beyond this supposed divide between autonomy and culture, which is, as Said (2001) argues, a self-fulfilling prophecy that restricts our understanding of social reality. For one, these debates and images do not do justice to the unstable and constantly shifting and fragmenting social reality, whether that is in a predominantly Muslim country like Morocco or in a multicultural country like the Netherlands.

So, Us nor Them are completely autonomous or confined by structures. That is the case for Muslim women, for women and for people in general. In moving through life, at an individual level, underlying power relations play an important role. For instance, power relations between generations and between husband and wife. Here I’d like to address power as a relational aspect rather than an attribute that is tied to a person or a group (Bartels 1993: 24, based on Rassam 1984; Giddens 1982; Rosen 1978). “There are constant changing power relations between individuals who take varying positions in different situations”. Thus, in human interaction one constantly deals with power. So, when power viewed in this way, nobody is ever completely autonomous or dependent (Bartels 1993).

Within these relations, the concept of agency and structure are of great importance as is extensively theorised by, among others, Bourdieu (1977) who reconciles the two and theorizes habitus and Giddens’ (1984) notion of duality of structure. However, to analyse the individual life paths and choices of the women in the following studies I want to pay special attention to the movement I observe at the level of social environments and the individual level: the women in this study. As I described in this chapter, the environments (on several levels) in which these women live their lives and move, is changing. For instance in regard to institutions (changing laws on (migration) marriage in the Netherlands and in Morocco) and ideals of marriage (how a woman should behave versus the norm of free choice and love). In the following chapters I explore the relationship between the two. A concept that specifically recognises this movement in both individuals and environments and their relation is the concept of social navigation. I use social navigation here as an overarching concept for this thesis to analyse the underlying issues that can be found in the chapters: the relationship between environments and individuals, in other words: the relationship between structure and agency. Vigh (2006, 2009) has written much on social navigation and aims to go beyond the dichotomy of agency and structure.
In relation to emigration, Morocco is world leading. Migrants build transnational relations, in divided, making the social environment difficult to navigate when confronted with the law. Since there is also a lot of resistance, people in general are deeply associated with immigrants.

My view is that Morocco is a country on the move. Although the reform of the Mudawwana had a long lead period, institutionally men and women have been ascribed different roles from one day to another. Since there is also a lot of resistance, people in general are deeply divided, making the social environment difficult to navigate when confronted with the law. In relation to emigration, Morocco is world leading. Migrants build transnational relations, in some cases resulting in circular migration. A situation which, by definition, implies movement. In the Netherlands, as a multicultural society, I specifically like to point to the increasingly heated debates about the West versus Islam, especially since the rise of IS and the flow of refugees to Europe. As described, the position of women plays an important role in this. Like the situation in Morocco, there are laws changing however, in the Dutch context, these changes are centered on marriage and immigration and the marriage practices associated with immigrants.

Importantly, the concept of navigation not only refers to societal characteristics, it is also “related to one’s social position and experience of control over social forces” (Vigh 2009: 430). In other words, the social position. So the opportunities that women have in their own individual situation can have a huge impact on the choices they can and want to make.
following chapters, the women search for ways that will secure the best possible position for them, taking into account all the different social forces emanating from the law on the one side and religion, culture and ascribed symbolic roles for women on the other. Thus, “it is our position within our social environments that designates our ability to control its flow of events”. “[...] The need to move, “in relation to the movement of social forces depends on the speed and volatility of change as well as the level of exposure or shelter that our given social positions and ‘capital’ grants us” (cf. Evans, Furlong 1997, Virilio 2001 in Vigh 2009: 430). In one way or another, most of the women in this thesis are in a social position that requires them to move.

In the following chapters I show how cultural rules and boundaries are transgressed and in flux. Individuals move and make choices as they see fit according to that moment in time and in the given context. Moreover, people navigate not just according to the here and now, but also in regard to dreams and aspirations in the future. But also, which Vigh does not include, to experiences in the past. Or in other words, moving in relation to “social goals and prospective positions” (Vigh 2009: 425). Thus, navigation is related to “movement through both the socially immediate and the socially imagined” (Vigh 2009: 425-426). For instance, the socially imagined future in terms of the individual’s prospective position as a woman, can highly influence the choices that women make in divorce proceedings, as I’ll describe in Chapter 4.

In this thesis I address the position of Muslim women as debated in social sciences and in political and public debates, a position which is most frequently debated these days through marriage. Within the contexts of Morocco and the Netherlands, where the issues surrounding marriage are highly debated, I describe how individual women navigate marriage. In so doing I focus on the changing contexts on the one hand and the narratives of women on the other. Specifically I explore the interactivity between the two. I therefore pose the following central question:

**How do Muslim women in Northeast Morocco and Dutch Turkish and Moroccan women in the Netherlands navigate marriage?**

The organization of this thesis is geographic. Part One is set in Morocco as a primarily Muslim country. Part Two is set in the Netherlands, as a multicultural country where Dutch Moroccans and Turks form large minority populations. Parts one and two are sub-divided thematically in sections that more or less represent the chronology of marriage: (1) women and partner choice, (2) women and the longing for, or having, children within marriage. Part one, set in Morocco also addresses (3) women and divorce, as a way that some marriages end.

A concept that returns in Parts One and Two (Chapters 2 and 6) is risk perception in relation to partner choice and marriage. When discussing cousin marriage, risk is relevant from both medical and anthropological perspectives. From a medical perspective, risk refers to the increased risk of having offspring with an autosomal recessive disorder and from an anthropological perspective, risk is discussed in relation to social positions and relations. The dissemination and perception of risk, as we will argue in Chapters 2 and 6, is socially mediated and constructed. Following Douglas and Wildavsky (1982), there are many risks in life and one cannot take all of them into account. A priority or a choice is made. What is considered an ultimate risk by one individual may be perceived quite differently by another.
In any society, the risks that are considered most important are politically motivated (Beck 1992; Giddens 1991; Douglas, Wildavsky 1982; Lupton 2006). In other words, moral qualifications are made, based on selected risks. In Chapter 2, set in Morocco, this topic is discussed in relation to a Muslim majority country. In Chapter 6 we address this topic in relation to migrant groups in a multicultural society as is the Netherlands.

Part One of this thesis, set in Morocco, includes chapters on women and partner choice, children and divorce.

Chapter 2, “Notre huile est dans notre farine. An exploration into the meaning of consanguinity in Northern Morocco against the backdrop of the medical risk of having disabled offspring” (Storms, Bartels, 2013), gives an overview of consanguineous marriage in Morocco, showing that the incidence of consanguineous unions is high, but that it varies per region and location. The institution of marriage in Morocco is on the move, for one because the roles that men and women have within marriage have shifted (see Chapter 7), but also because of what is referred to as ‘the marriage crisis’: young adults postponing marriage (Jaouad et al. 2009). The preference for a cousin as a spouse also seems to be decreasing among the younger generation (Jaouad et al. 2009: 580). The ideal of marriage is, however, still omnipresent in Morocco, since cohabitation and relationships outside marriage are prohibited. This is especially significant for women as I have described in the paragraph Marriage, Islam and women. Women seek a fitting partner: a relationship that offers security. In striving for this, what Vigh (2009: 425) calls the “prospective position”, in other words a "socially imagined position”, i.e. being a married woman, a number of different risks – social and medical – are weighed. In this article different discourses are explored on the perception of risk and what risk prevails, depending on the individual and the community. This is illustrated, for example, in the description of how a family living secluded in the mountains is well aware of the medical risk which makes them look for a spouse for their oldest daughter outside the family but then talk about the risk of not finding a spouse outside the family, which would make them search for one within the family.

As I have described in the paragraph about marriage; in many societies, marriage is a way to deal with sexuality and the care of children. Although it is rapidly changing, for many people in general, and for the Moroccan and Dutch Moroccan and Turkish women in these studies specifically, having children (within marriage) is essential, as being a mother gives these women status. I explore this in greater detail in two chapters on different child-related subjects: Chapter 7 on cousin marriage and (healthy) offspring and, first, in Chapter 3 on the children of (Dutch) Moroccan women as forced returnees in Morocco.

The children of (Dutch) Moroccan women are central in Chapter 3: “In between the Netherlands and Morocco: ‘Home’ and ‘belonging’ of Dutch Moroccan return migrants and abandoned children in Northeast Morocco” (De Bree, Storms, Bartels 2011). This chapter elaborates on children’s agency by discussing how Dutch Moroccan return migrants and children abandoned (by their fathers) express, and reflect on, feelings of belonging and home in Morocco. It is demonstrated how, for the latter group, these feelings of home and belonging are strongly shaped by their mothers. The predominantly young abandoned children are raised in Morocco from a young age. Meanwhile mothers transmit feelings of not belonging in Morocco and longing for the Netherlands. In what we call the creation of ‘imaginary belonging’ in the Netherlands (Moen et al. 1997; Schönpflug 2001; Nauck 2001),
the mothers create a “socially imagined” future for their children in the Netherlands (Vigh 2009).

Although marriage as an institution has such an important place in society, especially for women, in social reality many marriages end in divorce. In Morocco from the 1980s till 2004 the divorce rate was an impressive 50% (Bartels 1993; Koelet et al. 2009). This rate dropped considerably between 2003 and 2005, after the reform of the Moroccan Family Law in 2004.

Chapter 4 “The reform of Moroccan Family Law and women’s daily lives: Navigating between structural constraints and personal agency” (Storms, Bartels forthcoming), focusses on this reform and how women in daily life navigate in divorce proceedings. Although the revisions of the Family Law in 2004 accomplished the goal of greater legal equity between men and women in several areas of civil society, many Moroccans harbour serious reservations about the legal changes. From the standpoint of the Moroccan women in this study, the social environments are unstable on an institutional, symbolic and social level. In a society where divorce is common, but taboo, at an individual level, the women in this study move within the “socially immediate” - enhancing their current situation by divorcing – and the “socially imagined”: how their social environment will react and what their position in society will be (Vigh 2009: 425).

Part Two, set in the multicultural society of the Netherlands, poses a different dynamic when discussing marriage, looking at cousin marriage in particular which, in the Netherlands, often invokes reactions of disgust, primarily because it is perceived as incestuous.

In politics, cousin marriage is usually associated with Muslim minorities and placed within integration and immigration debates. Chapter 5, “Cousin marriage among Dutch Turks and Moroccans: Debates on medical risk and forced marriage” (Storms, Bartels forthcoming) retraces these debates on cousin marriage that took place in the early 2000s and were centred on the medical risks. From 2009 onward cousin marriage was discussed in the framework of forced marriage. The thread that links these political debates is what we call concealed transcripts. We use the term concealed to refer to the frame in which cousin marriage is always discussed: immigration and integration policy, especially regarding Muslim communities. This frame takes attention away from the population in general, directing it to a special group (Muslims). We argue that political transcripts on migration policy result in the creation of further boundary markers between who We are and who They are, in other words defining Them as not being ‘moral citizens’. The chapter then turns to primarily second generation, young Dutch Moroccan and Turkish women. In their stories it becomes clear that they feel to belong to several social environments through which they navigate: both Dutch society and their family network, ethnic group (Dutch Turks and Moroccans) etc., often talking in terms of religious identity.

The following chapter, Chapter 6, “Changing patterns of partner choice? Cousin marriage among Turks and Moroccans in the Netherlands” (Storms, Bartels 2015), discusses the focus on risk in the political debate (medical risk and forced marriages) and the perceptions of risk – medical, religious and social – and the negotiations made by Dutch Moroccan and Turkish women. A group for which, especially among the first generation, a consanguineous marriage is regarded ‘safe’ rather than ‘risky’. Safe for women, children and the family as a whole. Our respondents navigate within this complex mix of the personal risks on medical, religious and social levels and the perceived dominant risks on societal level. At the same
time, the second (younger) generation, in particular, navigates in a migratory context, where patterns of partner choice are shifting among the first, second (and ‘third’) generation.

Cousin marriage among Dutch Moroccan and Turkish women is discussed again in the Chapter 7: “Dutch Moroccan and Turkish consanguineously married women and their perspectives on preconception carrier screening and reproductive choices” (Verdonk, Metselaar, Bartels, Storms, forthcoming). The starting point of the chapter is the medical risk associated with parental consanguinity. The chapter discusses perspectives on preconception genetic screening and reproductive choices among Dutch Moroccan and Turkish consanguineously married women, with the aim of having healthy children. The current technology and preconception care cannot describe the risks facing consanguineous couples with any certainty, even if they have genetic counselling. This provides a very uncertain situation. Although, given the fast pace of the developments in genetic technology, more technologies are going to be available in the near future for estimating risk. As a consanguineous couple in the medical world you enter an environment of uncertainty: risks in terms of percentages on which basis you have to make very significant life choices. Not much is known about the perspectives of consanguineously married Turkish and Moroccan women on screening, counselling and reproductive options. In this environment of medical uncertainty, we show how Dutch Moroccan and Turkish women seek ways, or navigate, to have a child and, moreover, to have a healthy child via reproductive options.

1.7 Methodology

The articles in this study are based on fieldwork in Morocco and the Netherlands that I conducted over several periods between 2007 and 2012. In 2007, I started my fieldwork in Morocco where I stayed for over four months. In the years following, until 2014 I returned once or twice each year for short periods of time with Edien Bartels to complete follow-up research and/or new research projects. I started conducting research in the Netherlands with Edien Bartels in 2008. This was followed by a one-and-a-half year research period in 2011-2012. Each chapter in this thesis contains a paragraph on methods, so I will not specifically address that here. However, the manner in which I conducted fieldwork differs between Morocco and the Netherlands and I will therefore expand further on this in the following paragraphs. I’d also like to take a closer look at six specific topics: positions and politics, research assistants, ethical considerations, engaging anthropology, interdisciplinary research and my contribution to the articles in this thesis.

Research in Morocco and the Netherlands

Research in Morocco

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 are based on fieldwork completed in Morocco on several topics: cousin marriage (Chapter 2), Dutch Moroccan return migrant and abandoned children (Chapter 3) and women in divorce proceedings (Chapter 4). The fieldwork for these studies was primarily
conducted in Northeast Morocco, since this area is the main region of descent of immigrants in the Netherlands, as described in Section 1.4. For the greater part of my initial fieldwork period I resided in Berkane, a medium-sized town at the foot of the Rif Mountains and the research primarily took place in Berkane and the city of Oujda, which is the capital of the region. In the years that followed the research was mainly conducted in this area, and in the Rif Mountains. My research started, however, in Rabat and Casablanca, in the heartland of the women’s rights organisations. This is described in Chapter 4.

Gaining access to such specific research groups, wanting to talk about highly sensitive subjects, sometimes while the respondents were in the middle of legal procedures (Chapters 3 and 4), was challenging. I started my first research in Rabat and Morocco, where I was able to gain access to important national women’s rights organisations (LDDF, ADFM, UAF and the national network Anaruz) who were – understandably – very reluctant to introduce me to individual women. To do this and enter the research field, it was essential to have ‘gate keepers’. For all the research projects set in Morocco, the Stichting Steun Remigranten (SSR) was a crucial gatekeeper. As a Dutch transnational organisation based in Berkane, the SSR’s primary role is to provide legal aid to Dutch Moroccan return migrants. They have been based in the region since 1989 and enjoy the trust of a broad network of local organisations. They introduced me to women’s organisations, women’s shelters and a lawyer (Chapter 4). Return migrants, abandoned women and children can turn to the SSR for legal aid and De Bree, Bartels and I (Chapter 3) were able to contact this group via the SSR. This organisation also provided contacts for our exploratory research into consanguinity (Chapter 2).

I used two main means of data collection: conversational methods and participant observation. For all the research projects in Morocco semi-structured, in-depth-interviews were conducted. To collate information for the study of women in divorce proceedings (Chapter 4) I chronicled life histories. I spoke to the respondents once, or on more occasions, as the opportunities presented themselves. While I talked predominantly to women and children, interviews and informal conversations with lawyers, women’s rights activists and legal advisers provided a much needed juridical, social and historical frame for understanding the position of women in divorce proceedings (Chapter 4), as well as the position of abandoned children and their mothers (Chapter 3). In addition to the formal interviews, I’ve had countless informal conversations over the years: with the family I lived with, the families I visited, the women I encountered at a women’s rights organisations, and women I randomly met during my stay. And although I never focused my research on men, I also often had conversations with males on their views on gender relations and marriage in general.

I gained a sense of the country and the research topics in general by participant observation, “discovering through immersion and participation the hows and whys of human behaviour in a particular context” (Jorgensen 1989: 75). For my research into women in divorce proceedings (Chapter 4) I accompanied women during women’s rights demonstrations in Rabat and Casablanca and attended informative theatre about the new Mudawwana for the general public in the outskirts of Rabat and in Berkane. I spent many hours in court, accompanying lawyers, employees and volunteers of the women’s rights organisations offering free legal support, and women in divorce proceedings. I spent time at a women’s organisation that gave free legal advice and often organised courses where women could
learn to make, for instance, clothing that they could sell and make a small living. “Hanging out”, or what Geertz (1998) refers to as “deep hanging out”, being present on an informal level for periods of time, provided me with a deeper understanding of structures in society, family life and gender relations. In the first month of my stay I lived with Khadija and Ahmed, a couple in their thirties who were eager to discuss a range of topics with me and who I’ve visited many times over the years. Since the beginning of my research in Morocco, I’ve been frequently invited for déjeuner, lunch that could last the whole afternoon by people I met during my research. I spent days at a time in a women’s shelter, hanging out in their shared bedrooms and the grand salon talking to the women, but also cooking with them, having déjeuner, watching popular soap operas on television, taking care of their children and accompanying them to the hospital. Last, in the chapters set in Morocco, some archival data is presented. This is mainly retrieved from the Ministry of Justice and women’s rights organisations.

Research in the Netherlands

In the Netherlands, fieldwork was conducted among Dutch Turks and Moroccans. The combined category of Dutch Turks and Moroccans, although often studied in unison (e.g. Brouwer 1997; De Koning, Bartels 2005; Hooghiemstra 2003; Sterckx 2014a; Sterckx, Bouw 2005; Storms, Bartels 2008), raises questions. The two countries of origin, for example are situated in different parts of the world, have very distinct histories and speak different languages. As immigrant groups in the Netherlands there are, however, some similarities that I’ll briefly address here, based in part on Casier et al. (2013).17 First, both Moroccans and Turks came to the Netherlands around the same time as guest workers as I described in Section 1.4. Second, they are the two largest so-called non-western immigrant groups in the Netherlands. Third, both groups have followed similar trends in marriage (Casier et al. 2013). As described in Section 1.4, in the early 2000s a large percentage of both groups married someone from Morocco or Turkey. Transnational marriage being an important immigration strategy (Casier et al. 2013). Both groups show a similar great decline in migration marriages after 2004, and both groups show a stark preference for a partner with a similar ethno-religious background in the Netherlands today. Fourth, “the importance of transnational ties” (Casier et al. 2013), not only in marriage but also with regard to remittances. Fifth, “the high incidence of migration in the regions of origin” (Casier et al. 2013). And finally, sixth, “being subjected to negative discourse in the receiving society regarding marriage migration” (Casier et al. 2013) and partner choice and marriage patterns in general.

The fieldwork in the Netherlands took place mostly in cities where the majority of Dutch Moroccan and Turkish migrants live: Amsterdam and Rotterdam. Fieldwork was also conducted in a number of other major cities and a few towns outside The Randstad. In the larger cities, in particular, there are many ‘self-organisations’ of Dutch Moroccans and Turks which were useful in helping to find respondents. Over the years, I’ve visited some of these organisations on a regular basis and met a number of the women working there (often volunteering) at (national) gatherings and meetings about related subjects. Bartels, who has studied Dutch Turks and Moroccans for decades has particularly good contact with organisations and provided access. Often being situated in neighbourhoods were many

17 Casier et al. (2013) base these points on Moroccan and Turkish immigrants in Belgium. However, their points also apply to the same groups in the Netherlands.
migrants live, these organisations have good contacts and make an effort to reach out to (primarily) women (in difficult situations).

By far the largest part of the research is based on semi-structured in-depth interviews and group discussions. As described in Storms and Bartels (2008, in part based on Hooghiemstra 2003 and Krueger 1994), group discussions correspond with social reality. Hooghiemstra (2003: 192) writes how, in real life, opinions and perceptions are not shaped in isolation but in interaction with others. Listening to the stories recounted by other people stimulates individuals to tell their own and by organising group discussions, next to in-depth interviews, we were able to talk to a larger group of people. The research themes provided less opportunity for participant observation on the topic itself, however, on many occasions over the years I have visited women’s organisations and gatherings where partner choice or related topics were discussed. Visiting respondents at home also provided some additional material.

Conducting research on cousin marriage (Chapters 5, 6 and 7), meant that some knowledge about the medical risks related to parental consanguinity, preconception screening and reproductive options was required as well as a basic anthropological understanding of this form of marriage. Working in an interdisciplinary team and listening to lectures from Marieke Teeuw, researcher at Community Genetics VUmc on these topics helped me to acquire this knowledge fairly quickly. Accompanying Teeuw to focus groups for her own research where she explained medical risk also contributed to our own understanding and ability to engage in conversations about this topic with our respondents.

As evidenced by debates in the Lower House, items in the news, opinion articles and columns in newspapers, the focus on immigrants, Islam and the position of women in Islam can be found throughout Dutch society. Therefore politics and the media provided an important data source. We have, for instance, followed the proposed law to counteract forced marriage over the years, listened to the debates, questions and criticisms raised in the Lower and Upper House, and read the contributions in the media, all of which have provided the context for the research on partner choice in general (Storms, Bartels 2008) and on cousin marriage in particular.

**Positions and politics**

*My position as a woman*

As a young unmarried woman alone in Morocco I was somewhat of a curiosity. I was invited to stay with Khadija and Ahmed, a couple who lovingly provided me with a home, and at the same time stressed my position as a young single woman. It was here that I experienced, at first hand, gender and family relations and the expected roles attached to them. For instance, it was never expressed explicitly, but always carefully arranged that I was never alone in the house with Ahmed. Also, during the meals shared with the parents and unmarried siblings of Ahmed, men and women ate separately, the women insisting over and over that they didn’t want me to feel uncomfortable with men being around. As I conducted the fieldwork I was crisscrossing through Rabat and Casablanca, often returning home after dark, which worried Khadija and Ahmed greatly. I often found them looking out on the balcony to the *grand taxi* stand for my arrival, making sure I was not being harassed by men. They were concerned and puzzled about my position and my parents thoughts about my
endeavour, a situation which was resolved to some extent by a visit from my parents after which Khadija began to refer to me as her petite soeur, her little sister.

During my fieldwork in Northeast Morocco I lived on my own in an extension built onto a former French church (now home to an environmental organisation) which had been used before by women conducting research. Nevertheless, while living alone, I had to be careful to protect my reputation. Berkane is quite large and in the area I lived I frequently encountered people on the street. I naïvely transgressed a boundary when I walked to a gathering accompanied by two young men I knew from the environmental organisation. After the father of a family who had invited me to their house a few times in the past and whose teenage daughter I had talked to, saw me in the street, I was never spoken to again.

In the following years, conducting research in Morocco with Edien Bartels, my position was very different, as it was often assumed that I was her daughter.

On the other hand, being a young woman opened doors in Morocco as well as in the Netherlands. Especially talking about partner choice, I often encountered women around my age with whom I could talk to on an equal level.

Position and politics
The political climate in the Netherlands as described in Section 1.4 also reflected on me as a ‘native’ Dutch during the research. In Storms and Bartels (2008: 117) we already referred to the openness which we encountered among our Dutch Moroccan and Turkish respondents to talking about partner choice, arranged and forced marriage. This was, however, only when the subject was discussed in a broader context of partner choice, not when it was associated directly with having a Turkish or Moroccan background. In the research on cousin marriage we encountered this again strongly. Before engaging in a conversation, my motives and standpoint regarding the subject of cousin marriage was often challenged. It was only when I explained that I was not opposed to cousin marriage, that the respondents openly started talking about it and also revealed their doubts and questions.

Respondents as translators
When I decided to conduct research in Morocco it quickly became clear that I had to improve my French rather than trying to learn Derija (Moroccan Arabic). In French I could communicate with lawyers, women’s organisation and a number of the respondents. Although I learned some Derija from taking classes and living in Morocco, it was very limited. Without dismissing the disadvantages of having a research assistant and translator I nevertheless chose this option and experienced the advantages of it too. I was fortunate enough to meet Aisha, who was a respondent (after being divorced just a few years earlier). She also became my research assistant, interpreter and friend. Having lived in the Netherlands until she was thirteen, we could talk in Dutch. Due to her own experiences she had knowledge about my research topic and empathy towards my respondents which contributed a lot to the research. I also spend much time at her house, where she lived with her parents and siblings since the divorce and accompanied her and friends to the beach and the shops in the medina, which gave me a sense of the life of a young single (divorced) woman and enabled me to explore the boundaries related to talking and meeting men.
As well as using other translators, we again used an expert translator in the research on abandoned children for similar reasons. A translator was only required on a very few occasions in the research conducted in the Netherlands. During a few group discussions over the years, somebody affiliated to a women’s organisation would translate for a few women whose Dutch was too poor for them to participate in the discussion.

**Ethical considerations**

We all are “moral beings”, thus I was a moral being while conducting fieldwork and as such I was confronted with “moral challenges” in the field (MacClancy, Fuentes 2015). Three examples are now given of ethically challenging situations that cropped up during the several fieldwork periods.

Positioning myself, building rapport, and balancing being a fieldworker and a friend was very challenging for me during my research in Morocco. Before I went to Morocco it was evident to me that (at first) I could not relate my whole life in the Netherlands to most people I encountered. Being a young woman, non-religious, single and living on her own, drinking alcohol I transgressed a variety of boundaries. I thus presented myself as Christian (I have a Catholic background) and, although I did say I lived in a female student house, I denied drinking alcohol when directly confronted. On paper this seemed reasonable but being there and building relationships with people I still see today proved to be difficult. For example, in the beginning Khadija and Ahmed ‘tested’ me by asking direct questions, out of the blue, on my view on the evolution theory and drinking alcohol. Conducting research on divorce, inevitably partner choice and marriage was discussed, which resulted in my being asked questions about this subject. I found myself, more often than not, behaving in a very reserved way when asked about my own life, while at the same time, asking for openness to be shown by my respondents on very delicate subjects. Over the years I underestimated the challenges of social media, particularly Facebook. Here again my life in the Netherlands collided with my life in Morocco and I frequently turned down invitations. In the end finding a solution in a second – somewhat censored – account. However, the tension remains, as I now often position myself as a married woman (in reality co-habiting) with a child.

A second story pertains to my experiences conducting fieldwork in a women’s shelter. Here, I was confronted with an internal hierarchy that sometimes resulted in heated, at times violent arguments between the women who were under a great deal of strain because of their stressful and precarious situations. There were women who were married and were victims of domestic violence. They had the highest hierarchal position. Beneath them were unwed mothers and at the bottom, prostitutes. The boundaries were not always so clear-cut, a new woman could shift boundaries and end a rather peaceful period in an instant. In the shelter, I primarily conducted research among the married victims of domestic violence who were petitioning for divorce. I was ethically challenged on several levels during a holiday, when all the staff in the shelter had a day off, and a sixteen year old girl, a child prostitute, was severely ill, screaming in pain. Nobody wanted to come near her, as she was a prostitute, she was cast aside by the other women who whispered that she had HIV/AIDS. It was obvious to me she had to go to the hospital and I would have to take her there, despite knowing that this would strain the relationship I had with some of my respondents who tried to convince me to let it go. At the same time the girl was conflicted about my help: she was glad I helped her, but had difficulty making sense of it, since I was not a Muslim. She
desperately tried to convert me to Islam, by trying to make me say the *Shahada* (Testimony of Faith), which I refused. When we finally arrived at the hospitable, with my research assistant Aisha, the doctors did not want to help the girl. Knowing she came from the women’s shelter, they did not want to treat her; something that also often happened to the unwed mothers giving birth in the hospital. This resulted in me making a scene, insisting on treatment, which worked in the end.

Third, a particularly challenging aspect of the research in the Netherlands was talking about the medical risk to the respondents. Risk in terms of percentages is difficult to comprehend, particularly when you don’t know the rights and wrongs of it, as was the case for many of the women I talked to. For example, during the interview with Sarah, her fear about possible birth defects in future children became apparent. She became more frantic the further we spoke, insisting it was okay, but I sensed it wasn’t. In this case, Sarah’s pre-existing fears came to the surface by talking to me, when other people in her surroundings had convinced her for years to let the subject rest. Finally, I ended our interview and tried to calm her by answering the questions she had as best as I could and arranging for her to have a conversation with a geneticist who could explain things to her in more detail. So, first talking about sensitive subjects (which has been the case in all the research projects I have conducted), can illicit emotional reactions. This is avoidable, to some extent, if the subjects of the research are explained clearly before the interview, as we did. Another particularly difficult aspect in this research is that as anthropologists, Bartels and I also required knowledge about genetics. A complex discipline which we (obviously) only learned the basics of. In the case of Sarah, for example, it was necessary to refer her to a geneticist for more detailed answers to her questions. Anthropologists should be aware that researching these kinds of sensitive topics can appeal to the emotions. As a researcher you have a responsibility to inform respondents beforehand and carefully build and close an interview and offer the possibility for referral and/or contact for further questions.

**Engaging Anthropology**

In 2005 Eriksen published the book *Engaging Anthropology*, stressing that anthropology par excellence can contribute to today’s societal issues, however so few anthropologists take this role upon them. Eriksen (2005, 2012) points specifically to proactively engaging in the media in current debates and also to study the issues that current societies present. This public role of anthropologists is debated. In a recent edited volume on the topic Abram and Pink (2015) write that

> [...] questions about anthropological engagement tend to fall into easy dichotomies. Despite contrary evidence, the idea persists that there is a pure, academic anthropology, which is a discussion between anthropologists, in contrast to an applied anthropology that is a discussion ‘out there’ beyond university departments of anthropology. The entrenchment of the idea of pure versus applied and the exclusion of active anthropology from academic departments is happily largely behind us, but the dichotomy tends to raise its head at regular intervals.

Nowadays you see an increasing focus on engagement in social sciences in the Netherlands. Also, justly, funds for scientific research increasingly require valorisation: to make scientific research socially available, relevant and usable.
Underlining the importance of contributing to public debate and concrete projects, the research team on consanguinity, for example, conducted several projects alongside the study on consanguinity. We facilitated the publication of an informative brochure for consanguineously married couples in corporation with De Maakbare Mens (Belgium) and Erfocentrum, the Dutch institute for heredity. Edien Bartels and Petra Verdonk, with Dona Daria (the Centre for Emancipation in Rotterdam), planned accessible information meetings, informing primarily Dutch Moroccan and Turkish women about consanguinity, medical risk and reproductive options at a local level. Furthermore, we organised a gathering for medical practitioners, midwives etc. informing them about the outcomes of our research. Furthermore, we presented the results of the research project to master students in medicine at the VU University.

Our role in public and political debates and the media, however, proved to be challenging. As described in this introductory chapter, the topic of marriage among migrant groups is highly political in the Netherlands. Taking up politically and publically sensitive topics, is a form of engaging anthropology. Inevitably it can result in reactions and critique from outside the scientific world. Our research on consanguinity was published in the media and resulted in a series of comments as described in De Koning et al. (2014). There were negative comments, for instance, on the popular website GeenStijl where many statements were posted about cousin marriage among Dutch Turks and Moroccans, typifying the practice as inbreeding and incest, while the comparison with cousin marriage of the Dutch evoked resentment (De Koning et al. 2014: 235). There were also negative comments and threats made on the website GeenStijl about us as researchers. Elma Drayer, a known columnist and women’s rights activist Shirin Musa both critiqued our work for being culturally relativist. They argued that we were bailing out on women who were oppressed by their culture because of our fear of stigmatising them. These reactions spark debate and, in my view, lay bare the tension that exists between addressing important issues such as forced marriage and a discomfort about the way in which this sometimes takes place: reinforcing, in my opinion, non-existing dichotomies. I’ll return to this issue in the discussion in the last chapter.

**Interdisciplinary research**

The research in the Netherlands on cousin marriage was conducted in an interdisciplinary team consisting of Community Genetics, Medical Humanities (VU university medical center) and Anthropology. At the same time as the anthropological studies in this thesis were being conducted, Community Genetics (VUmc) researched the question as to how the risk of children with an autosomal recessive disorder in consanguineous unions could be predicted by developing screenings (Teeuw 2015). Medical Humanities (VUmc) focused on how genetic knowledge can be used in public health from an ethical perspective. The interdisciplinary research proved to be a steep learning curve. It also meant that all the parties were confronted with differences in traditions between the disciplines, especially in regard to methodology and publishing.

The methodological approach of qualitative research in Community Genetics and Medical Humanities is much ‘stricter’ than it is in anthropology. For example, accepted anthropological methods, such as informal conversations and participant observation are not considered valid research material. Also, the research is published in a different way. In
the medical sphere, the list of authors is often long: everybody who has contributed is included. The placement in the list of authors often also says something about the sort of contribution. This is in stark contrast to anthropology, where it is common to conduct and publish individually, although this is changing. However, generally only people who have contributed to the research, analysis and writing are mentioned as authors in publications. Furthermore, there was mutual astonishment about the style of writing: the short, to the point articles in medical sciences and the long, empirical articles in social sciences. From both sides it meant discussion, negotiation and adoption; a process which led to further insight. For instance, discussing a subject or reading an interview with others, especially in an interdisciplinary team, confronts you with your own bias. By discussing this, one’s understanding of the topic is enhanced and new ideas are developed.

**Contribution to articles**

This thesis consists of a series of co-authored published and submitted articles. In anthropology a thesis based on an ethnographic account is within the norm. A thesis based on articles published in peer reviewed journals or as book chapters, or co-authored articles is relatively new and (still) uncommon in anthropology, contrary to many other disciplines. First, I address a thesis based on articles. Without wanting to dismiss the importance of ethnographies, an evident advantage of a thesis based on articles is that all the articles have been (or will be) published in journals or edited volumes which ensures that a potentially larger public will be reached compared to an ethnographic account. As an external doctorate candidate, working on a thesis next as well as having another job and therefore taking a long time, an important argument is also that the articles are published along the way, rather than piling up on one’s desk waiting to be finished.

Second, in regard to co-research and co-authoring. In anthropology it is common to publish as a single author. However, collaboration in research and publishing provides many advantages. On a practical note, conducting fieldwork with two, provides the opportunity to shift from questioning to taking notes which is particularly important when conducting group discussions. Furthermore, it is a slightly different learning experience: through discussion you learn. Since ‘you are your own research tool’, by hearing, observing and reading a similar research situation, you are confronted with your own bias and you develop new ideas.

In the following paragraphs I describe my contribution to each chapter in detail. First, though, a general note on my contribution to the co-authored chapters in this thesis. For all chapters of which I am the first author (chapters 2, 4, 5 and 6), I wrote the majority of the text, the co-author provided comments during this process, and the analysis of the research data was conducted jointly. For chapters 3 and 7 I am a co-author and the first author wrote the majority of the text.

**Chapter 2** “Notre huile est dans notre farine. An exploration into the meaning of consanguinity in Northern Morocco against the backdrop of the medical risk of disabled offspring” (Storms, Bartels 2013). The research in Morocco was jointly conducted by Storms and Bartels. The article was authored by Storms and co-authored by Bartels.

**Chapter 3** “In between the Netherlands and Morocco: Home and belonging of Dutch Moroccan return migrant and abandoned children in Northeast Morocco” (De Bree,
Storms, Bartels 2011). This chapter is based on two studies. De Bree conducted research among Dutch Moroccan return migrant children; Storms and Bartels conducted research on Dutch Moroccan abandoned children. In the writing of the article, a similar division of labour was followed: De Bree wrote primarily about return migrant children, Storms and Bartels wrote primarily about abandoned children.

Chapter 4 “The reform of the Moroccan Family Law and women’s daily lives: Navigating between structural constraints and personal agency” (Storms, Bartels forthcoming) is based on extensive fieldwork in Morocco by Storms in 2007, and follow-up research by Storms and Bartels in 2008, 2009, 2010. The article was authored by Storms and co-authored by Bartels.

Chapter 5 “Cousin marriages among Dutch Turks and Moroccans: Debates on medical risk and forced marriages” (Storms, Bartels forthcoming). The fieldwork was conducted by Storms and Bartels. The group discussions were conducted by Storms and Bartels. The interviews were conducted by Storms. The article was authored by Storms, and co-authored by Bartels.

Chapter 6 “Changing patterns of partner choice? Cousin marriages among Turks and Moroccans in the Netherlands” (Storms, Bartels 2015). The fieldwork was conducted by Storms and Bartels. The group discussions were conducted by both Storms and Bartels. The interviews were conducted by Storms. The article was authored by Storms, and co-authored by Bartels.

Chapter 7 “Dutch Moroccan and Turkish consanguineously married women and their perspectives on preconception carrier screening and reproductive options”. (Verdonk, Metselaar, Bartels, Storms, forthcoming). The article is authored by Verdonk, Metselaar and Bartels, and co-authored by Storms. It is based on fieldwork by Storms and Bartels. The group discussions were conducted by Storms and Bartels. The interviews were conducted by Storms. In our interdisciplinary research team the research topic was discussed in detail.

References


