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Dutch-Moroccan Girls Navigating Public Space: Wandering as an Everyday Spatial Practice

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Abstract

Based on qualitative research among female Dutch-Moroccan teenagers in two underprivileged neighborhoods in the city of Utrecht, the Netherlands, this article focuses on the spatial practices of young Muslim women in public space. Compared to their male counterparts, who “hang around” in groups, female teens spend less time in public space. We focus on girls’ “wandering practices” through the neighborhood, a spatial practice structured by their search for freedom (to spend time outside the home, to talk to friends in private) and by social control (to avoid the presence of young men, to avoid being gossiped about). Our research shows that wandering both decreases their visibility and pushes against gendered cultural norms about women in public space. By analyzing their wandering as a form of social navigation, we show how these teenagers maneuver through both the physical neighborhood and the gendered cultural norms regarding appropriate behavior in public space.

Keywords

Public space, social navigation, teenagers, Muslim women, gender, The Netherlands

Introduction

Two giggling girls cross the street. They wear headscarves and long colorful skirts that swirl behind them as they walk. They head toward the shopping mall. At the other side of the road, they stop to greet another teenage girl, with a gray headscarf and dressed in gray. They give each other kisses on the cheek and talk happily to each other.

Compared with their male counterparts, female Moroccan-Dutch teenagers are less visible in public space, even though they comprise a significant part of the population. The girls are technically visible, but they are going from one place to the next. Theirs is a mobile presence, while the boys’ is a much more stationary presence. We analyze the presence of these teens in public space in relation to studies that emphasize the gendered character of public space, especially for Muslim residents. The relative invisibility of girls and women in public space also has a scholarly dimension: Most studies of youth in public space focus on boys. Although our study also finds a decreased visibility of Moroccan-Dutch girls in public space, we demonstrate that this does not

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imply that they are absent. On the contrary, they move around in a “wandering” way that enables them to make claims to public space.

Our analysis is based on qualitative research among female Moroccan-Dutch teens between the ages of 14 and 19 years, all born in The Netherlands, living in Kanaleneiland or Hoograven, two underprivileged neighborhoods in the city of Utrecht.

“Wandering,” (*ronddopen*) a word the girls themselves used, is an everyday form of navigation that on the one hand decreases their visibility, but on the other, expresses a claim to the neighborhood’s public space. Wandering enables the girls to navigate between the existing cultural norms within their community and their own autonomy (Golkowska, 2017; McGrath & Magarry, 2014). Wandering comprises aimless walking around the neighborhood from A to B, with no specific route in mind, as one of the girls told us. Meanwhile, it is also structured by reasons that they have for doing this, as we show later on.

Heeding the recent call to pay more attention to the “micro mobilities” and “micro geographies” of youth in their local surroundings (Holt & Costello, 2011; Horton, Christensen, Kraftl, & Hadfield-Hill, 2014; Van Blerk, 2013), we demonstrate how this wandering works in three ways. First, wandering is a legitimate way for girls to be outside; second, it enables girls to escape social control both inside and outside the house; and third, it makes it possible for girls to interact with boys in public space even if in a very fleeting way.

Research Site and Methodology

This research was conducted in Kanaleneiland and Hoograven, two underprivileged neighborhoods in the city of Utrecht, the fourth-largest city of The Netherlands with a population of 339,000 residents (WistUData, 2016). Dutch-Moroccans comprise about 9% of the population of Utrecht, the majority living in underprivileged neighborhoods such as Kanaleneiland and Hoograven. Both neighborhoods consist in large part of social housing. Kanaleneiland is a post-war neighborhood built in the 1960s, characterized by tall apartment buildings, gallery entrance flats, and green public spaces. Kanaleneiland was built to house young families, but the houses and apartments were not fit for large families and amenities turned out to be scarce. The apartments lacked the possibility for upward mobility. In the 1980s, the neighborhood started to change. Rents became relatively low as the housing corporations invested less in the maintenance of the housing. With the physical decay of the neighborhood, many of the original residents moved out. In this period, Kanaleneiland transformed from a homogenous White Dutch population to an ethnically diverse population, with a high percentage of low-income families and high unemployment rates. Recently, the neighborhood has struggled with increasing crime rates and decaying housing and public space. The same pattern was visible in Hoograven. Built in the late 1950s for the more prosperous working-class families, in the 1980s, Hoograven rapidly turned into a low-income neighborhood, with poor housing facilities (Gemeente Utrecht, 2015). Both neighborhoods have, since the 1990s, received much attention from the media and government with regard to crime, degradation, and problems with youth (Pots, 2013; Vegeterlo, 2015). In both neighborhoods, in the past 15 years, municipal policies have tried to increase the socioeconomic diversity of the population by replacing social housing with privately owned dwellings (Gemeente Utrecht, 2013, 2014, 2015).

Kanaleneiland has a relatively young population. Twenty percent of its 16,000 residents is younger than 17 years, and almost 35% of the population is of Moroccan descent (WistUData, 2016). Just like Kanaleneiland, Hoograven has a young population. Twenty-five percent of its 6,000 residents is younger than 17 years, and Moroccan-Dutch residents constitute 30% of its population (WistUData, 2016). The neighborhood struggles with diverse problems: people living in poor socioeconomic conditions, low education levels, and high dropout and unemployment rates (Gemeente Utrecht, 2015; Koning, Laney, Romme, & Tjhuis, 2015).

This study is part of a larger research project on youth and their attachment to place. Author 1 conducted qualitative fieldwork over a period of 2 years (2012-2014), carrying out participant observation and in-depth formal and informal interviews with teenagers, both male and female, in Kanaleneiland and Hoograven. Living just outside one of the neighborhoods, Author 1 spent as much time as possible observing and talking to youth about their neighborhood. During this time she noticed the general absence of Moroccan-Dutch girls in neighborhood public spaces and started interviewing girls and youth workers about the presence of teenage girls in these spaces. The observations of the girls “wandering” through the neighborhood were very general, as we saw this as a common everyday practice during the fieldwork period. The purpose of our research is not so much to give a generalized explanation of young Dutch-Moroccan women’s practices in public space through the study of a representative sample. Instead, in an attempt to advance existing theories on young Muslim women in public space, we critically approach this literature by putting it into dialogue with an analysis of the specific experiences of our interviewees.

Most quotes from informants in this article come from 13 interviews with female Dutch-Moroccan teens between 14 and 19 years old. We gained access to the teenagers through youth work organizations, the local supermarket where several teens worked, and our own networks. Interviews were held at a youth center, the supermarket, schools, and cafés. We explicitly looked for places where girls would feel more comfortable talking to us. Eleven of the interviewees met one-on-one with the first author, and two met with the first author at the same time. The interviews centered on three themes: (1) the physical appearance of the neighborhood; (2) the activities, social interactions, and practices of youth in their neighborhood; and (3) what the neighborhood means to them.

Navigating Public Space

Public space plays an important role in the everyday lives of young people (Cahill, 2000; Matthews, Limb, & Percy-Smith, 1998; Shildrick, 2006). It is an arena of social difference, where various social groups—who may be complete strangers to each other—encounter each other and, intentionally or unintentionally, have to deal with each other’s presence (Hajer & Reijndorp, 2001; Ruppert, 2006; Van Lieshout & Aarts, 2008). As Christensen and Mikkelsen (2013) write, public space is “always contested and imbued with social meaning” (p. 199). These meanings often have a normative dimension and structure the presence and practices of people in public space.

Youth spend a considerable part of their leisure time in public space (Huiberts, 2002; Matthews 2003). “Hanging” and “chilling” with friends in the streets or on the squares are important group activities that contribute to the social and psychological development of young people. This is where they construct and experiment with their identities (Koster & Mulderij, 2011; Lieshout & Aarts, 2008). We agree with Langevang (2008) that many studies on youth in public space tend to focus on boys (see, e.g., Robinson, 2000). Studies that do focus on girls are often limited to young girls up to 12 years of age (Weller, 2006). In general, as Hill and Bessant (1999) point out regarding studies of young people and public space: “little differentiation tends to be made in terms of various racial, ethnic, age or gender dimensions of this population” (p. 46). Because people with different cultural backgrounds tend to perceive public space differently.

While young men often meet up and spend a period of time in one location, young women behave differently (Bettis & Adams, 2005; Ehrkamp, 2013). Young women, as we will show, often move through public space while talking with female friends. There are, as other studies show, specific places in public space where young women do linger (see De Backer, 2017; Spierings, Van Melik & Van Aalst, 2016). However, these are mostly places in commercial areas, like squares where they meet up and wait, for example, before entering a cinema, or taking a rest while shopping. Our study focuses on female youth’s presence and practices in the streets and squares of residential areas.

Most studies on the relationship between young women and public space have analyzed how space is gendered in terms of the private–public dichotomy. Especially studies of Muslim residents in European cities have examined how women are, in general, more confined to the private space of the home, while men dominate public space (Ehrkamp, 2013; Hopkins, 2006; Peleman, 2003; Spierings et al., 2016). Religious and cultural ideas about how (young) women should behave in public play an important role here (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2001; Mohammad, 2013; Wagner & Peters, 2014).

Concentrating on their presence and practices in public space, we observed that these young Muslim women wander in pairs or small groups, moving through public space with one or more female friends. We understand this wandering as a way in which they negotiate access to public space and the gendered cultural patterns that structure it. This practice is both an effort to evade the social control of their family members and to avoid encountering boys in public spaces, which they experience as threatening. In so doing, they “sculpt spaces for social activity beyond the material and discursive reach of adults and boys. . . . [They] take advantage of spatial inconsistencies for identity expression and for socializing” (Thomas, 2005, p. 588).

To understand how these young women move through public space, we build on the notion of “social navigation” as used by Vigh (2009) and Anjaria and McFarlane (2011, p. 6), focusing on “how people make sense of and work their way through diverse urban environments, often in contexts of deep political, economic and social inequality.” “Navigation” refers to the specific spatial and social practices of actors, how they “actively move through, practice, cope with, seek to dominate, and learn how to live in the city” (Anjaria & McFarlane, 2011, p. 7). People navigate both physical spaces and social spheres. Social navigation is always situational: There may be a final goal or purpose, but on the way the actor has to react cleverly to unexpected situational, particular, and local conditions (Toiskallio, 2002). As we see it, while navigating, people creatively combine what De Certeau (1984) calls “strategy” (intended and structured plans) with what he calls “tactics” (ad hoc everyday practices). Whereas strategies create, arrange, and control spaces, tactics are used to maneuver within these spaces (Reinders, 2013). Drawing on its original meaning from the domain of shipping, “navigation” includes both following a planned series of coordinates (a trajectory on the map) and responding to unpredictable circumstances (storms, calms, pirates). In our study, young women’s strategy includes going outside to talk to friends and evading the social control of their family members. It also includes the drive to keep moving because “hanging around” is deemed inappropriate. Tactics come into play because of unpredictable circumstances or occurrences, such as encounters with young men or family members outside, both of whom the young women try to avoid. In addition, according to the girls, they often do not have a clear idea of where they are going; their navigating is thus both strategic (intentional) and tactical (improvisational).

Their navigation is also structured by gendered notions of what is appropriate. Like Silvey (in Freeman, 2005), we found that “mobile subjects are policed by discourses defining the boundaries of appropriate gendered, place based behavior” (p. 148). We can think of such discursive policing as social control, a way to impose particular group norms on people. It may increase safety, but it can also limit people’s room to maneuver (Jacobs, 1969; Wittebrood, 2008). Social control, effected mainly through gossip and the risk of losing one’s good reputation, influences how young women make use of and behave in public space (Ehrkamp, 2013; Lenton, Smith, Fox, & Morra, 1990; Spierings et al., 2016). As other studies show, young Muslim women not only challenge gendered cultural boundaries in physical places but they also seek to stretch these boundaries in virtual space (Leurs, 2014).

Interestingly, several studies on how Muslim female youth behave in public space build their analyses on the notion of resistance (Ehrkamp, 2013; Peleman, 2003). The female teens are depicted as agents who purposefully or unintentionally resist the male dominance manifest in norms that limit the mobility of women in public space. Feminist Muslim scholars have criticized this focus on resistance by pointing out that the notion of emancipatory practices as a form of

resistance against male dominance is derived from a “Western” framework and thus does not have much explanatory force in these particular contexts (e.g., Bilge, 2010). While we do not cast the practices of the teenage women as a form of resistance, we do argue that their navigation of public spaces is structured by gendered cultural norms, even as it deviates from and challenges these norms.

Wandering Through the Neighborhood

Entering Public Space for Privacy

In both neighborhoods, we observed that Moroccan-Dutch boys gather in central places such as the shopping mall, football pitches, squares, and parks. They spend a large part of their leisure time on the streets, meeting friends, talking, and playing soccer (Martineau, 2006). The girls, however, at first sight, seem absent. Nevertheless, they are present, moving through the streets of the neighborhood. Girls indicate that they go outside, because, paradoxically, public space offers them a level of privacy they do not have within their homes (Van Lieshout & Aarts, 2008). Most girls come from large families with a minimum of four siblings, all living together in relatively small houses. At home, family members are always around, providing a sense of social control in which the girls do not feel free to talk about private matters. Being outside the house is both “exciting” and “relaxing,” because public space offers them a sense of privacy. “Nobody can overhear you talking when you’re outside,” one girl told us. Labiba explained further

When we are outside I can be myself. There is no bigger idea or plan behind wandering. It is just that at home I am different than outside. I can be myself outside. Being outside is a way of expressing oneself, just yourself. You cannot talk about everything at home, for instance about boys. Girls do not talk about boys. It is a taboo. My friends face the same problems, you know? So we meet each other outside.

Public space offers girls opportunities to experiment with their identity, express themselves, relate with friends, and develop their autonomy. Because the private sphere offers girls few opportunities to experiment with their identity, especially with their girlhood, they seek privacy in public space to talk with their friends.

Appropriate Behavior and the Presence of Boys

Another reason the girls mention for wandering outside is the presence of boys. Boys hang out in central places in the neighborhood, making it almost impossible for girls to avoid them altogether (Peleman, 2003). We see how, as for most adolescents across different cultural settings, a game of “repel and attract” takes shape. For the girls, the presence of boys is very ambivalent, as some of the girls stated that wandering is a way to avoid young men in public but for some girls it is a way to walk into them in an inconspicuous manner they are attracted to them but also consider them a threat that they need to avoid. Some of the girls expressed their disdain of girls who seek the attention of boys.

Fayruz explained, “For some girls, wandering around is just a way to seek the attention of boys. Because they love the attention. . . . They look and wave at the boys.” With disdain, she continued, “Who do they think they are? Just stuff it and keep walking. They are the ones looking for attention.” Manssoura expressed a similar sentiment.

It is for real. That is what we [girls] think. [We’ve] have no reason to spend time outside. If you do go outside, you’re looking for the attention of boys. Just that. You cannot just . . . no. [I want to ask:] Why are you all dressed up, why are you like that, whatever? Just like that. People will make insinuations, that you look like that for a reason.

Like Ghaffar-Kucher (2015) found in her research on Pakistani-American youth, the girls tend to accuse other girls of shameless behavior, and they are aware that their presence in public space may be deemed inappropriate. According to cultural norms, girls have no business loitering in the neighborhood. Moreover, they are not supposed to be outside without a clear reason. These girls' views show how the use of space is disciplined by implicit gendered norms regarding space and behavior. By condemning other girls for seeking attention from boys, our informants reproduce dominant ideas about how Muslim girls and women should behave in public space.

What is considered "appropriate" behavior in public space is structured by ideas that girls at a certain age need to avoid young men. Several young women told us that at a younger age, primary school age, they used to play outside, in the streets. They referred to it as a carefree period, during which boys and girls both played in the neighborhood with each other. As girls approach puberty, there is a shift in what they are allowed to do. The last year of primary school marks a boundary at which girls become young women (Buitelaar, 2009; Karsten, 2003). Lamb (2000) notes that a "girl's first menstruation marks the beginning of a state of openness and thus . . . sexual relationships" (p. 185). Girls stop playing with boys and their use of space becomes more limited, affecting their mobility. Girls are expected to avoid boys and men and behave discreetly in the presence of men (Brouwer, 1997). Labiba recalled, "Before we used to skip school, boys and girls. All of us together. At the age of nine, ten. . . . But now my parents would rather not have me talk to my neighbors, something like that. So I don't." When asked when this separation becomes apparent, she responded, "I guess from the age of 13, 14, 15 or so."

As others have argued, the segregation of sexes Labiba refers to is important in Moroccan-Dutch culture (Buitelaar, 2009; Eldering, 2002). From a young age, girls learn to avoid the presence of boys because it can give rise to problems (Buitelaar, 2002). Cross-gender friendships are uncommon. Labiba finds this segregated life difficult, saying that it did not prepare her for high school where she now has to interact with boys:

I regret it, yes. Because personally I was taught not to play with boys. When I was younger I barely interacted with them. . . . And now at my age, I notice that it is quite hard for me to interact with boys. That is something I have experienced. However, compared to a few years ago, it is easier, because I opened up. The first years in high school I noticed that I wasn't accustomed to talking and hanging out with boys.

When girls enter adolescence and this segregation increases, their spatial mobility gets restricted; in contrast, boys experience more freedom (Ketner, Buitelaar, & Bosma, 2004; Pels, 2003). The presence of young men in public space limits the mobility of young women. One of our informants commented that in a particular part of Kanaleneiland there are hardly any girls on the streets. The girls did not wander in that area, because there were too many boys. Ghita explained,

[That part of the neighborhood] is overrun with boys. That's why you never ever see girls. The girls don't dare to go outside. They are afraid people will start gossiping about them. [They say to themselves], "then they start talking about me, and my brother, cousin, or whoever will find out." So they stay home or go somewhere else. In my opinion, that's not necessary.

Specific places, Ghita went on to explain, are "off limits." About the yellow dome, in Kanaleneiland, a place where a lot of boys hang out, she said, "Only boys hang out there. We can't hang out there, because they play football. It is a little bit strange if you—then you are really looking for it. What I mean is that you're asking for attention."

According to Tucker and Matthews (2001), cultural norms and conditions to a large extent dictate if it is acceptable for girls to enter public space, and thus restrict girls' physical mobility. As their study shows, "Girls' use of space was governed and to some extent regulated by the

presence of boys” (Tucker & Matthews, 2001, p. 166). This is also the case in Kanaleneiland and Hoograven. Not only do girls avoid spaces that are dominated by boys but also their mobility is shaped by policing each other’s behavior in public space. By framing certain places as “boys only,” and by condemning other girls for seeking the attention of boys, girls reproduce prevailing gendered ideas about space and appropriate behavior. These relate not only to socializing with boys but also to social interactions in the public domain in general. Kheira explained, reproducing, like her peers, dominant notions about gender and space:

Girls should not be standing on the corner of the street, chatting. It is, well, kind of a disgrace. How shall I put it? It’s really not meant for girls. For Moroccans, especially girls, they should be inside the house. [. . .]. Being outside is something boys do. At home they [girls] learn to cook, for their future.

While Kheira condemns the behavior of girls, she does not do so for boys. Boys are allowed to hang around while girls are expected to be inside preparing for their future (Paetcher, 2007). By marking this difference girls imply that being in public space has to have a functional reason for girls. For example, shopping is a legitimate reason for girls to be outside and to spend time with their friends (Naber, 2004). Hanging around and chatting in public space is not purposeful and thus may give rise to shame for girls and their families.

Many studies note the importance of notions of honor and shame in the relationships between Muslim men and women in European cities (Bartels, 1993; Ehrkamp, 2013; Fadi, 2003; Peleman, 2003), and as such coincide with studies of Muslim men and women in other contexts (Abu-Lughod, 1985). Behavior is controlled via an emphasis on morality, honor, and shame, which together define what is acceptable conduct for women. Gender segregation emerges from this and ties in with socially accepted public behavior (Sadiqi, 2003). By avoiding gossip, girls are able to preserve a good reputation both for themselves and for their families (Peleman, 2003; Spierings et al., 2016). In spaces where boys congregate, girls may be catcalled or stared at, and this can give rise to gossip. Girls will do anything to avoid such places, because they can bring shame on them.

Kheira told the first author about how teenage boys yell at teenage girls on the streets. When asked what kinds of things they yell, she replied, “‘Come over here’ or something like that. In a very loud voice.” It is annoying especially when they stand at the corner. It is hard for Moroccan girls to walk by because you are ashamed.” “Ashamed of what?”, and she replied, “That they will talk to you. That they [will] laugh at you. If you pass by. [They’ll say] ‘Look at her. Look what she looks like,’ for example.”

Kheira feels uncomfortable with the behavior of the young men in her neighborhood, and her experience illustrates how gender, age, and culture intersect in how young people deal with place and identity (Hopkins, 2010). A boy talking to a girl in public or a girl standing out in public space can have big consequences for a girl, as doing so might influence her wedding prospects, as Manssoura explains,

I: Why does it matter that a boy talks to you?

Manssoura: Well, yes. He expresses his disapproval about my behavior and we girls think [boys] will never forget that. “Look, that’s the loud girl. She’s the same as other girls.”

I: And that’s important, apparently?

Manssoura: You want to know why it’s important?

I: Yes?

Manssoura: The woman’s hand. If you get married, people will look into your past. That’s the only reason girls need to uphold their reputation. Because people can judge you from the outside. They’ll ask around, they’ll contact people you know, people you grew up with, your neighbors, make enquiries about who you are. You understand?

Hinda and Ikbal share Manssoura's assessment, as evidenced in the following exchange:

- Hinda: Boys gather outside the Albert Heijn [a supermarket]. That's a nuisance.
 Ikbal: Yes, it is. You just pass by and they start calling out your name. Start annoying me.
 Hinda: They yell all kind of strange things. My first reaction is "What the fuck are you saying?" You know what I mean?
 I: How do you react?
 Both girls in unison: Ignore them. That's the best.
 Hinda: Because otherwise you give them the attention they are looking for. Y'know? But sometimes, you notice, well. For example . . . when they start shouting things like "whore" or so, you know.

Encountering boys in the neighborhood is unavoidable. But, in general, girls chose to ignore the comments and allusions made by young men about their presence in public space. Responding to them not only can be interpreted as making advances toward them but also gives young men the attention they are hoping for: a reaction from young women. Hinda said, "If you pass by without paying attention to their remarks they say things to the other boys, like 'Oh, that girl gave me a blow job.' Just like that. To evoke a reaction. Hahaha."

Although not all the girls chose to ignore or look away from this behavior, most of them found it difficult to react to boys' comments in public. Even Manssoura, a "tough" looking girl said, "No, no. I won't do a thing. I'll just keep on walking." Ghita stated, "If you are ashamed, or show fear, you won't survive. Because the comments will keep on coming. Twice, three times a day they will talk to you: 'Go home, what are you doing over here?'" In her opinion, girls should arm themselves against the comments of young men because they are everywhere in the neighborhood and cannot be avoided completely.

In response, the young women develop different strategies to minimize their encounters with young men in the neighborhood. Having a socially legitimate reasons—such as shopping and accompanying younger siblings to the playground or by pretending that they have a similar purpose—young women are able to operate in the margins of public space and create an illusion of invisibility. Ghita explained, though, that even with grocery shopping, she must be strategic:

If my mom asks me to do groceries I'll go to the Albert Heijn instead of the Lidl [another supermarket] because I don't want to bump into the same boys a second time. Because I met them earlier on. And you can't keep running into them again and again when your mom asks you to do some more groceries. Then I have to pass them once more, [and think] "What the fuck! Do I have to go there again"?

A youth worker confirmed our analysis that girls need a legitimate reason to be outside, telling us:

Girls wander around the neighborhood constantly. It is quite funny. Just the other day, when we were camping, one of the girls was telling us: "You know how many times we visited Albert Heijn per day?" Her mother simply asked her to do some groceries, and she deliberately forgot to buy all the items on the grocery list. So she needed to return to the shop once more. Ultimately she went to the supermarket three times. Girls need a reason to go outside. They don't want to just wander around the neighborhood as if doing nothing. That's why they need a reason to go outside. Fetching something, accompanying younger siblings to the playground—those are ways to legitimize their presence in public space. But actually it's a performance they give, wandering around.

School also gives girls a legitimate opportunity to stretch their spatial mobility. Hinda and Ikbal described how such seemingly legitimate excursions can still be thwarted:

Hinda: [Girls] use school as an excuse. Or they say, "I'm with my friends." Meanwhile they are hanging around downtown, you know.

Ikkal: Yes. That's right. You see them downtown but not in Hoograven.

I: That's because of . . . ?

Hinda: Everybody keeps an eye on each other. For example, if I'm downtown and I bump into a friend of my brother, my phone will ring immediately. You understand?

Watching over each other is something Hinda appreciates. But she cannot comprehend why her brother's friends feel compelled to inform him about her whereabouts. Labiba also disapproves of the overbearing role that (older) brothers play. She told us a story of a friend who secretly smoked on a neighbor's porch. Labiba's brother saw this girl smoking and advised Labiba not to hang out with her anymore. Annoyed, Labiba retorted, "I decide for myself with whom I hang out!" Other girls share the same opinion.

As Buitelaar (2009) argues, gossip is a means to reproduce the moralities of a particular community. Especially in a migration context, where community members encounter different dominant norms and values, discussions about morality plays an important role and give rise to forms of social control. Several female teens acknowledged the benefits of social control, like Ghita: "On the one hand it's nice to have someone looking out for you. You feel safer. It's really the case that I feel safer because you know everyone. But sometimes, I think, there is no need. I know my boundaries."

From a young age, girls are taught to carry and preserve the dignity and honor of their families (Eldering, 2002; Ketner et al., 2004; Sanghera & Thapar-Björkert, 2012). They are highly conscious of this responsibility and of their older brothers' role in protecting the dignity and honor of their female siblings, which makes them refrain from drawing attention to themselves in public space. We noticed that in many Dutch-Moroccan families in Kanaleneiland and Hoograven, brothers have a corrective role toward their female and younger male siblings and supervise their behavior in public space. Natifah talked about such brotherly guidance:

Hanging out with the wrong girls can have serious consequences. You'll turn out to be the same as them. But if your brother gives you some advice, like, "Don't hang out with those girls"—because they are up to no good, smoking pot, consuming alcohol—"That's what they do." Then you socialize with the good girls, and stay on the right track Eldering, L. (2002) states that young women oppose the corrective role older brothers play; Ghita, who knows Natifah well, seems to exemplify Eldering's argument,

It is soooo terrible for girls to have a brother. Because I know a girl. We're really close and she has a brother. He's one of the guys who hang around over there. She literally can't do a thing. She can't move around in a normal way. She stays at home, goes to school. Or she's in another neighborhood with family.

Ikkal and Hinda discussed how and why some girls leave the neighborhood:

Ikkal: I think girls leave the neighborhood so they won't be seen.

Hinda: It is the same in every neighborhood. With Moroccan but also Turkish and Surinamese girls. I've notice that in school. You know? They leave the neighborhood to make sure they aren't seen.

Ikkal: It's just that they want to escape the social control. But they forget that if they are seen, the consequences are much bigger. They're hypocrites. People'll start talking.

Because of the social control young women feel obliged to devise strategies that allow them to move about in public space. By telling their parents that they are at school, with friends, or out

shopping, they gain an opportunity to create space to move outside the socio-spatial confines set by the contexts in which they are raised.

Discussion and Conclusions

In this article, we analyzed the everyday spatial practices of young Muslim women in public space. We concentrated on female Dutch-Moroccan teenagers in the underprivileged neighborhoods of Kanaleneiland and Hoograven in the city of Utrecht, the Netherlands. Cultural understandings of appropriate behavior give rise to a less visible presence of these female teenagers in public space. But they are present in public space, moving through the neighborhood with their friends, “wandering” as they call it. We analyzed this spatial practice as a form of social navigation, drawing attention to how they maneuver between challenging cultural boundaries and minding cultural norms (Anjaria & McFarlane, 2011; Toiskallio, 2002; Vigh, 2009).

The female teens take cultural norms regarding their behavior into account. It is deemed inappropriate, they agree, for young women to hang out on the streets and, even more, to interact with young men. Social control by family members, both through their physical presence in public space and through corrective gossip, structures the spatial practices of girls (see also Peleman, 2003; Spiering et al., 2016). While it is common to think that young Muslim women’s presence in public space is limited because of these gendered cultural patterns, we demonstrated that girls *do* make use of public space in inventive and dynamic ways. Their walking through the neighborhood grant them the possibility to escape from the social control within the house, as outside they have more privacy to talk with their friends. To steer clear of accusations of inappropriate behavior that could harm their reputation—such as lingering in the streets without a purpose or seeking the attention of young men—they move through the neighborhood and usually avoid or ignore the presence of young men in public space.

While navigating, these teenagers combine planned practices and intentional purposes, on the one hand, with improvised responses to unexpected circumstances and events on the other (Vigh, 2009; Toiskallio, 2002). The girls want to go outside to talk to each other and they create socially legitimate opportunities for this, such as going to the supermarket for groceries. Next to these intentional practices, they also react to local circumstances, such as the sometimes-unpredictable presence and behavior of boys on the street.

Seeing young Muslim women’s practices as forms of social navigation helps to better understand the blurred boundaries between compliance and resistance. Regarding compliance, we agree with Thomas (2006), who argues that in public urban space girls’ “activities are spatial practices through which girls assume normative social differences and identities, and reproduce normative spatiality and public space” (p. 589). However, they also push existing cultural norms that would otherwise limit them to the confines of their homes (Chalhi, Koster, & Vermeulen, 2018; Ketner et al., 2004). In contrast to studies that analyze the spatial practices of Muslim women mostly in terms of resistance (Ehrkamp, 2013; Peleman, 2003; Robinson, 2000), we argue that these girls’ navigation can be viewed as a continuous combining of compliance and resistance. Their spatial practices are, on the one hand, structured by dominant cultural norms regarding the appropriate behavior of young women, which they largely do not question. On the other hand, these same practices are also shaped by their longing for freedom to talk to friends and to escape from social control. We argue that these young women are agents whose spatial practices simultaneously coincide with and challenge dominant cultural notions regarding appropriate behavior for women in public space. Maneuvering through both the physical space of the neighborhood and their community’s gendered cultural norms, they navigate by complying with the norms while contesting them at the same time.

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