Summary

Second-generation emancipation
Choices and opportunities during the course of life of young mothers of Moroccan and Turkish origin

The research question
This study was conducted by the Verwey-Jonker Institute, and commissioned by the Ministry of Justice’s scientific research and documentation centre, the WODC. Its subject is the emancipation, centred on autonomy and participation, of second-generation women of Moroccan and Turkish origin. It deals with the life plan of these women and with the actual course of their lives from their teens until the birth of their first child. The object was to offer insight into emancipation processes, the choices made by these women, and the influence exerted by social, cultural, and religious processes. We have examined possible differences among the women according to their ethnicity, educational level and, most importantly, their position on the labour market, and we have compared them to native Dutch women from similar social backgrounds. The results of this study clarify the relation between the views and the actual choices of the women on the one hand, and the notions about emancipation prevailing within existing policy on the other. This understanding can provide a starting point for the design of further emancipation policy in the future.

Interviews
The heart of this study is made up of extensive interviews with fifty women of Moroccan and Turkish origin, and with ten native Dutch women. The group of respondents contains a specific selection of women: young, second-generation mothers from (mainly) two-parent families, spread according to level of education and position on the labour market. A quantitative generalisation of this study’s findings is, therefore, not possible. Its primary focus has been to unveil processes, an exploratory purpose for which the group of respondents has been consciously composed.
For the main part, the interviews had an open set-up. They were conducted by trained interviewers of the same origin as the target groups. The recruitment of respondents took place through the networks of both the researchers and the interviewers, and also by way of the snowball method. Almost all interviews were recorded and transcribed word for word. The programme atlas/ti was used to process the qualitative material, which was analysed inductively. This means that categorisation was based on what arose from the material itself.

Views on emancipation
In this study, we have made a distinction between two aspects of emancipation: autonomy (further specified into freedom of choice and freedom of movement), and participation (participation in labour and in unpaid social activities and economic independence).
The respondents’ views showed a clear focus on emancipation. The second-generation women essentially endorse the right to freedom of choice and movement. A large majority thinks that economic independence is important. Their objections are related to the pre-dominance of woman’s caring role: taking care of the family is the main reason to refrain from working outside the house.
Next to this, another obstacle may stand between ideal and reality: part of the women lack ‘power of their own’, will power, selfconfidence and assertiveness, needed to manifest themselves as an autonomous person and to participate socially. The socialisation of the caring identity and obligingness of their younger years often makes these women feel more secure in a caring role, and more inclined to conformity. In addition, the majority of respondents va-
lues economic independence primarily to earn ‘something extra’, and to be able to spend this without their husband’s interference. This leaves the man’s breadwinner role intact. Thus, more than a woman’s economic self-reliance, participation in paid employment serves the purpose of an intensified pursuit of autonomy, towards the partner as well. Despite the discrepancy between the ideals about autonomy and participation on the one hand, and the actual choices made on the other, the trend toward emancipation is unmistakable. It is reflected in the respondents’ ambitions for the future. As the children grow up, ‘being considerate’ still figures prominently. Yet, beside the role of wife and mother, that of the autonomous working woman gains a more accessory status. Even more important is the fact that the mothers of today, judged by their sayings, knowingly endorse the trend toward emancipation through their parenting, even though our study results also indicate insecurity about parenting skills. The autonomy and participation of their daughters is high on their agenda, although accompanied by fear that ‘young people nowadays’ will lose track of respect, empathy and decency. For the generation of daughters, as well, the goal still is to establish an equilibrium with ‘being considerate’.

The actual course of life

During their teens, some respondents saw their choice of school being restricted, because their parents gave priority to their protection and to rules regarding sexual segregation. Sometimes, parents also conveyed the message that education did not matter for a girl by their passive demeanour. Furthermore, the respondents had little elbowroom to explore the world outside school. On the one hand, this seems to be a partial explanation of the girls’ success at school. On the other hand, their restrictive upbringing may have resulted in their dependency and insecurity, hampering an autonomous role in society. By the time the phase of starting a family begins, at least in part the die is already cast. During the preceding socialisation, a clear pattern of expectations has emerged regarding the future course of life. Marriage, a family, and a caring role are taken for granted. Participation in paid labour is viewed as a less natural element. However, this ‘power of the obvious’ does not prevent that various choices, of a partner, of the moment of marriage and having children, -within certain boundaries-, are made autonomously. For most of the women, by this time, their relationship with their parents has become more egalitarian, even though the latter’s expectations are still important. Marriage hardly is an obstacle to seek employment. It becomes an obstacle, however, when the first child is born, which is reason for part of the respondents to (temporarily) stop working. Within the national population, the age of women giving birth for the first time is on the rise. We found this tendency to postponement again among part of our study group, as a strategy both to realise autonomy, and to increase one’s opportunities to participation. It was found that for the majority, the division of tasks is not a subject for negotiation. Again, where the caring role is concerned, the power of the obvious makes itself forcefully felt. The (intensity of) participation in activities outside the house, like volunteer work, is determined by the caring role within the family. This is why many women indicate that they foresee they will get more room to realise their own ambitions in the future, ‘when the children have grown up’.
Opportunities and hindrances

Influences on both the life plan and the course of life can be located, respectively, on the levels of the individual, of interactions, institutions, and symbols.

The level of the individual is ruled, firstly, by ‘personal power’. In addition, and contrary to what is suggested by public imagery, religion more often is felt to provide an opportunity than a hindrance. Women of immigrant origin derive support and strength from it, and in part, autonomy, too: they feel they are answerable only to God, not to the people around them, like their partner. However, religion can also be a hindrance to participation, when it provides the ground for self-exclusion in order to avoid contact with men, or more indirectly, because wearing a headscarf can lead to exclusion.

With regard to the level of interaction, the parents exert direct influence during the teenage period. After that, their influence becomes more indirect, because the young women continue to take their wishes into account. A more restraining influence is ascribed to the in-laws: according to the respondents, they attach far too much value to the norms ruling ‘the community’. However, the pressure exerted by the community or, perhaps, chiefly the extent to which the younger generation is bothered by it, is weakening. Peers among family and friends are important, for they are much more capable than members of the old guard to provide instructive support, in addition to moral support. The partner’s influence is relatively great after marriage, but opinions about its nature differ. Part of the women experiences his moral and practical support, when realising their wishes. To a lesser extent, however, they also experience an unequal division of power between the sexes, with the husband limiting his wife’s autonomy. This gender inequality is reported most by the lowly educated and non-working respondents. Even more often, the women’s freedom is curtailed in practice, because the caring role of the wife is taken for granted, while care provided by the husband is not. The data indicate that employment outside the house meets with fewer objections from the partner than a woman’s freedom of movement in a more general sense.

Factors on the institutional level were discussed less. Only a few women seemed to be knowledgeable about opportunities offered by society, for instance in the form of parental leave or arrangements for child care. However, the respondents did mention institutional obstacles that may have much effect on the opportunities to participate: the atmosphere at work, and discrimination related to ‘the headscarf’.

On the symbolic level, there is the issue of negative images in society about immigrants and/or the Islam. The women are engaged in a process of ‘double emancipation’, as a member of a minority, and as a woman. They feel forced to defend the own identity and experience this as an obstacle to their integration in society, although some respondents view it as an incentive to prove themselves even more.

The interviews uncovered several emancipation strategies, used by the women to achieve their goals and by-pass obstacles. As stated before, women can attain autonomy by referring to their religion. Negotiations and rebellion are options for some women, but often being considerate, conforming, and avoiding conflict constitute a more common response. Fitting in with this is the so-called ‘two worlds strategy’, which means that women use a different repertoire to act in their private world, than they use in the world outside the house. This strategy may contribute to the development of a ‘bicultural competence’, the capability to navigate within diverse contexts. Another strategy that is often applied, is that of patience and acceptance, for instance where the division of domestic chores is concerned. This response may affirm the status quo, but it may also be deployed to create more personal space in a gradual manner. In addition to these interactive strategies, other ways to achieve more autonomy are marriage, the postponement of motherhood, and taking a job.
Differences within and between groups

Although there are many similarities among the respondents of Moroccan and Turkish origin, there are differences, too. With regard to participation, the Moroccan women have a much longer way to go. Compared to that of the previous generation, their upward mobility is relatively strong. In addition, they seem to be more attached to the caring role. Far into their adulthood, the women of Turkish origin are used to tighter bonds with both their birth family and the Turkish community than the Moroccan respondents. Among the latter, a stronger trend toward individualisation is perceptible. A last difference is that the Moroccan women suffer from discrimination and negative images more than their Turkish counterparts. This is probably due to the fact, that the Moroccans as a group are harder hit by the stigmatisation than the Turks.

Regarding the level of education and employment status, on the whole, the picture is quite consistent. In short, in so far as differences exist, they all indicate that women with a higher education and a job have gained more autonomy and participate more. The parents of the highly educated women were more closely involved in their daughter’s school career, but were also more united in watching over her activities away from home, in comparison with the parents of the lower educated women. The employed women more often mentioned both their parents when they were in need of help in school matters, than those without employment. The latter more often mentioned their own person(ality) as a limiting factor when they had to make choices during their teens. Fewer of the highly educated women had little or no influence on the choice of their partner. Postponement of motherhood occurs more often among those women with a higher education and those who are holding a job. The women who stopped working when pregnant of their first child have a lower education. ‘Being considerate’, that is, the caring identity, is more central to lower educated and unemployed women, who more often view their caring tasks as an obstacle for seeking employment outside the house. The unemployed women are also less assertive, more inclined to accept the limits to their freedom of movement, and less inclined to see employment as a way to (share) the breadwinner’s role. In short, the women who can be considered successful in terms of participation, combine their liberating views with a greater willingness, both to act autonomously and to take responsibility as a breadwinner, than their less successful counterparts.

In the course of several generations, the native Dutch respondents have shown the same changes toward emancipation, but the leaps made during this process were smaller. Their ambitions regarding work are more moderate, for themselves as well as for their daughters’ generation. Their life plan is ruled by the ‘equilibrium model’, in which employment is balanced against the family interest. As young adults, the Dutch women experienced less pressure from their parents about their choice of partner, the moment of their marriage, and that of starting a family. ‘Being considerate’, that is, the relational form of autonomy, is common in this group, too. Yet, here, it is less tied up with conformity. Notable differences are the greater insecurity about the partner’s desire to have children, and about the care-giving role of the woman herself. This doubt is reason for postponing motherhood, - a postponement, furthermore, that lasts much longer than among the women of immigrant origin. The native Dutch women are more knowledgeable about arrangements to facilitate parents. They suffer less from social control exerted by their informal network, or from negative images, than their non-native Dutch counterparts.

Points of departure for policy

The conclusion of our study is that thought about women’s emancipation cannot be separated from thought about care within the family. Therefore, emancipation policy and family policy should be much more connected.

Where the women themselves are concerned, their level of education turns out to be a powerful factor for the extent of their autonomy and participation. For this reason, investments
in education, through pre-school and early-school education programmes, integration curricula and extra training continue to be of great importance. Because the allochtonous women are, comparatively speaking, frequent ‘stackers’, and think positively about ‘lifelong learning’, they should be offered as many opportunities to do this as possible.
The children’s upbringing in the family influences their chances within the educational system, the development of their caring habitus, and the women’s inclination to conformity.
Today’s parents are found to be favourably disposed to change, but they have many questions about how they should proceed. It is very important to offer pedagogical support which connects to these questions. Programmes providing such support should also pay attention to the development in both mothers and their daughters, of the capacities needed for autonomous functioning and social participation. Likewise, the encouragement of the social participation of women who are yet unable or unwilling to participate in paid employment, should take as its explicit point of departure empowerment, increasing the women’s own will power and capacities.
Women who do not work outside the house, or seldom do so, may be encouraged to participate in several different ways. These may vary from support to engage in volunteer work, and maintaining their connection to the labour market or their vocational skills, to facilitating their reintegration on the labour market.
Often, women of immigrant origin who are employed outside the house are pioneers where the combination of work and care is concerned. They are relatively uninformed about the arrangements or opportunities (for support) related to the combination of these tasks. Ideally, the exchange and dissemination of information should already begin before the phase of starting a family, for example by using role models and mentors among their peers. The partners, too, may be involved in this educational programme, in the context of the effort to attain a more equal division of tasks. In order to bring about a change in mentality among the men, policy makers might capitalise on the fact that participation in the children’s upbringing is more acceptable to non-native Dutch fathers, than the sharing of domestic chores.
After all, the process of the double emancipation of women of immigrant origin is served by nuancing the images about immigrants and Muslims, and by combating their discrimination on the labour market.