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## **CIVILIZING THE CITY: Revanchist Urbanism in Rotterdam (The Netherlands)**

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**ABSTRACT:**

In this paper we discuss the relevance of American literature on ‘revanchist urbanism’ for understanding urban policies in European cities, particularly Rotterdam. We suggest that the literature is pertinent in several respects but the case study also shows that Rotterdam exhibits some distinctive features that have to do with conditions not present in the United States. More specifically, we suggest that revanchist urbanism in the European context takes on a different *form* than in the United States. For several reasons, European state officials are far more likely to identify segregation as a problem and integration as a solution to ethnic tensions. In addition, we do not observe a wholesale displacement of social-democratic policies by revanchist policies. Many policy measures which formed part and parcel of a social-democratic urban project – anti-segregation policies, policies to promote social cohesion – are not abandoned but instead redefined and reconfigured so that they can be incorporated into more revanchist strategies.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

All kinds of recent policy developments seem to betray an increasing distrust of authorities against residents of marginalised spaces. Slowly but steadily, European cities seem to go the same way as the United States: welfare is being restructured into workfare, inter-territorial competition is taking precedence over solidarity and zero-tolerance policing is replacing soft paternalism. Some of the most ambitious analyses of urban dynamics have attempted to contextualise these policy changes as part of a global urban strategy to re-conquer the city for capital and the middle classes (Smith, 2002). Cities are becoming less and less sensitive to the demands of their vulnerable inhabitants and are increasingly resorting to punitive strategies to reorganise the city according to the tastes and interests of middle classes.

This redirection of policy is often informed by neo-conservative and neo-liberal discourses that hold the residents of disadvantaged areas responsible for their own plight. Smith calls such discourses ‘revanchist’ since their basic proposition is that the city has been taken away from the decent, white middle classes by a diversity of groups who share little more than their marginal status: drug dealers, delinquents, single mothers, gangsters, sex workers, the unemployed, ethnic minorities, etc. After a period in which the reform of the ‘incivilities’ perpetrated by these groups was deemed a viable and legitimate enterprise, we now seem to have entered an era that is marked by segregation, separation and authoritarianism rather than reform (Davis, 1990; Cruikshank, 2004).

In this sense, zero-tolerance policing and state-sponsored gentrification seem to be closely connected to a more encompassing shift from welfare to penal states (Bourdieu et al., 1999; Wacquant, 1997a). Revanchism in its purest form, we would suggest, is predicated on a belief system that *naturalises* as universal the interests and cultural codes of the white middle class while it at the same *essentialises* marginalised individuals into subjects who cannot be reformed. This ideological construction provides legitimacy to a state policy that aims to take back the city and take revenge on those who have occupied it (see Smith, 1996, 1999a, b, 2002).

Needless to say, this is a somewhat stylised representation of Smith’s already radical account. In reality, there are many countertendencies and nuances to be identified,

even in New York and Los Angeles, the cities that have inspired most of the critical or even dystopian analyses of urban dynamics. The point of sketching an ideal-type, however, is to be able to make distinctions and trace developments.

In this sense, the revanchist city can be contrasted with another ideal-type, that of the reformist city of the 1960s and 1970s, a city in which urban marginality was present but was considered as a *social problem* that could be cured through institutional reform and welfare. If we read the literature correctly, there seems to be a general consensus that revanchism now is a dominant mode of governance in American cities whilst European cities are now moving in that direction as well. Thus, Beaten (2001) argues that a dystopian view of the city also dominates the political debate in Europe, for example, in the case of Brussels. MacLeod (2002) argues that Smith's concept of the revanchist city, developed to make sense of developments in New York under Giuliani, is applicable in Glasgow. Caldeira (1999) suggests that her research in Los Angeles and Rio de Janeiro may not be representative but that it highlights developments that can also be observed elsewhere, albeit in an underdeveloped form. Davis (1990) tellingly gave his apocalyptic account of urban development the subtitle 'excavating the future in Los Angeles'.

In this article, we follow this literature by 'testing' the concept of revanchism in our study of Rotterdam. If the concept does not fit in Rotterdam, its relevance for other cities in Europe may be doubtful as well. Rotterdam is the city in the Netherlands with the most severe urban problems and it is the only municipality where the populist politician Fortuyn ran for (and won the) elections and where his party became part of the local government. Rotterdam is so interesting, moreover, because this city has become an emblem (see Hajer, 1995: 20) for urban problems in the Netherlands and especially for problems that are associated with a large presence of ethnic minorities. The images and discourses on Rotterdam are central in the public and political debate on these issues and the city now serves as laboratory for experiments with new, 'tough' approaches to tackle urban problems (Uitermark & Duyvendak, 2005). While we can see experiments with such policies in every major city in the Netherlands, and indeed in Europe, we focus on Rotterdam because this case might show us in undisguised form the kind of policies that result in the treatment of urban ethnic minorities as a new 'dangerous class' (Morris

1994). The discourse on the city by the current local government betrays strong distrust against the present residents and a desire to reinstall middle class norms and values.

However, while we wish to argue that the case of Rotterdam shows the relevance of the literature on revanchism and the penal state, we also – on empirical as well as theoretical grounds - want to amend this literature and make it more sensitive to variety of *forms* in which contemporary revanchism manifests itself. More specifically, we suggest that, next to a shift towards repression, there are renewed attempts to *discipline* rather than *exclude* marginalised groups. Since attempts to discipline groups that are considered deviant are characteristic of many types of political regimes – including liberal or social-democratic ones – the prevalence of such attempts is not in and of itself a reason to qualify a political project as revanchist. We nevertheless consider revanchism a useful concept in the context of Rotterdam because of the fact that the repressive and disciplinary measures are introduced as part of a self-conscious attempt to first de-legitimise and then replace the institutions created under the former social-democratic governments.

We thus argue that revanchism in Rotterdam is *as intensive as but qualitatively different from* the revanchist project as it has been identified by Smith. This form of revanchism, we argue, can be explained by taking into account the form of the Dutch state, the political power configuration and the characteristics of the groups that are held responsible for urban decline (mainly ethnic minorities and progressive politicians). Since these conditions can also be found in many other European cities, we suggest that Rotterdam may present a type case of European revanchism.

## **2. REVANCHISM AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE PENAL STATE**

Contemporary revanchist policies seem to be, at least in part, an indirect response to rounds of economic ‘restructuring’. As a consequence of the decline of industrial employment, the job prospects for a large proportion of the labour population have worsened considerably. Ethnic minorities in particular were hit hard by plant closures as they were more dependent upon jobs in the manufacturing sector than whites. The effects of de-industrialization have been especially profound in the United States where

worsening labour market conditions have been reinforced by cuts in welfare state provisions and persistent racial discrimination (Massey & Denton, 1993; Wacquant, 2002a; Wilson, 1987, 1996).

A similar process has also been evident in European countries, even if it has been somewhat softened by a relatively comprehensive welfare state (Musterd & Ostendorf, 1998; Wilson, 1996). In the continental countries, Mediterranean immigrants and their offspring have been confronted most severely with the consequences of de-industrialisation. Even though the situation is (still) obviously not as alarming as in the United States, there are growing concerns over the emergence of a 'European underclass' (Musterd, 1994; Mingione, 1996). The rise of unemployment and the lack of prospects for secure and decent work have led some observers to talk about 'advanced marginality' as a new type of deprivation (Wacquant, 1995, 1999a). Groups and individuals who suffer from such marginality are targeted by all kinds of policies and concerted attempts are undertaken to prevent the formation of a group of which the members have consistently lower chances on the labour market, lower levels of education and lower prospects for escaping their marginal position.

The groups that have been confronted most dramatically with the inability or unwillingness of nation-states to provide secure jobs have also been most closely targeted by the emerging revanchist offensive. The fear of 'incivilities' more generally is closely associated with the fear of 'urban unrest', 'sensitive' neighbourhoods and 'youth' delinquency – terms that are, Wacquant (1999b: 319) argues, 'as vague as the phenomena they are alleged to designate.' Yet these are the terms that are central to policies developing all over Western Europe. These terms already indicate that the offensive is spatially (and hence socially) selective. It targets those places where marginalized ethnic groups reside: cities in general and disadvantaged neighbourhoods in particular. By holding these groups responsible for their own fate and that of their neighbourhoods, it becomes possible to legitimize forms of 'authoritarian governance' (Swyngedouw, 2000) that should recapture the city from the disadvantaged groups that allegedly degenerated it.

The 'need' for revanchist state action on a local scale is intensified by the growing importance of cities as sites for the (regulation of) capital accumulation. Processes of

political-economic re-scaling have resulted in a configuration wherein cities are more than before considered autonomous economic actors that, in the absence of full and unconditional financial support from central government, have to generate resources through their own entrepreneurial activities (Brenner, 1999; Uitermark, 2002).

Several geographers have recently argued that the revanchist offensive is the ‘darker side’ of the proliferation of an ‘entrepreneurial spirit’ that has in recent decades entered to differing degrees the minds of policy makers and politicians in almost all European cities (Hall & Hubbard, 1998; Ter Borg & Dijkink, 1995; Swyngedouw, 2000). As cities (perceive themselves to) become more dependent upon highly mobile tourists and investors, they are increasingly concerned about the quality of and safety in urban public space. Hence, investments in such attractions as museums, theme parks and themed neighbourhoods go hand in hand with attempts to remove or keep out elements that may degenerate urban space, such as the homeless and less resourceful groups more generally (Zukin, 1995; Smith, 1996; MacLeod, 2002; Swyngedouw, et al. 2002; Ward, 2003). These attempts to separate the tourist from the vagabond and the visitor from the refugee amount to attempts to *purify* space – to program space (Lefebvre, 1976), to neatly separate in all possible ways (functionally, visible, symbolically) spaces of selective exclusion that function as local residual spaces from the spaces of selective inclusion that are to be sold as commodities on an international market (Bauman, 1993; Urry, 2002). However, such neo-conservative efforts to ‘purify’ urban space arise from *aesthetic* and *moral* concerns as well:

Contemporary public spaces are designed to keep the frequency of uncomfortable encounters to a minimum and to maintain a rigid power relation between Whites and people of color when such encounters do take place, while at the same time maintaining a veneer of unity and homogeneity (McCann, 1999: 179)

Here, too, Europe seems to follow the USA in some respects. Especially in continental Europe (for instance in Belgium, France, Sweden and the Netherlands), recent years have seen a process of what might be called interethnic des-identification (De Swaan, 1997; Duyvendak, 2004a). The mounting support for (extremist) right-wing parties indicate that parts of the native population increasingly experience a large cultural distance between

themselves and (second-generation) ethnic minorities, resulting in emotional detachment and decreased inter-ethnic solidarity (De Beus, 1998). In this context, cities are increasingly seen as ‘dystopian’ spaces that have been ‘occupied’ by ethnic others, resulting in calls to sanitize space and quell sources of disruption (Baeten, 2001, 2002). Mental des-identification thus translates into physical separation.

In sum, there are two closely related processes at work that each implies a convergence of some sort between Europe and the USA towards urban revanchism. First, in the economic sphere, there is a (perceived) need to ‘control’ marginalized groups in order to safeguard the economic functioning of cities. Second, as large segments of the native population increasingly perceive a cultural distance between themselves and (large parts of) ethnic groups, the moral call for tough treatment and long prison sentences resounds harder.

We agree that this account has relevance in both the USA and Europe. However, in many European cities ‘mental’ segregation does not result in spatial strategies of separation and segregation. On the contrary, in many cities, like Rotterdam, housing policies aim at de-segregation of the population, at mingling. As we will see, in the perspective of Rotterdam’s policy makers, separation is not a solution to the degeneration of urban space. Stability has to be reached by mixing ‘dangerous’ elements and high(er) income households. If we want to appreciate the nature and intensity of the project that is currently unfolding in Europe, we need to amend the literature on revanchism before it is applied in the European context.

### **3. PARALLELS AND DIFFERENCES: WHY THE IMPORT OF ANGLO-SAXON THEORY DOES NOT SUFFICE**

In this section we identify two areas where West-European countries, especially continental countries, differ markedly from the USA: the position of cities within (national) institutional configurations and the history and nature of immigration and minority formation. Identifying these differences will help us to analyze the revanchist project as it has emerged in the city of Rotterdam.

### 3.1. Local-central interdependency

If we look at the interdependencies between cities and the central state, we can argue that European cities, very generally speaking, have more and stronger relationships with the central state than American cities (Savitch & Kantor, 2002)<sup>1</sup>. Since European central states, in general, account for a relatively large proportion of the costs for service provision, they have more incentives to invest in cities. This is especially evident in the Netherlands, where the central state provides around 80 per cent of local expenditures (Terhorst & van de Ven, 1995, 1998). Because of fiscal centralisation, the municipal balance is not so severely affected when the socio-economic position of its population deteriorates. In contrast, American cities are largely responsible for their own expenditure. As a consequence, they seem left with few choices other than to attract investors, affluent households and tourists and to exclude marginalized groups.

In addition, European cities generally have stronger political and economic linkages with the central state than American cities. A relatively large part of the electorate resides in cities and representatives of urban municipalities have relatively good access to national representatives and the central state apparatus. Probably the features of the urban fabric play a role here as well. Due to reasons we can not deal with here, cities in Europe generally have more spaces that groups with different social and ethnic backgrounds are ‘forced’ to share. Public transport, city squares and services are more accessible to all groups than is the case in the United States’ metropolitan areas. As a consequence, all kinds of urban malfunctioning (crime, nuisance, substandard provisions) affect a relatively large and diverse group and are thus more likely to create political controversy. This might explain why European politicians find it necessary to constantly make visits and references to disadvantaged urban areas: there is a general

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> It is obvious that due to the constitutional make-up of the American state the situation may differ markedly between different states, i.e. the level and nature of interdependencies between cities and their states varies widely. The same goes for European states, such as Germany, where the intermediate administrative and political level are relatively important. However, here we want to provide some very general observations that can be specified in concrete cases, such as that of Rotterdam, which we discuss below.

feeling that these areas might first experience threats that could spill over to other areas if they are not dealt with immediately.

With respect to economic performance, it is significant that the level of public and private investments in European cities is relatively large and that cities generally account for a large proportion of economic activity and growth. As a consequence, European central states will in general be more inclined to invest both politically and economically in Europe's (inner)cities. These fiscal, economic and political interdependencies between cities and central states explain in large part the relatively ambitious urban policies of European central states and the European Union (Terhorst & van de Ven, 1995; Savitch & Kantor, 2002).

Even though European cities are largely compensated for the costs that are associated with the presence of marginalised households, cities do receive incentives to manipulate the socio-economic composition of their populations. The central state stimulates cities to develop policies to strengthen their socio-economic profile; many urban policies are specifically meant to attract affluent households (Duyvendak & Veldboer, 2001; Musterd & De Winter, 1998; Uitermark, 2003a-b). Recently, the tasks of local governments have become more important. It is now common for central governments to demand of local governments to provide both positive (education, job application courses, etc.) and negative (fines, inspections, etc.) incentives to individual welfare recipients (Jones, 1998; Peck & Jones, 1995). Similarly, with the devolution of responsibilities, the local state plays an increasingly important role in the areas of policing, youth work and so forth. However, at the same time the central state's role as judge and jury of local policies becomes increasingly important. At least to some extent this also works the other way around: because municipal governments are interdependent with the central government, they are in a relatively strong position to demand from central government that it develops policies that are beneficial to cities and that will help it to manage the tensions that might result from the strong concentration of marginalised groups. Since ethnic groups in Europe are over-represented in such groups, like the black poor in the USA, it is important to briefly investigate the parallels and differences between the urban proletariats in the USA and Europe.

### 3.2 The ethnic question in Europe: domains of intervention

In the USA, the development of the welfare state has from the early start been closely connected with race issues. Some authors even argue that racism largely explains the underdeveloped state of American welfare; they suggest that key political actors have refrained from the implementation of welfare measures as a consequence of the weak political position of the black poor and the persistent prejudices against prospective welfare recipients (Alesina et al, 2001; Manzi, 2000). In any case, such groups have been hit hardest by the restructuring of the economy and the state after the gradual and ongoing dissolution of the Fordist welfare state (Wilson, 1987, 1996). However, in neo-liberal discourses, their disadvantaged position is explained with reference to personal attributes and attitudes. The 1980s have witnessed a down-scaling of poverty discourses from the national economy (cf New Deal) to the unemployed individual (Katz, 1990; Gans, 1995). As *economic* fortunes are effectively seen as resulting from *morals*, workfare programmes are designed to induce feelings of responsibility in the unemployed. The idea of the unemployed as individuals who suffer from defunct morals is thoroughly racialized. However, in marked contrast to the 1960s and 1970s, urban policies and public debate do not discuss race as a relevant variable in explaining urban poverty (Wacquant 2002b). Thus, whilst race continues to dominate imageries about urban violence and incivilities (e.g. Body-Gendrot, 2000; Smith & Feagin, 1995), group identities have a subordinate role in urban policy in the USA.

Even though the position of Europe's ethnic minorities is in some respects similar to that of African-Americans, the fact that Europe's poor are largely (offspring of) relatively recent immigrants is significant here. Their peculiar position within West-European societies opens up several fields for intervention that do not exist in the United States. This has to do with at least three related factors.

First, Europe's 'potential underclass' consists largely of relatively *recent* immigrants and their offspring. Thus, it is possible to argue that they are not *yet* integrated. Integration into a national society can therefore be held up as a goal that can be achieved if the proper policies are pursued. Such a policy stands in contrast to the USA where it would be bizarre indeed if policies are pursued to 'integrate' blacks, as a distinct target group, into a society where their ancestors have against their will been

incorporated into. This does not mean that in the USA no policies exist to integrate individuals into society but such policies are aimed at individuals, not at (ethnic) groups. Second, in Europe immigrants often have a language arrear. Thus, it is possible to argue, and many policy makers do, that their weak socio-economic position results from a factor that is specific to immigrants. Hence, language provides one of the policy areas through which ethnic minorities can be targeted as a discrete category for policy. Third, in addition to language, other cultural properties are also, and increasingly so, considered as obstacles to socio-economic development and integration into a national society (Duyvendak, 2004a; Koopmans, 2002). Again, policy makers in Europe do not 'need' to blame either a 'culture of poverty' or individuals. Instead, they can focus their attention on 'culture', understood as a set of values and norms that can be more or less compatible with the dominant culture. This third aspect has become of immediate importance in recent debates within Dutch society about the presumed negative effect of Islamic religion, and the cultural institutions with which it is associated, on the opportunities for integration (Blok, 2004; Duyvendak & Rijkschroeff, 2004).

These differences open up a whole range of possible governmental strategies: in Europe, a project that *'integrates' immigrants and their offspring into society* can be thought of as a potential solution. Such a project does not so much resemble the strategy of exclusion and segregation that appears to typify the United States (and many developing countries)<sup>2</sup> but rather seems a contemporary variant of a civilisation offensive<sup>3</sup> that was pressed upon the urban poor by the elite in the 19<sup>th</sup> and earlier half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Then as now, a sense of moral outrage and fear informed the actions of elites who tried to educate and discipline the 'dangerous classes' with language courses,

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<sup>2</sup> Though in the USA there are policies programs like Moving to Opportunity aiming at mixing and integration, these are marginal compared to massive segregation tendencies and often in practice reinforce the processes they are meant to counter.

<sup>3</sup> Civilisation offensive is the most accurate translation of a the Dutch concept of *beschavingsoffensief*. We are not alone in arguing that there are continuities between the civilisation offensive that was directed to the urban proletariat in the period of industrialisation and the current policies towards ethnic minorities. Two of the most influential figures in the public debate, Paul Scheffer (2000) and Gabriël van den Brink (2004), also make this comparison and argue that the contemporary ethnic question should be confronted with the same energy as the social question of hitherto. The latter has even provided a book-length argument to convince the public and policy makers that we are currently in need of a civilisation offensive that would counter incivilities and that would reinstall middle class norms in public life (Van den Brink, 2004).

house visits, education in democracy and, most important of all, a proper living environment (Rath, 1999). The images the current government of Rotterdam has of immigrants are in some respects similar to the image that paternalistic elites previously held of urban paupers: they lack the basic cultural capital to be responsible citizens but they can, in principle, accumulate this capital, provided they have good and especially stern guidance.

The strong interdependency between the (central) state and disadvantaged neighbourhoods, in turn, helps to explain why Rotterdam's government is in fact facilitated to undertake such a civilising offensive. The continuing presence of the state prevents exactly the type of processes that Wacquant (1997b, 1998) deems typical of the American ghetto: depacification and institutional desertification. The state retains a strong role in social relationships in disadvantaged and even tries to manipulate these relationships to an exceptionally high degree (Uitermark, forthcoming). The urban poor are not segregated or isolated but instead integrated and incorporated. While such a strategy does not necessarily mean that they are treated more respectfully, it does mean that they can count on more attention of the state than their American counterparts (Uitermark & Duyvendak, 2005).

## **4. INTEGRATING THE URBAN POOR**

### **4.1 Rethinking Rotterdam**

Although there is as yet no reason to suppose that the socio-economic back-log of minority groups is permanent (see Dagevos, 2001; Blok, 2004; Rijkschroeff et al., 2004), recent debates within Dutch society indicate that there is a growing concern that the institutions of the Dutch state will need to be adapted to deal with the integration of minorities (Ten Hooven, 2001). Fortuyn's promise to deal with integration issues with strict and demanding policies was one of the main reasons why he achieved a historic victory in the municipal elections of Rotterdam: his party 'Leefbaar Rotterdam', just created a few months before the election, received almost 35 per cent of the votes. The Labour party (PvdA), which had been in power since the Second World War, was pushed out of office. Leefbaar Rotterdam formed a coalition with the right-wing liberals of the

VVD and the Christian-Democrats of the CDA. In its short time in office, the government has articulated an urban project that may be called revanchist in that it is supposed to counter the so-called ‘take-over’ of the city by poor migrants, a development that started during the social-democratic government of Rotterdam. In this revanchism, both poor migrants and their political allies are fiercely under attack.

First, ‘norms and values’ have emerged as a central theme in public debate. It is generally believed that problems of crime, disorder, misconduct and alienation result when there is no consensus about norms and values. Neighbourly relations and their alleged dissolution are felt to epitomize the importance respectively demise of norms and values<sup>4</sup>. Even though the debate on norms and values does not only have to do with minorities, the sense of urgency that is characteristic of the debate derives largely from its relation to the ‘ethnic issue’. Anton Zijderveld, CDA-ideologue and chairman of the Rotterdam advisory commission on the multicultural city (SAMS) laments philosophies that allegedly do not provide clear norms:

I hate multiculturalism. Multiculturalism is pretending that Dutch society and its culture do not exist. Everything should go, every culture should have its way and then, in the end, everything will melt together – something like that. ‘Those Turks are incidentally living here but it might as well have been another country.’ Newcomers had to adopt before short to a great big nothing. (THE *Trouw*, 23 August 2003, *translation ours*)

Second, social cohesion and especially segregation have become of major public concern. Contacts and relationships between members from different cultural backgrounds are believed to be essential for promoting understanding. Pim Fortuyn was

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<sup>4</sup> The discussion about norms and values in many ways relates to the seminal work of Robert Putnam (1993, 2000). The nostalgia for social relations, including neighbourhood relations, of yesterday is typical of Putnam’s moral agenda and even more so for the present Dutch and Rotterdam governments. In the Dutch context, however, ‘bonding’ social capital, i.e. relations of trust, identification and reciprocity within communities, is not held in high regard whilst ‘bridging social capital’ is considered extremely valuable, especially for ethnic minorities.

especially concerned about concentration neighbourhoods<sup>5</sup> and he argued that the use of mandatory policies should not be avoided to prevent or halt such a development (Fortuyn 2002). In its recent address to the cabinet, the government of Rotterdam puts it like this:

Public anxiety primarily has to do with the fact that disadvantaged groups concentrate in certain neighbourhoods (segregation). Segregation does not necessarily have to be a problem. The working class neighbourhoods of the past also had a one-sided population with limited perspectives. But then social cohesion ensured a reasonably stable society. ... If nuisance and criminality gain the upper hand, neighbourhoods will decline. If this development threatens to overflow the city or neighbourhood, targeted action should be taken (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2004, p. 42, *translation ours*)

This quote is the outcome of a long discussion about an ‘*allochtonenstop*’: a measure that would prevent ethnic minorities from moving into the city. Even though there was never any chance that such a measure would generate enough support locally or be allowed by the national government, the idea nevertheless dominated the public discussion. The government of Rotterdam rejected accusations that it equated ethnicity with problems but at the same time used population prognoses about the ethnic composition of the city to argue the necessity of manipulating the composition of the city’s population. In fact, in the chapter of the document that is entitled “scrutinising the trend” takes ethnicity as a starting point. Take, for instance, the first paragraph of the memorandum:

The influx of non-Western migrants concerns people from countries which deviate strongly from the Rotterdam with respect to socio-economic development, language, culture and religion. This means that for large parts of the incoming groups, social policy (*achterstandsbeleid*) will be needed. In addition, many groups with arrears are concentrated in certain city districts (segregation). If different forms of segregation (language arrears, educational arrears, low

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<sup>5</sup> In the jargon of Dutch policy makers, concentration neighbourhoods refer to neighbourhoods with a comparatively high proportion of ethnic minorities.

incomes, unemployment, dependency on welfare, health problems) occur together in a neighbourhood, we can observe decline. Decline mainly has to do with the quality of life in a neighbourhood. And if nuisance and criminality get the upper hand, decline turns into decay (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2003, p. 11)

Since the ethnicity of incoming groups is the starting point of the analysis, the native Dutch population remains out of the analysis altogether. Nuisance and crime appear only as a result of neighbourhood decline, which is in turn a result of the influx of ethnic minorities. In this way, the ethnic composition of the city becomes the primary factor for its economic, cultural and social life. Where Marxists or leftists sometimes see economic processes as the 'structural' or 'real' causes for crime, for the government of Rotterdam the ethnic composition of the city takes on this role. As a consequence, the government wants to keep the city in a 'sustainable balance', to use the terms of the memorandum itself (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2003, p. 14-15). The fear of an ethnic 'take-over' fuelled the debate and helped pave the ground for a revanchist urbanism.

Third, citizenship has recently been discovered as an important area for government intervention. In fact, one of the first actions of the newly elected government was to commission a report on citizenship amongst ethnic minorities. Like the debate about norms and values and the concern for segregation, the fact that there is discussion about citizenship is not specific to the Netherlands or Europe. However, what *is* specific, and this is also true for the former two points, is that arguments about citizenship are formulated in relation to the issue of integration. In fact, the very presence of ethnic minorities is one of the five reasons why the authors of this report feel that a 'the big cities of the Netherlands are moving towards a dangerous and perhaps explosive situation'<sup>6</sup>:

The share of the ethnic population is expanding in the big cities and in some neighbourhoods, native Dutch are merely a small minority. Researchers and

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<sup>6</sup> Another adviser of the council of Rotterdam, Arie van der Zwan, is so worried about the growth of the ethnic population that he proposes to restrict child support to one child (in the Netherlands, parent receive progressively more government support per child) and to actively promote birth control among these groups (Van der Zwan, 2003).

politicians did not want to see this development for a long time from fear of being labelled a racist but now all those involved are aware that this generates big tensions (Van den Brink & De Ruijter, 2003: 4, *translation ours*)

As a result of these and other processes, like social disorganisation and crime, the authors suggest that in Rotterdam a ‘new social question’ has arisen (Van den Brink & De Ruijter, 2003). Apart from rigid policing strategies, the authors expect much from a policy that promotes active citizenship among ethnic minorities.

In sum, the offensive of Rotterdam’s government is based on a few fundamental notions and assumptions. The starting point is that it must be recognised that the immigration of ethnic and poor groups should be considered as a social problem, if not the biggest threat to the city. Whatever else migrants may be or have (latent human capital, legitimate needs, etc) it is imperative that, as a whole, they should be considered as a problem. From this it follows that certain types of differences need to be problematised and eradicated in order to seduce and force migrants to integrate into Rotterdam and Dutch society. Dutch norms and values are supposed to be explicitly formulated and the activities and beliefs of migrants are supposed to be tested according to these values and with these norms. Integration by definition means that migrants are not supposed to be excluded but they will have to mingle with the native Dutch population: they are to live in the same neighbourhoods, visit the same schools and need to develop a collective sense of responsibility and belonging.

These measures are not exceptional when analysed in isolation but together they constitute a civilizing offensive that (1) serves to impose the demands of the Dutch majority on ethnic minorities and that (2) promotes integration in social life and selective incorporation in political life. We do consider it as a form of European revanchism since this civilizing offensive towards poor migrants is combined with an attack on social-democrats (and liberals in general) who are blamed for this situation. They did not have an eye for the interests of the middle and upper classes and prioritised the cultivation of ethnic identities over defending the culture and identity of Rotterdam. They just let the take-over by newcomers happen.

Still, regardless of the vigour with which the new policies are declared, it might simply be the case that they are not executed or in practice have unexpected effects. Therefore we turn now to actual policies: how does revanchism as an ideology affect policies, i.e. state practices?

Before we discuss the importance of empirical differences between Rotterdam and, say, New York, it is only fair to indicate some strong similarities between both cities. In fact, the case of Rotterdam provides considerable evidence to support the claim of Wacquant, Peck and others that European cities are mimicking American-style policing strategies. After his appointment in 1998, the mayor of Rotterdam, the right-wing liberal Ivo Opstelten, visited New York to ‘learn’ about ‘safety and security issues’ (Press Release Municipality of Rotterdam, 18 August 2001). For him, the electoral success of Fortuyn shows that he needs to emphasise the type of management and policing strategies that have gained so much popularity:

The culture of government has changed, and so have the issues we address. A large share of the voters wanted other issues to be talked about and thanks to Fortuyn we can now do so. We have chosen for safety, with an emphasis on the implementation of policies. We can be more efficacious and the concrete targets make us more accountable (cited in Van der Kuijp, 2004: 2, *translation ours*).

In practice, this means that Rotterdam is adopting the types of zero tolerance and management policies that have made New York such an important laboratory for law enforcement and social regulation. Preventive searches, active policing and zero tolerance measures have already been extensively used during the first two years of this government’s term. Such repressive policies are complemented by the type of cultural policies that are typical of American urban boosterism (see Zukin, 1995; Florida, 2002). Rotterdam is trying to develop itself as a ‘cultural city’ – it was awarded the status of cultural capital by the European Union in 2001, a sign of ambition rather than achievement – that can attract demanding middle-class households. More recently, the city of Rotterdam has indicated to the central government that it wants to follow the

example of Enterprise Zones and provide fiscal incentives to business that want to relocate to disadvantaged areas (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2003). Perhaps more examples of similarities and mimicking could be found but there are also differences that are at least as important.

## **4.2 Restructuring Rotterdam**

Roughly speaking, the distinctiveness of Rotterdam's approach lies in the nature and intensity of its attempt to promote a process of integration that will ultimately lead to a cohesive city where citizens share the same places and the same norms. The main vehicle for achieving this objective is to target groups that are perceived to be outside an already existing Rotterdam – the migrant groups which are not integrated. It thus views incivilities – ranging from indifference to neighbours to violent street crime – neither as an outcome of structural inequalities nor as the product of defunct individual morals. Two aspects of this 'revanchism Rotterdam style' will be discussed. The first aspect concerns policies for manipulating the composition of the neighbourhood population, the second relates to the social interactions within neighbourhoods.

### ***4.2.1 Mixing up***

While the present government of Rotterdam has generated considerable controversy with its housing policies, there are many precedents. In the 1970s, after several incidents, including attacks with molotov cocktails on pensions for Turkish guest workers, the city wanted to pursue a policy of forced dispersal: new migrants would be allocated a house in neighbourhoods that contained less than five per cent migrants. When the central government did not allow that policy, the city used urban renewal policies to influence the composition of neighbourhoods. Only residents who had been living in a district for more than five years, were allowed to return after the operation, a criterion that was purposefully chosen to disperse ethnic minorities (Uitermark, 2003a; Veldboer & Duyvendak, 2004).

At present such measures obviously do not offer resolve: the share of ethnic minorities is simply too high. Nevertheless, Rotterdam can draw upon resources provided by the central government to pursue attempts at social and ethnic mixing. Most of the

policies of the present local government have already been used by the previous. That government had decided in 2000 that no more social housing would be built in order to prevent a ‘dual city’ and to create ‘differentiated’ neighbourhoods (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2000). Only for projects on the fringe of the city, where the concentration of ethnic and marginalized groups is relatively low, is a maximum of 20 per cent social housing allowed. While the alderman who was responsible for this policy shift, Herman Meijer of the Green Party, repeatedly declared that Rotterdam should be a ‘social’ and ‘undivided city,’ – the subtitle of the memorandum was actually ‘an attractive city for everybody’ – in practice the policy curtailed the opportunities for low-income households to enter the city or to move within the city. Then already the advisory council for multicultural issues fiercely objected the policy, arguing that it did not pay sufficient attention to needs of disadvantaged groups (SAMS, 1999).

The new alderman of Pim Fortuyn’s party, Marco Pastors, has continued the policy of his predecessor:

The Labour Party now says: you are executing the policy that we have thought out. That is true. And they have developed good policy indeed, for example with respect to housing: no more affordable rental housing, only expensive and medium priced owner-occupied dwellings. They just did not communicate that policy. It was not done of course, to built expensive houses. With the result that the policy did not really took off (THE *NRC Handelsblad*, 17 January 2004, *translation ours*)

While the discourse has changed rather dramatically – there is now certainly no more talk of Rotterdam as a social city – there are also some modest yet significant changes in the actual policy<sup>7</sup>. For one thing, the present alderman has lifted the exception of building social housing at the fringe of the city: now only privately owned dwellings for middle-

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<sup>7</sup> There are numerous other projects that have been enthusiastically picked up by the present government even though they had originally been devised as part of an outspoken social-democratic project. Examples include city debates, neighbourhood mediation projects and neighbourhood-based criminal justice programs. We cannot undertake an analysis of all these projects but the general picture is that they can be slightly reformulated and then inserted into the revanchist project of the current government.

and higher-income households are to be produced. In addition, while the implementation of the housing policy was very slow after it had been formulated in 2000, under the present alderman it is gathering steam. Rotterdam has demolished more houses than any other municipality and is the only city in The Netherlands where the housing stock has declined.

The policy has also been targeted against so-called ‘hot spots’ – a new term that the local government uses to denote places that are considered especially dangerous. In these efforts, the local government is supported by the central government. The latter offers some financial means to housing corporations that want to ‘restructure’ neighbourhoods: to upgrade the public space and to sell social housing in order to create neighbourhoods that are more ‘stable’ in social and socio-economic respect (see Uitermark, 2003a, b).

However, the seemingly most radical proposal of Rotterdam’s new government, which was briefly alluded to above, has been to stop disadvantaged households from moving into the city. This proposal generated so much controversy because it was initially presented as a measure to prevent households of ethnic origin from entering the city. The final proposal did not mention ethnicity, even though it did use forecasts about the expected share of ethnic minorities in 2017 as a legitimization of the plan. Instead it suggested that Rotterdam would be granted the authority to disallow anybody with an income of less than 120 per cent of the minimum income to register as a resident of Rotterdam. In an official statement, central government embraced this idea and argued in favour of allowing local governments to refuse disadvantaged households in *particular* neighbourhoods (De Graaf & Verdonk, 2003, 2004). The effects of this proposal are probably limited since the reduction of social housing already severely limits the opportunities for lower-income households and those who desperately want to live in Rotterdam will find illegal ways to do so anyway. But it is nevertheless significant that the central government approves a measure that contradicts some basic rights – it might even be in conflict with the universal right to mobility.

While all these policies have a xenophobic or reactionary undertone, it cannot be said that they are primarily meant to turn the city into a middle-class or upper-class area, to purify the city. The reasons for promoting social mixing have more to do with the

management of marginalized population than with strengthening the tax base. Quite understandable: the central state pays for the lion's share of the costs that are associated with the presence of marginalized groups whereas the municipality is responsible for the 'management' of these and other groups.

In the case of Rotterdam, the strong mental, political and economic connections between the city and the country helped to create intense public debate and prompt political action. The diverse measures that are used to achieve a more socio-economically diverse (and white) population – selling social housing, sanctioning illegal landlords, denying access of low income groups (read: ethnic minorities) to certain neighbourhoods – are all undertaken in cooperation with and with strong support from the central government. Rather than saying 'drop dead,' as president Ford more or less did when New York witnessed its first major fiscal crisis, the central government has declared its support and is now changing the law in order to facilitate Rotterdam's plans. In addition, Rotterdam is currently negotiating with several of its neighbouring municipalities about a possible channelling of marginalized groups to their jurisdictions (THE *NRC Handelsblad*, 8 April 2004) – that there is even a chance of such regional coordination has much to do with the fact that these municipalities will not face severe financial repercussions if they agree to build more social housing.

#### ***4.2.2. Fostering friendliness?***

In a sense, it is somewhat awkward that a government that puts so much stress on the tensions and conflicts that are associated with ethnic diversity so vigorously promotes social mixing. These attempts can only be understood against the background of an ambition to use these mixed neighbourhoods as meeting points for different groups (Duyvendak & Veldboer, 2001): the problems caused in and by marginal groups in neighbourhoods should be solved *in situ* (Duyvendak, 2004b).

It is important to note that many policy measures to promote contacts, citizen participation and political incorporation have already been in place for a long time. In fact, these programmes seem to enjoy even more political support than they did under the previous, social-democratic government. In practice it proves very difficult to develop new programmes that are a direct answer to the call for tougher policies (towards

immigrants). As in the case of housing policies, it turns out to be much more efficient and opportune to slightly reform and especially reframe the use of existing programmes.

A first example is the so-called 'street etiquette'. The idea for this program was first raised in 1999, when there was growing concern about the manners and behaviour of youths. However, during a so-called city debate some active residents suggested that the programme would be developed for all age groups. The original formulation of the project does not mention ethnicity or crime (Diekstra et al., 2002). Instead it emphasized that citizens needed to be aware of the consequences of their actions and that the government needed to involve citizens on the level of the neighbourhood as well as the city. The street etiquette basically means that residents in a street meet and discuss what they think is 'normal' public behaviour (Müller, 2003). As a consequence, the street etiquette has been considered more and more as a device to regulate or test relationships between different groups in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. The mayor, however, frames street etiquette as part of a strategy that helps to prevent undesirable behaviour – the ambition to create a positive atmosphere and to promote friendliness seems to have been dropped. At the same time, the agenda is more ambitious since it now appears that street etiquette might even help to prevent serious crimes like stabbings:

The main problems of the city concern safety and filth. The party programmes and the election results show this. These are problems that Rotterdammers do to each other. Someone is throwing the garbage on the street, someone is walking the dog and someone is holding the knife. The most important question in this city is how we deal with one another. Whether we want to take each other into account. Whether we agree on rules of communication and conduct (Opstelten cited in Diekstra et al., 2002: 5, *translation ours*)

Thus, the call for a discussion on norms and values is now translated into a call for promoting those kinds of social projects that reduce unsafety. While the goals may be defined more narrowly and betray mistrust against certain groups, the means remain largely the same.

A second example concerns Opzoomeren. Opzoomeren was originally part of the social renewal policy that was formulated in Rotterdam and then transformed into national policy (Engbersen 2002). The basic goal of social renewal was to increase the quality of social relations in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and to promote citizens' initiative in the voluntary sector. Opzoomeren is perhaps the most famous part of this programme: citizens were mobilized to clean their streets, to organize youth and sport activities, and to have street barbecues in order to get into contact with each other (Duyvendak & Van der Graaf, 2001). Opzoomeren fits with a more general tendency to 'empower' citizens in order to make them govern themselves and each other. As such, it constitutes a technique of neo-liberal philosophies of government that tend to look for solutions on the level of the community or individual rather than society (Rose, 1999). However, at least in its original formulation, Opzoomeren also tried to capitalize on latent citizen qualities; it *valued* the people living in these neighbourhoods. The emergence of social mixing policies in the second half of the 1990s indicates, however, that authorities started to lose their trust in neighbourhood communities – it was felt that it was no longer possible to simply activate the existing population and therefore authorities tried to change the composition of the neighbourhood (Uitermark, 2003a).

Opzoomeren, along a range of other programmes, constitutes the cement that needs to bind the different ethnic communities, socio-economic classes and age groups together into a territorial community that is of some concern to its members. Thus, while the policy was initially chiefly intended to show some tangible social results of a coalition between the Christian-democrats, Labour and the Green party, now it is used in a far more instrumental way for a rather specific purpose:

People do not feel safe and do not feel connected to each other and their environment. There is no longer a broad sense of 'us'. There is often distrust against each other and, following from this, in the government. This is indeed the social clash: a 'contemporary social question.' We are confronted with an extraordinary challenge of social integration. (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2003: 3, *translations ours*)

The new government clearly feels that Opzoomeren can play a pivotal role in meeting this challenge. It has set itself as a target to increase the number of streets that participate in Opzoomeren from 900 now to 1.600 in 2006 (that is about half of all streets in Rotterdam).

## 5. CONCLUSION

Throughout this article we have identified several elements of a Dutch-European type of revanchist urbanism. Even though we have only discussed Rotterdam, we believe that since conditions in this city also can be found in other European cities, it is likely that our findings apply elsewhere. The elements we found were not exclusively revanchist: in fact, most of the times, they were ingredients that had been used earlier but in different proportions and in different recipes. Part of the reason why the local government has continued to use social policies in spite of its harsh rhetoric is probably purely practical; authorities cannot entirely leave the path of their predecessors because policies normally develop in relation to a context and need to be adapted to that context in order to be effective (Brenner & Theodore, 2002). The political earthquake that shook the Netherlands and especially Rotterdam around 2002 has generated major shifts in discourse but governance arrangements and ideas of civil servants do not change over night.

What are the implications of the differences we have observed between the USA and (continental) Europe with respect to, on the one hand, the position of cities within national institutional configurations and, on the other hand, the position of ethnic minorities as a possible target group for a specific kind of policy ('integration policy')?

First, given the fact that the central state accounts for most of the costs associated with the presence of poor households, cities' policies are less incited by economic imperatives. If economic imperatives would be most important, a likely strategy would be to exclude poor households from cities. That may happen in Europe (and Rotterdam indeed tries to stop the influx of poor immigrants in several ways) but it is important to recognise that the strategy to *civilise* the urban poor is a likely alternative or complementary strategy.

Such a strategy is all the more likely because, in addition to the difference with respect to local-central interdependencies, there is a second important difference between the USA and (continental) Europe, namely the position of ethnic minorities within national societies. Unlike the black in the USA, ethnic minorities in European countries are subject to distinct policies (integration policies) that focus on policy areas that are less relevant in the USA<sup>8</sup>, such as language and culture.

The case of Rotterdam shows how socio-cultural interventions intertwine with US-style revanchist policies to produce a fusion of repressive and integration policies that might be described as a ‘civilizing offensive’. Such an offensive differs from American revanchist policies in that it entails measures that (a) are aimed explicitly and specifically at ethnic groups, (b) hold the middle between, or combine, penal and social policies, (c) discipline poor households instead of excluding them (by segregation or imprisonment), (d) are distinctly local but are nevertheless (almost) fully funded by the central government. This ‘civilizing offensive’ targeting the poor/migrants becomes part of a revanchist project as both these migrants and those who are considered to be their political allies – the liberals – are the main target of a revengeful strategy by the new power holders. The latter claim that they have to stop the influx of poor migrants who threaten to take over the city. The laxity of the former governments – read: the social-democrats – created a demand for compensation, for policies do justice to other groups in society: the law-abiding, middle-class Dutch.

We do not know if these differences between the USA and Western Europe will persist. Our account suggests that the Dutch-European style of revanchism is developed in a path-dependent way: the scope for drastic institutional reform is limited and therefore this style still distinguishes itself clearly from USA revanchism. However, it remains to be seen how long inherited social policies like *Opzoomeren* (which the neo-conservatives *au fond* abhor given the social-democratic roots of these initiatives) will follow this path of urban policy if the integration offensive of the national and Rotterdam government will not show the results these authorities hope for. The step from integration to segregation policies might be smaller than many Europeans perhaps think at this moment,

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<sup>8</sup> Though there might be a convergence here between the USA and Europe with the influx of many Hispanic migrants in the USA.

since both are based on revanchist sentiments: not only regarding poor migrants but their political godfathers as well. Strategies in both the US and Europe are fundamentally grounded in the idea that to take back the city is morally and practically superior to alleviating the plight of the urban poor, as liberals claimed for so long. The goal of constructing new communities in Rotterdam is not based on respect for different cultures or appreciation for cultural diversity but is supposed to enforce the integration of immigrants into Dutch culture and to correct the incivilities for which they are held responsible. Moreover, it delegitimizes in one move the social-democratic project that (allegedly) defended the interest of the most marginalized groups. The desire to keep social-democrats and other liberals out of local office, is the main intrapolitical aspect of the revanchist project of the right. And as long as the integration of migrants fails, the left will be guilty by association and thus more likely to reluctantly support revanchist policies than to provide a comprehensive alternative.

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