

# Parallel Lives on the Plaza: Young Dutch Women of Turkish and Moroccan Descent and Their Feelings of Comfort and Control on Rotterdam's *Schouwburgplein*

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## Abstract

In the last two decades, many city center plazas in the Netherlands have been redeveloped to become more attractive “meeting spaces” and not merely profitable “market places.” This article analyzes the use and experience of *Schouwburgplein*, an urban plaza in Rotterdam, as meeting space by young Dutch women of Turkish and Moroccan descent. Our analysis reveals a paradoxical interplay between “social comfort” and “social control” in public space. To feel comfortable, the young women avoid interaction with non-befriended young men of immigrant descent and use the plaza in company of friends and family, mostly young females of immigrant descent. However, being among known and unknown youth of Turkish and Moroccan descent on the plaza also implies subjecting oneself to uncomfortable social control. Moreover, the young women of Turkish and Moroccan descent seem occupied with being part of what they consider “their” youth group and some even reveal indifference toward “others” on *Schouwburgplein*—resulting in “parallel lives” on the plaza.

## Keywords

public space, diversity, comfort, control, youth, immigrant descent, *Schouwburgplein*

## Introduction

In recent decades, many city centers and their plazas have been redeveloped with the idea that public space should not only be an economic “market place” generating consumer spending (Clark, Lloyd, Wong, & Jain, 2002; Madanipour, 2006; Spierings, 2013; Van Melik, Van Aalst, & Van Weesep, 2007), but should—first and foremost—be a social “meeting space” for a variety of people (Haas & Olsson, 2014; Iveson, 2007; Lofland, 1973; Sennett, 1978). The underlying argument is that spaces displaying a diversity of consumer services as well as sociocultural mixture (i.e., in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, and class) provide favorable conditions for encounters with

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“others” (Lofland, 1998; Young, 1990), which could promote social cohesion, tolerance, and safety in the city—and ultimately urban cosmopolitanism (Lofland, 2000).

*Schouwburgplein* (Theatre plaza) in the Dutch City of Rotterdam is a revealing example of this social policy ambition for public space. This plaza in the heart of the city center was not only redeveloped in 1997 to create a “cultural heart” attracting more consumers (Van Melik, 2008), but also a meeting place for a diversity of people (Moscoviter, 1997). The municipality explicitly put the interrelation between public space and sociocultural diversity high on the policy agenda by arguing that its city center should serve as “city lounge” (City of Rotterdam, 2008). This implies that city center public space, including *Schouwburgplein*, should “invite to meet others and stay longer” (City of Rotterdam, 2011, translated by the authors). As such, the aim is to “intensify *Schouwburgplein* as hospitable, metropolitan, cultural plaza for *all the people from Rotterdam*” (City of Rotterdam, 2012, translated and italics added by the authors).

This article analyses the use and experience of Rotterdam’s *Schouwburgplein* as meeting space by young Dutch women (18- to 25-year-old) of Turkish and Moroccan descent. The focus was put on these young women for three reasons. First, young women born to immigrant parents in general (i.e., second- and third-generation immigrants) have received relatively little attention until now in public-space literature, despite an emerging debate around the use and experience of public space by women of immigrant descent (e.g., Ehrkamp, 2013; Jókövi, 2000; L’Aoustet & Griffet, 2004; Peleman, 2003; Van Lieshout & Aarts, 2008; Wagner & Peters, 2014; Yücesoy, 2006). Second, our female respondents seem of high interest to the public-space debate because they have to deal with two often contradicting sets of norms and values due to their Muslim background—those reflecting how parents believe one should behave in public space and those set by themselves, desiring a more free life (see Santelli, 2009). Third, youth of Turkish and Moroccan descent together are an important youth group of non-Western descent in Rotterdam (COS, 2012), and as our research revealed, both ethnic groups are to a high degree similar in their use and experience of *Schouwburgplein*.

Following a theoretical section on public space, urban youth, and sociocultural diversity as well as a description of the research design, including the plaza under scrutiny, we analyze the use and experience of Rotterdam’s *Schouwburgplein* by young Dutch women of Turkish and Moroccan descent, based on in-depth interviews and systematic observations. The research results show that to feel comfortable, the respondents visit the plaza together with friends and family, mostly young females of immigrant descent, and avoid non-befriended young men of immigrant descent. However, when visiting the plaza, they subject themselves to uncomfortable social control at the same time. Altogether, this implies a paradoxical interplay between “social comfort” and (uncomfortable) “social control” in public space for these young women.

## Public Space, Urban Youth, and Sociocultural Diversity

### *Diversity, Freedom, and Interaction*

Urban public space is often defined as not only physically but also socially open and accessible space where people from all kinds of backgrounds can congregate and interact (e.g., Francis, 1989; Jacobs, 1961; Lofland, 1998; Sennett, 1978; Young, 1990). As such, it has an important social function implying “encounters between strangers, people outside the life of family and close friends and within the region of diverse, complex social groups” (Ruppert, 2006, p. 272). It is in public space where diverse human and nonhuman elements are “thrown together” (Massey, 2005) providing many opportunities for a “being together of strangers” (Young, 1990) and encounters with others and otherness (Valentine, 2008). Idealistically, public spaces facilitate encounters among people with different social and cultural backgrounds resulting in the development of social ties in cities, the enhancement of urban tolerance and the rise of cosmopolitan citizens (Amin, 2012; Fainstein, 2005; Wessel, 2009).

Encounters with sociocultural difference in public space play an important role in the development of young people's identity during the transition from dependent youngsters to independent adults (Robinson, 2000). Young people compare themselves to friends, other contemporaries, and society as a whole through encounters with peers and other public-space users. In so doing, they can be confronted with other norms and values and ones that they may have been unaware of. Therefore, public spaces like streets and plazas are not just sites for them to hang out but also sites to learn and develop, because there is less control ("places of retreat") and more encounters ("places of interaction") compared with staying at home (Lieberg, 1997). Escaping from adult supervision and being "able to be a stranger among strangers" (Lieberg, 1995, p. 731) promises youth "freedom from the demands and expectations of family, school and associations" (Lieberg, 1995, p. 730) connected with the experience of privacy and anonymity in public space (Kraack & Kenway, 2002; Van Lieshout & Aarts, 2008). In this context, L'Aoustet and Griffet (2004, p. 185) even talk about "temporary forgetting of differences in ethnic background, generation and/or class, and help make the park one of the most liberating places in the communication of a city"—illustrating the enduring importance of public spaces for young people's urban lives despite social and technological developments such as the rise of social media.

Goffman (1963) distinguished two forms of encounters or interaction in public space: focused and unfocused. Focused interaction is a form of encounter between people who participate in a shared activity or have direct conversation. In that case, they often have a "common background, common interests or common problems" (Gehl, 2001, p. 53). Unfocused interaction occurs among people who share the same space but are not communicating in a direct and face-to-face manner, such as glancing at people passing by. This form of often very brief encounters, which Lofland (1989) defined as "co-presence without co-mingling," prevails in situations when and where people are among strangers. Such unfocused interaction is also of great importance to and beneficial for urban life, because the "rubbing along" (Watson, 2006) of strangers helps people differentiate between "us" and "them," develop "public familiarity" with others, and achieve the feeling of comfortable "co-presence" (Blokland & Savage, 2008; Peters, 2010).

### *Precaution, Parochialism, and Splintering*

Some people may very well be comfortable when being among strangers. They value the opportunities offered by public space for encountering difference and even deliberately seek the experience of the unfamiliar (Spierings & Van der Velde, 2013). In contrast, others may be much more hesitant to have encounters with difference and consider them unwanted, are afraid of the unknown, and may even perceive a socioculturally diverse public space as a threatening and dangerous (Watson, 2006).

In the case of the latter, people often adopt precautionary practices, including both protective and avoidance strategies, to feel more comfortable in cities with many strangers (Brownlow, 2005; Koskela, 1999; Riger, Gordon, & LeBailly, 1982). Protective strategies involve those behaviors "that seek to reduce or deter the risk of fear by increasing the ability to deter or resist a criminal act" (Miethe, 1995, p. 23). People may protect themselves by using a weapon (e.g., pepper spray) and by holding a mobile phone in their hand, for instance. They may also avoid eye-contact with particular people and only entering certain public spaces as a group. Being together with friends can create strong feelings of comfort and safety because members of the group are able to intervene and help in case of an emergency (Roberts & Eldridge, 2009). Avoidance strategies involve the "physical withdrawal from dangerous situation and places" (Miethe, 1995, p. 23). People may avoid particular spaces that are perceived as rather risky (e.g., empty alleys or very busy squares), avoid contact with specific strangers (e.g., homeless people), and avoid being outside at certain times of the day (e.g., after dark).

An important reason for adopting both protective and avoidance strategies is the clear presence and perhaps even dominance of a particular user group in public space—and as such the absence

of other user groups. Lofland (1998) coined the term *parochialism* to describe how the clear presence and related spatial and psychological claim of one group—such as homeless people but also skateboarders (see Chiu, 2009) and youngsters “hanging out” (Van Lieshout & Aarts, 2008)—can result in other users not feeling at home and even prevent them from using that public space.

According to Duyvendak (2011), feeling at home is a selective process, both inclusive and exclusive. You cannot feel at home everywhere and with everybody. Including “ourselves” in a certain space automatically implies excluding “others” as well as defining “us” as opposed to “them,” implying a limitation of the social openness and accessibility of public space. For example, the construction and expression of masculine identity in public space may create places that women want to avoid—and at the same time trigger the construction and expression of feminine identity as vulnerable and fearful (Day, 2001). Those public spaces may be still visited by women, though, but only for certain purposes, at particular times, and in specific social settings. Based on a study of a neighborhood in Barcelona, Spain, by Ortiz, Dolors Garcia-Ramon, and Prats (2004), women of immigrant descent mostly seemed to use public spaces with a substantial presence of men of immigrant descent on an infrequent basis and as an area for transit and rather than for meeting purposes. According to Green and Singleton (2006), young women (of immigrant descent) in the north of England aim to avoid men (of immigrant descent) because of the risk of male harassment and physical violence, but also of public gossip—in case of “being seen in the wrong place at the wrong time” and related reputation damage. In this context, Peleman (2003, p. 158) talked about a male “Moroccan tamtam” that “spreads gossip to anybody who might be interested” in the Belgian city of Antwerp. Yücesoy (2006) added that married and first-generation Turkish women in general are only allowed to visit Dutch public spaces in the social setting of Turkish family members or friends. They often do not seem to desire interaction with “others” themselves nor do their husbands approve doing so. However, Peleman (2003), Ehrkamp (2013), and Wagner and Peters (2014) discussed (young) women of Turkish and Moroccan descent affirming as well as challenging restrictions—enforced by often older males but also older females, including parents—and involved expectations on how to behave in public space.

Based on the processes of sociocultural segregation and exclusion discussed above, one could argue that full social openness and accessibility of any street or plaza seems impossible to achieve and is probably only based on a “highly idealized” image of public space (Mitchell, 1995). Moreover, even when a high degree of sociocultural diversity exists in public space, this does not always mean that automatically a great deal of interaction takes place. Different ethnic groups may perform different practices in separate sections of the same space, “splinter[ing] cities into non-communicating fragments” (Langegger, 2013, p. 3364). According to Holland, Clark, Katz, and Peace (2007, p. x), such splintering may also occur along age lines as they found that “different groups within and between different age groups co-exist and observe each other even if they have little direct interaction.” Lofland (1998) added that people may not even perceive the opportunity to interact because they simply fail to see the different other in the same place. As such, the production of “parallel lives” (Valentine, 2008) or an “archipelago of enclaves” (Hajer & Reijndorp, 2001) in public space may sometimes rather occur due to indifference toward than a dislike or even fear of strangers and otherness.

## Research Design

For our empirical analysis of young Dutch women of Turkish and Moroccan descent’s use and experience of Rotterdam’s *Schouwburgplein*, we relied on systematic observations of plaza users’ characteristics and activities as well as in-depth interviews with the young women.

We systematically made multiple observations during both March and October 2010 on different days and times. We counted and registered the number of users (categorized by gender, estimated age, and probable ethnicity), the size of the groups, and the users’ activities performed on the plaza. The observations were used to acquire descriptive information to complement the

**Table 1.** Centre for Research and Statistics (COS), Youth (and Non-Youth) in Rotterdam According to Age and Ethnicity (%), 2012.

	0-12 Years	13-17 Years	18-25 Years	(13-25 Years), Youth total	26+
Surinam & Antillean	13	17	16	16	11
Turkish & Moroccan	23	26	16	20	12
Other non-Western	13	13	13	13	09
<i>Subtotal non-Western</i>	49	55	45	48	31
Western non-natives	10	08	12	11	12
Native Dutch	41	37	43	41	57
<i>Subtotal Western</i>	51	45	55	52	69
Youth total	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Courtesy of Centre for Research and Statistics (COS), Rotterdam.

data collected from in-depth interviews with 12 young Dutch women—6 of Moroccan and 6 of Turkish descent—who use Rotterdam's *Schouwburgplein* on a regular basis. The interviewees' age ranged between 18 and 25 years. All respondents were in vocational education (MBO), applied universities (HBO), or traditional universities (WO). They all lived in (the surroundings of) Rotterdam, 11 respondents in their parental home.

The interviews were conducted in the spring of 2010 and ranged in length between 45 and 60 minutes. The choice for the location of the interviews was left to the participant with the idea that they could choose a place where they would feel comfortable to talk. Some took place in a semi-public space, such as a coffee bar, others at the participant's educational institution. All interviews were audiotaped, transcribed, coded, and analyzed. All quotes in this article were translated from Dutch. To respect the respondents' anonymity, the names of the interviewed females are fictitious.

Our empirical analysis is situated in Rotterdam—the second largest city in the Netherlands with a population of around 600,000 inhabitants. The city is an interesting case study for our research on public space and sociocultural diversity because relatively speaking it is an ethnically diverse city in the Netherlands, with above-average shares of people (having parents) born outside the Netherlands (CBS Statline, 2014).

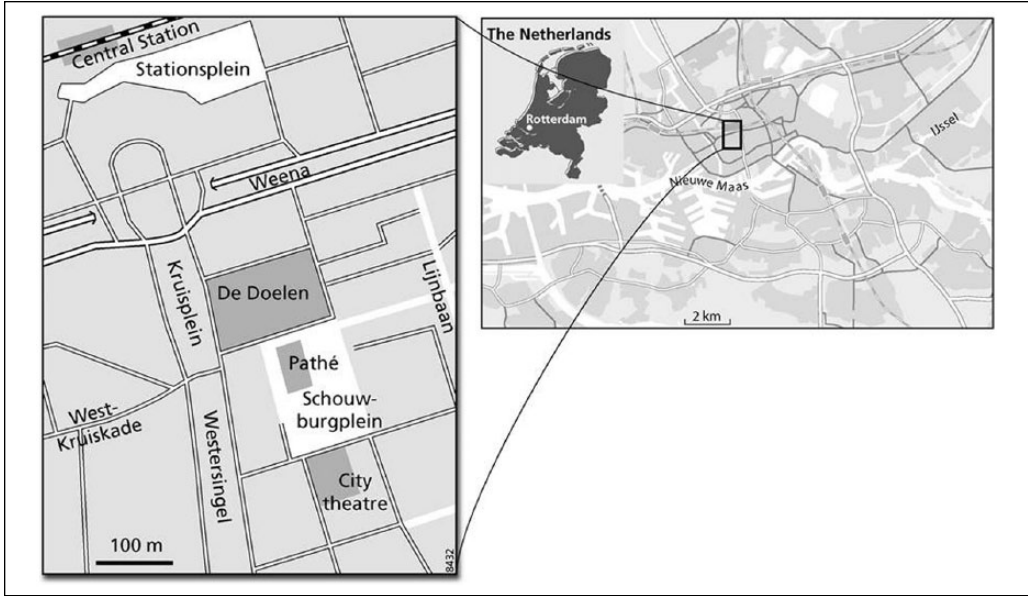
As Table 1 shows, youth (aged between 13 and 25 years) of Turkish and Moroccan descent accounted for one fifth of all young people living in Rotterdam in 2012. In total almost half of the city's youths were of non-Western descent. For the selected age group of 18 to 25 years (young adults), 16% were of Turkish and Moroccan descent—making it one of two most important groups of non-Western descent of that particular age group in Rotterdam.

*Schouwburgplein* is a plaza of 12,250 square meters situated in the city center of Rotterdam (see Figure 1). The square accommodates the city theatre, the Doelen concert hall and congress center, a Pathé multiplex cinema, cafés, and restaurants. Raised 35 centimeters above ground level, the plaza is designed as an "urban stage" where events can be organized (hence its relatively large scale) and also a place that would be an attraction on its own due to its design, which is inspired by the city's maritime past with high light poles shaped like hoisting cranes. Furthermore, it has wooden benches over the entire length of the plaza (see Figure 2).

## The Use and Experience of *Schouwburgplein*

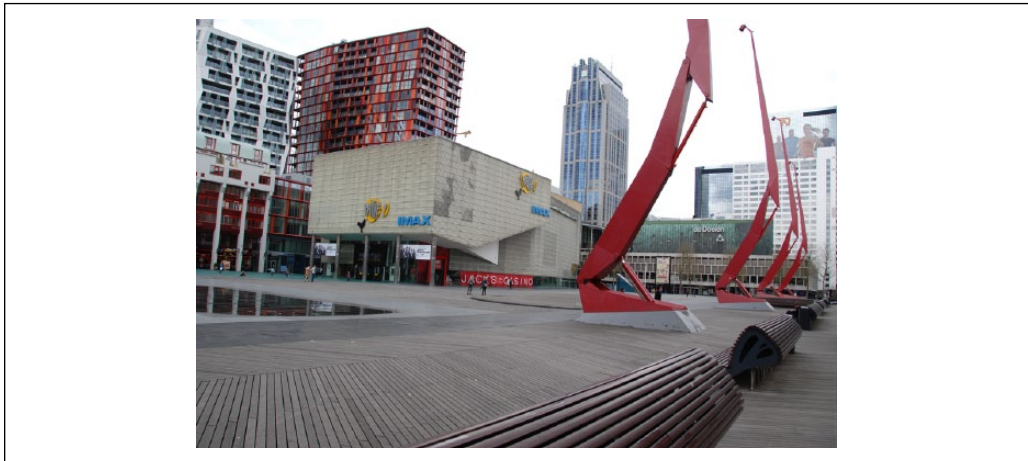
### *Meeting and Chatting*

In general, the observations revealed that *Schouwburgplein* is a socioculturally diverse public space in terms of the gender, age, and ethnicity of its users, although young people (between 18 and 25 years of age) are relatively more prevalent than people of other ages. At certain times, they



**Figure 1.** MarCom Carto, Rotterdam city center, 2013, map.

Source: Image courtesy of MarCom Carto, Faculty of Geosciences, Utrecht University.



**Figure 2.** Schouwburgplein and its design, 2015, picture.

Source: First author.

even clearly dominate the plaza. During those evenings, the benches are the main domain of youth whereas other age groups are more present on *Schouwburgplein* during other days and time periods. According to Gadia (20), the predominance of youth “hanging out” makes the plaza not a very suitable space to visit with parents and family. Meysa (21) added that you just do not want to be “made a pass at when in company of your father.” Assia (21) summarized by arguing that “nature, parks and green” equals “family”—illustrating both the preference of immigrant groups for visiting parks (Jókövi, 2000) and the related focus on family-oriented leisure (Stodolska &

Livengood, 2006)—while “crowdedness, buildings and the city” imply “female friends.” This quote also pinpoints that the young women usually visit *Schouwburgplein* together with other young women who are their friends and family. Male friends may be present as well but mostly they are not. As Azize (19) described:

Most of the time I am together with female friends but sometimes with male friends as well. The things we do then are the same as with female friends really: just sitting around, chatting and watching people passing by.

The observations revealed that, like many other *Schouwburgplein* users, young women with an Arabic appearance and of probable Turkish and Moroccan descent often use *Schouwburgplein* to pass through, predominantly while accompanied. When actually staying on the plaza, they most often use it for visiting the Pathé cinema and waiting there before going to the movies, sometimes in small groups but most often in duos. According to our respondents, visits to the cinema and preceding meetings on *Schouwburgplein* are usually planned. The observations also revealed that young women of probable Turkish and Moroccan descent mostly use the benches during the afternoon and early evening on Friday and Saturday, usually together with someone else or in small groups. When sitting alone they have planned to meet with someone there. However, our respondents argued that sitting on the benches usually is done unplanned and with the purpose of resting after walking around and shopping.

### *Avoiding and Flirting*

The observations showed the largest number of young women of probable Turkish and Moroccan descent on Friday in the early evening—although young White women of probable Western descent and young Black women of probable Surinamese or Antillean descent are relatively more prevalent then. Only a few of our respondents indicated that they avoid *Schouwburgplein* on Fridays particularly in the evening when there is late night shopping in Rotterdam. A lot of young people are hanging around then because, according to Feyza (19), “they all assemble here on *Schouwburgplein*.” Moenia (23) added that she finds it too busy during late night shopping and she does not like the crowd because guys “will trouble you.” Young males hanging around approach them like “hyenas,” as Tugba (20) expressed it, making our respondents feel annoyed. They usually feel uncomfortable in public space due to the presence of young men of Turkish and Moroccan descent in particular—reflecting “parochialism” (Lofland 1998). Tugba (20) explained:

I do feel uncomfortable when guys are standing around. Then I think “pay attention to what you do, you must not fall when wearing high heels and they will start calling you names.” Or when you ignore their advances, they will respond with “hey you, slut.” I do feel uncomfortable because of that.

Our respondents argued that when spending time on the plaza, they usually strategically locate themselves to stay away as much as possible from young men of Turkish and Moroccan descent, in particular those they do not know through friendship networks. When sitting next to a group of guys, “you just know that sooner or later they will start talking to you,” according to Dünya (22). Our respondents go sit somewhere else when being troubled, as Lila (19) argued, but also often apply “avoidance strategies” beforehand by choosing not to sit where the guys usually hang out and using additional “protective strategies”—like going to or meeting up with female company on the plaza (cf. Miethé, 1995). Tugba (20) explained:

I will not sit down “at the beginning” [respondent pointed at the side of the benches next to the small walking bridge close to De Doelen] because that is where the guys usually are. If you are Moroccan

or Turkish, they will trouble you... That is why I always sit in the middle. They do not come there. And when I am alone, just listening to music and showing that I am not rather uninterested, they will also not come. When I am together with my cousins, they will not come either because then they do not dare to do so.

Other respondents feel it is okay when guys only make conversation or make an advance once. Tulin (19) added that:

It is annoying when they continue making advances. Then you think "I should not have come here" or "let's go away." When living in Rotterdam you do get used to it though. There are more guys here just trying to be funny together with their group of friends. And that's usually where it ends (. . .) I also have never ever experienced anything really unpleasant here [*Schouwburgplein*].

At the same time, some young women certainly do not mind the advances by the young men. They even see and use the plaza as a space for dating and flirting. In this context, Nada (18) argued:

Some girls give their phone numbers to guys here [*Schouwburgplein*] (. . .) They live in Rotterdam but may also come from other cities and know that this is the "place to be." They also know which days and what times are best (. . .) Some of my female friends who live in other cities also come here to get a guy. Especially during late night shopping [on Friday] people come from Den Haag, Amsterdam, Utrecht, and Eindhoven.

### *Pressure and Gossiping*

Although some young women are said not to mind advances, most of our respondents reason that they do not use *Schouwburgplein* for dating and flirting. The fear of gossiping by youth of Turkish and Moroccan descent as well as getting comments from young men of Turkish and Moroccan descent in particular prevents them to do so. The fear becomes more intense when in company of a man of non-immigrant descent. As Nada (18) explained:

Whenever I am here [*Schouwburgplein*] together with a Dutch guy, they [young men of Moroccan descent] look at me in a really strange way and interfere with our conversation. Then they call you an "Arabic slut who has been completely dutchified" ["verkaast"].

Dide (19) added that she very often gets comments from guys of Turkish or Moroccan descent, who condemn that her boyfriend is "foreign but not Turkish." Thus, group pressure seems to be quite high for young Dutch women of Turkish and Moroccan descent on *Schouwburgplein*. Our respondents experience strong social control by other young people of Turkish and Moroccan descent, whether they are known to them or not. *Schouwburgplein* is thus not a place where our respondents can be "strangers among strangers" (Lieberg, 1997). Tugba (20) clarified by saying:

If I would get to know a guy I would never come to this plaza. Just imagine what would happen if I would do that often with different guys and other girls are around. They would then think "what kind of girl is that? First she makes an appointment with this one, then another one and then even another one." I would prefer to go to a cafe somewhere else in the city. Because believe me, Turkish gossip is faster than the Internet!

The respondents feel that social control limits their potential range of behavior. *Schouwburgplein* offers them quite the opposite of the privacy and anonymity that Lieberg (1995) and Van Lieshout and Aarts (2008) attribute to urban public space for youth, in general, and youth of immigrant descent, in particular.



### Attachment and Othering

Our respondents seem very much focused on what they see as their “own group,” feeling a strong sense of attachment to it. As Assia (21) stated:

I believe that Moroccans stick together strongly. They are also very much interested in each other. Whenever you enter a space and you see a Moroccan girl sitting somewhere, you take a look, look again and once more ( . . . ) Whereas if the same girl was of non-immigrant descent then she would not be paid attention to.

This quote also helps explain why the respondents often typified *Schouwburgplein* as a space for youth and for youngsters of Turkish and Moroccan descent in particular—although our observations revealed a different picture of a more mixed user group on both the plaza and its benches. Relatively large numbers of youth of probable Turkish and Moroccan descent are present on Friday evening. Then, most of the bench users are of probable Turkish and Moroccan descent and also of probable Surinamese and Antillean descent, while a substantial number of youngsters of probable Western descent can also be witnessed on the plaza. Throughout the week many users of the plaza seem of Western descent, while other ethnic groups can be noticed as well. However, some respondents do not even seem to be aware of or perceive this sociocultural diversity on the plaza—illustrating the argument by Lofland (1998) that people sometimes fail to see “others” in public space. Some other respondents do give examples of “others” on the plaza though. Dide (19), for instance, mentioned that during summer time, families with small children, walking through the water fountains, may visit *Schouwburgplein*. Some respondents noticed elderly on the plaza and some spot people who seem “interested in culture” once and a while—referring to the cultural facilities on the plaza. A few of them talked about young skaters of non-immigrant descent but they have never spoken to them.

When confronted with the observation that many young people of nonimmigrant descent use the plaza, Assia (21) responded by saying that she does not notice them because she is not really interested in youth of nonimmigrant descent. She is “very much occupied with ‘my own kind of people’.” In general, the young Dutch women of Turkish and Moroccan descent clearly stress their ethnic identity by making a distinction between “us” as “Turkish” and “Moroccan” and “them” as “native Dutch” people. The young women mostly visit the plaza in company of other young and befriended women of Turkish and Moroccan descent, as the observations revealed as well. Our respondents are also very much aware of and occupied with the presence on the plaza of other youth, male and female, of similar descent. Contrary to the argument by L’Aoustet and Griffet (2004) that differences of ethnic background could be forgotten temporarily in public space, the young women very much stressed their immigrant background in defining and demarcating the ethnic group they feel they belong to, comprising both known and unknown young people on the plaza.

### Conclusions

The observed sociocultural diversity at *Schouwburgplein* potentially offers young people opportunities for interacting—focused and unfocused—with “others” and, at the same time, promises them the experience of freedom, associated with privacy and anonymity in public space. However, our semistructured interviews with young Dutch women of Turkish and Moroccan descent reveals a paradoxical interplay on *Schouwburgplein* between social comfort and social control—experienced by our respondents as uncomfortable.

Particularly the presence of young men of Turkish and Moroccan descent, who could, and often will, make comments and advances produces a feeling of discomfort among the young women of Turkish and Moroccan descent. Ortiz et al. (2004) also raise this argument for women

of immigrant descent but, drawing on Koskela (1999), this may rather be a generic female–male issue than a specific immigrant descent-related issue. For the experience of more “social comfort” on *Schouwburgplein*, the young women use different strategies, such as not visiting the plaza on Friday evening, avoiding non-befriended young men of Turkish and Moroccan descent in particular by specifically selecting locations on the benches where the men are not hanging out and by strategically accompanying themselves with family and friends, mostly young females of Turkish and Moroccan descent. The latter seems to be an important protective strategy, which may still also reflect parents’ norms of how to behave in public space, following Yücesoy’s (2006) observation that first-generation Turkish women in the Netherlands only visit public spaces in company of family and friends and that interaction with “others” is often neither desired nor approved. However, Peleman (2003), Ehrkamp (2013), and Wagner and Peters (2014) question “older (fe)male-enforced restrictions” by arguing that younger women often challenge these restrictions and accompanying rules on how to behave in public space. This again may be in line with the fact that making new contacts and dating with young men is not considered unwanted by all young women. Overall, however, our respondents mostly ascribed flirting practices to other young women rather than themselves.

At the same time, the presence of other, known and unknown, young women as well as men of Turkish and Moroccan descent produces a feeling of discomfort because they provide constant social surveillance. Being on the plaza generates the risk of public gossip and even reputation damage—something which, according to Green and Singleton (2006), is a rather a generic female–male issue than a specific immigrant descent-related issue. The inspecting gaze, condemning comments, and normalizing gossip of both known and unknown youth of Turkish and Moroccan descent seem to operate as a strong power in the Foucauldian sense, regulating and disciplining the behavior of the young women on the plaza. Altogether, visiting *Schouwburgplein* means no parental control but it is replaced, or rather extended as “a set of actions upon other actions” (Foucault, 1982, p. 789), by strong and uncomfortable on-site “social control” when being among known and being confronted with unknown youth of Turkish and Moroccan descent.

Thus, young Dutch women of Turkish and Moroccan descent on *Schouwburgplein* rather experience the opposite of the freedom associated with privacy and anonymity, often promised by sociocultural diversity in urban public space. Nevertheless, they still use the plaza on a regular basis, despite this constant social surveillance by other youth of similar descent which—through disciplining effects—limits our respondents’ potential range of behavior, thus producing “young (fe)male enforced restrictions.” They meet and “hang out” on the plaza with people they know and sometimes flirt with people they do not know, challenging (parental and peer) morality and expectations on how to behave in public space. The young women seem to prefer group control on the plaza over parental control at home. Although both types of control cannot be separated because their power is interrelated, being on the plaza presumably provides the young women with relatively greater freedom than when staying in or close to the home and it simultaneously provides them with the opportunity to “be together and belong to the[ir] group,” as Lieberg (1995, p. 730) would put it.

Our respondents seem occupied with “focused interaction” on the plaza with people from inside what they consider “their group” of youth of Turkish and Moroccan descent—reflecting what Lofland (1989, p. 462) calls a “co-presence without co-mingling.” Moreover, some of the young women seem unaware of and some even indifferent toward “others,” implying a rather low degree of “unfocused interaction” with “others” on the plaza. The young Dutch women are very much preoccupied with being part of an ethnic youth group and, in so doing, constructing the meaning of having a Turkish and Moroccan identity and maintaining both a respectable image and comfortable setting as a young woman within the group.

Thus, for young Dutch women of Turkish and Moroccan descent, the plaza rather provides an urban platform for constructing “us” (in terms of being of Turkish and Moroccan background) as opposed to “them” (in terms of having a “native Dutch” identity) and for “cocooning” in protective and comforting sameness (often both gender and ethnicity-based) rather than for meeting a diversity of people. Considering our respondents’ use and experience of *Schouwburgplein*, the plaza does not seem to live up to its policy ambition of being a meeting place for diverse people. It rather reveals a coexistence of diverse people, sharing the same space but living “together in difference” through “parallel lives” (Valentine, 2008) on the plaza.

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### Key Online Resources

- <http://www.rotterdam.nl/binnenstadrotterdam> [City Centre of Rotterdam] (Dutch only)
- <http://planyourcity.net/2013/11/27/schouwburgplein-more-than-meets-the-eye/>
- <http://www.pps.org/>
- <https://archive.org/details/SmallUrbanSpaces>

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