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# Civilising the City: Populism and Revanchist Urbanism in Rotterdam

Justus Uitermark and Jan Willem Duyvendak

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## Abstract

This paper discusses the relevance of American literature on ‘revanchist urbanism’ for understanding the policies of the populist government that ruled Rotterdam between 2002 and 2006. It is suggested that revanchist urbanism in the European context in general and in the case of Rotterdam in particular takes on a different *form* from that in the US. Moreover, a wholesale displacement of social-democratic policies by revanchist policies is not observed. Many policy measures which formed part-and-parcel of a social-democratic urban project—anti-segregation policies and policies to promote social cohesion—are redefined and reconfigured by populist parties so that they can be incorporated into more revanchist strategies. In this sense, the differences between social democratic and revanchist governance are large with respect to symbolism but small and gradual when it comes to actual policy measures.

## 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 those in the US: 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 revanchist urban strategy to reconquer the city for capital and the middle classes (Smith, 2002). 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 at the same it *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

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those who have occupied it (see Smith, 1996, 1998, 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 (see, for example, DeVerteul, 2006). 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 emancipatory 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. Many critical scholars have recently suggested that European cities are moving from emancipation towards more repressive policies and some explicitly argue for the relevance of the concept of revanchism in the European context (Atkinson, 2003; Aalbers, 2006; Baeten, 2002; MacLeod, 2002; van Criekingen *et al.*, 2006).

In this article, we build on this literature by 'testing' the concept of revanchism in a study of Rotterdam. If the concept does not fit in Rotterdam, its relevance for other cities in Europe may be doubtful as well. The local government dominated by Fortuyn's party (2002–06) was clearly revanchist in its self-conscious attempt to provide an alternative to the agenda of the previous social democratic governments and to make repressive and disciplinary measures a corner-stone of urban policy.

However, we argue that the literature on revanchism needs to be amended on four accounts if it is to grasp the local urban reality of Rotterdam. First, the target groups of the revanchist project are not the same in Rotterdam as in the US. The revanchism of populist parties in Rotterdam is directed in

large part to ethnic minorities and especially to Muslims.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, revanchism finds most of its supporters not among the middle classes but among the autochthonous Dutch population and especially the lower classes. Thirdly, we observe not a wholesale shift towards repression but instead argue that there are renewed attempts to discipline marginalised ethnic groups. Fourthly, housing policies do not aim to exclude or segregate marginalised groups but instead aim to create mixed neighbourhoods.

We thus argue that revanchism in Rotterdam between 2002 and 2006 was as intensive as, but qualitatively different from, the revanchist project as it has been identified by Smith in the US. It can be understood by taking into account the different position of cities within the European context and the characteristics of the groups that are held responsible for urban decline. Since these conditions can also be found in other countries of continental Europe, we suggest that developments in Rotterdam are indicative of how revanchism could transform urban governance in European cities.

## 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 deindustrialisation have been especially profound in the US where worsening labour market conditions have been reinforced by cuts in welfare state provisions and persistent racial discrimination (Massey and Denton, 1993; Wacquant, 2002a).

A similar process has also been evident in European countries, even if it has been somewhat softened by a relatively comprehensive welfare state (Musterd and Ostendorf, 1998; Wacquant, 2005). In the continental countries, Mediterranean immigrants and their offspring have been confronted most severely with the consequences of deindustrialisation. Even though the situation is (still) obviously not as alarming as in the US, there are growing concerns over the emergence of a 'European underclass' (Musterd, 1994). 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, 1999a).

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, p. 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 marginalised ethnic groups reside: cities in general and disadvantaged neighbourhoods in particular.

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. 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 (Zukin, 1995; Smith, 1996; MacLeod, 2002; Ward, 2003). These attempts to separate the tourist from the vagabond and the visitor from the refugee amount to attempts to purify space and to separate neatly in all possible ways (functionally, visibly, 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.

Here, too, Europe seems to follow the US in some respects. In continental Europe in particular, (for instance in Belgium, France, Sweden and the Netherlands), recent years have seen a process of interethnic disidentification (Duyvendak, 2004a; Uitermark *et al.*, 2007). The growing support for (extremist) right-wing parties indicates that parts of the autochthonous population increasingly experience a large cultural distance between themselves and (second-generation) ethnic minorities, resulting in emotional detachment and decreased interethnic solidarity. In this context, cities are increasingly seen as 'dystopian' spaces that have been 'occupied' by ethnic others, resulting in calls to sanitise space and quell sources of disruption (Baeten, 2002).

In sum, there are two closely related processes at work that imply a convergence of some sort between Europe and the US towards urban revanchism. First, in the economic sphere, there is a (perceived) need to 'control' marginalised groups in order to safeguard the economic functioning of cities. Secondly, as large segments of the autochthonous 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. Despite these convergences, however, there is a need to amend the literature

on revanchism before it is applied in the European context.

### 3. Parallels and Differences: Why We Should Not Uncritically Import Anglo-Saxon Theory

In this section, we identify two areas where west European countries, especially continental countries, differ markedly from the US: 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 analyse 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 and Kantor, 2002).<sup>2</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 and van de Ven, 1995). Because of fiscal centralisation, the municipal balance is not so severely affected when the socioeconomic 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 marginalised groups.

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 socioeconomic composition of their populations. The central state stimulates

cities to develop policies to strengthen their socioeconomic profile; many urban policies are specifically meant to attract affluent households (Musterd and de Winter, 1998; Uitermark, 2003). 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). Similarly, with the devolution of responsibilities, the local state plays an increasingly important role in the areas of policing, youth work, social service delivery 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 them to manage the tensions that might result from the strong concentration of marginalised groups.

These stronger political linkages with the central state are also due to the fact that 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. 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 US metropolitan areas. As a consequence, all kinds of urban malfunctioning (crime, nuisance, sub-standard 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 constantly to make visits and references to disadvantaged urban areas: there is a general feeling that these areas might first experience threats that could spill over to other areas if they are not dealt with immediately.

### 3.2 The Ethnic Question in Europe: Domains of Intervention

While Smith himself refers to all minority and vulnerable groups as the racialised victims of revanchism (Smith, 1996, p. 211), other authors emphasise that in particular the urban Black are targeted by repressive policies. In the US, the (lack of) development of the welfare state has from the early start been closely connected with race issues (Alesina et al., 2001). The Black poor have been hit hardest by the restructuring of the economy and the state after the gradual and on-going dissolution of the Fordist welfare state (Wilson, 1987). However, in neo-liberal discourses, their disadvantaged position is explained with reference to personal attributes and attitudes (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 racialised. 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 and Feagin, 1995), group identities have a subordinate role in urban policy in the US.

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 US.

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 US where it would be bizarre indeed if policies were pursued to 'integrate' Blacks, as a distinct target group, within a society into which their ancestors have against their will been incorporated. In contrast, cultural group characteristics are in Europe increasingly considered as obstacles to socioeconomic development and integration into a national society (Duyvendak, 2004a). 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 has become of immediate importance in recent debates within Dutch society about the presumed negative effect of Islamic religion on the opportunities for integration (Prins, 2004). These factors differentiate migrants in Europe from the urban Black (arguably the most disadvantaged group in the US) but also from all the other groups Smith (1996) identifies as targets of revanchism: women, squatters, the working class and also recent immigrants who are subject to different forms of stigmatisation in the US (see Zolberg and Woon, 1999).

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 US but rather seems a contemporary variant of a civilising offensive<sup>3</sup> that was pressed upon

the urban poor by the *élite* in the 19th and earlier half of the 20th centuries. Then as now, a sense of moral outrage and fear informed the actions of *élites* who tried to educate and discipline the ‘dangerous classes’ with language courses, house visits, education in democracy and a proper living environment (Rath, 1999). The actual images of immigrants are in some respects similar to the image that paternalistic *élites* previously held of urban paupers: they lack the culture to be responsible citizens but they can, in principle, be inculcated with this culture, provided they have good and especially stern guidance.

The strong interdependency between the (central) state and disadvantaged neighbourhoods, in turn, helps to explain why local governments are in fact facilitated to undertake such a civilising offensive. The continuing presence of the state prevents exactly the type of processes that Wacquant (1998) deems typical of the American ghetto: depacification and institutional desertification. The state retains a strong role in social relationships in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and even tries to manipulate these relationships to an exceptionally high degree (Wacquant, 2001). The urban poor are not segregated or isolated but instead are integrated and incorporated. This means that they can count on more attention from the state than their American counterparts. This holds true for both social democratic and revanchist civilising offensives and, as we shall show in the next section, it is for this reason that revanchism, in spite of its revolutionary rhetoric, does not dismantle the social-democratic project but rather modifies it by muting its emancipatory ambitions, amplifying its disciplinary elements and adding punitive measures.

#### 4. A Radicalised Civilising Offensive

This section begins with a brief excursion into Fortuyn’s ideology and rhetoric. Subsequently,

we take a look at the electoral support this discourse received and the resistance it encountered. Then we examine the policy discourse of the right-wing government that ruled Rotterdam between 2002 and 2006. Finally, we take a look at the actual policy changes. Although on the level of ideology and rhetoric there is a marked difference between revanchist and social democratic projects, the affinities and convergences between both projects become apparent when we compare the policy measures of the populist coalition with its social-democratic predecessor and successor.

##### 4.1 Revanchism à la Fortuyn

The ascendance of Fortuyn marked a strong break with the consensual and technocratic politics that were the hallmark of Dutch political culture in the 1990s and early 2000s. Although Fortuyn was not a celebrity before the elections of 2002, he was a known figure in some circles because of his many conference speeches, columns and books on topical issues. Fortuyn’s political style was a curious mix of *élitism* and populism. Although he had a limousine with a chauffeur and the lifestyle of an aristocrat, he consistently presented himself as a representative of the Dutch people who had allegedly been sidetracked by a political *élite* that only served its own interests. Although this criticism was made towards all parties, he especially addressed the Labour party and the left for failing to address the major issues of the day. One of the most important issues, in his view, was Islam. In 1997 he wrote a book-length argument ‘Against the Islamisation of our culture’ (Fortuyn, 1997) and he repeated his criticism of this ‘backward’ religion until he was assassinated in 2002. In the course of the 1990s, he radicalised his viewpoints and explicitly argued that there should be ‘one people, one nation, one society’. The migrants who were already living in the Netherlands could certainly stay, but it was essential that

the élites stop “hating themselves” so that it would become possible to promote “values of the Enlightenment” and to reinstate “our values and norms” (see Pels, 2003, pp. 192–195, 201–203). He combined these grand narratives of cultural competition with an emphasis on the need for stern and pragmatic measures—rules and bureaucracy should not get in the way of necessary interventions.

#### 4.2 Electoral Support for Fortuyn’s Agenda

Fortuyn’s party ‘Leefbaar Rotterdam’, just created a few months before the municipal elections of March 2002, received almost 35 per cent of the votes and gained 17 seats. The Labour party, which had been the biggest party in Rotterdam since 1945 (and at least twice as large as the second party since 1974), lost 4 of its 15 seats (COS, 2002). Surveys show that Fortuyn’s supporters were mainly found among voters with a cynical outlook on politics and politicians as well as relatively low trust in government. They generally favoured a tougher stance on criminality and welcomed higher income disparities. The strongest correlation between survey items and his success is found with positive answers to two questions on migrants: “asylum seekers should be sent back” and “foreigners should adapt” (Holsteyn and Irwin, 2003, p. 62).<sup>4</sup> Fortuyn voters tend to be low-educated but some have relatively high incomes (Belangera and Aarts, 2006). Fortuyn’s revanchist discourse appeals, in short, to those groups that have low cultural capital and are normally not inclined to participate in politics. However, in his hometown of Rotterdam especially, Fortuyn’s supporters are not exclusively or predominantly concentrated in the middle classes and certainly not in the groups who occupy the high-qualified jobs of post-Fordist sectors. This corroborates our first amendment of the literature on revanchism: the middle classes are not the only or natural supporters of revanchist policies. Analyses

of the elections show the strong support for Fortuyn from the lower- and lower-middle-class autochthonous Dutch population. This group is overrepresented in Rotterdam, which is traditionally the most industrial of the four major cities (Burgers and van de Waal, 2006).

Quite understandably, there is virtually no support for this populist discourse among the ethnic minorities that constitute 35 per cent of the population (including 6 per cent Moroccans, 8 per cent Turks, 9 per cent Surinamese and 3 per cent Antilleans in 2006). This would become crystal clear in the municipal elections of 2006 when we observe in a sense a mirror image of what happened in 2002. A large part of the disaffected autochthonous lower and middle classes that had momentarily been activated by the ascendance of Fortuyn, now abstained (COS, 2006). Yet in contrast, the turn-out among ethnic minorities increased considerably (Table 1). Although no information on party choice is available for 2002, we can get an impression of the changing electoral behaviour of minorities by comparing the municipal elections of 1998 and 2006.

The increase in turn-out and especially the growth in support for the Labour party can be explained in part by the mobilising efforts of migrant organisations and in part by the fear of migrants for another term of Leefbaar Rotterdam.<sup>5</sup> While the previous elections were considered as a “White middle finger”, now the results were interpreted as a “Black middle finger” (*De Volkskrant*, 2006): ethnic minorities and their organisations stepped up their efforts and mobilised support for the only party (Labour) that had a chance of pushing Leefbaar out of office.

According to estimates of Rotterdam’s Centre for Research and Statistics (COS), the Labour party owes 10 of its 18 seats to votes from minorities. In neighbourhoods with the highest concentrations of ethnic minorities, the party won large majorities of



**Table 1.** Turn-out and support for the Labour party in municipal elections in Rotterdam

	Turn-out (percentage)			Support Labour party percentage	
	1998	2002	2006	1998	2006
Turks	42	53	59	30	72
Moroccans	33	39	59	39	81
Surinamese/Antilleans	25	27	24	69	73
Cape Verdians		33	41	73	74
Electorate	48	55	58	33	37

Sources: Dekker and Fattah (2006); IMES (2006); COS (2006).

the vote (71 per cent in the large district of Delfshaven). Leefbaar Rotterdam, in contrast, won the elections in the ‘White’ neighbourhoods and its 14 seats are all occupied by autochthonous Dutch politicians (COS, 2006; *NRC Handelsblad*, 2006). These results show convincingly that populist policies find their support among the autochthonous Dutch population. Although the Labour party certainly does attract votes from this ethnic group, the electoral defeat of revanchism would not have been possible without the mobilisation of minority and especially Muslim votes.

### 4.3 Rethinking Rotterdam

Fortuyn was murdered (by an autochthonous Dutch environmental activist) in the run-up to the elections of 2002. He only was involved in the very early stages of the formation of the governance coalition of Rotterdam that included, next to his own party, the Christian-Democrats and the right-wing Liberal party. Fortuyn’s agenda therefore had to be made compatible with those of other parties, but these shared his commitment to provide a comprehensive alternative to the reformist agenda of previous governments. We discuss two components of this policy discourse: discursive confrontations and radicalised anti-segregation ambitions.

**Confrontational discursive politics.** Among the coalition parties, there emerged a consensus that problems of crime, disorder, misconduct

and alienation result when there are no shared norms and values. This understanding of urban problems is not unique to the populist government of Rotterdam but it did adopt an alternative way of addressing these issues. Whereas previous governments had studiously avoided making offensive or controversial statements, the councillors of Leefbaar Rotterdam deliberately chose to make controversial arguments in order to ‘stimulate discussion’. This was apparent, for instance, in the ‘Islam debates’: large public debates that were set up by the municipal government to discuss the problems associated with the growth of this religion in Rotterdam. Marco Pastors, the councillor for infrastructure and housing, was the most outspoken critic of Islam. In an essay prepared for the Islam debates, he argued, for instance, that “Western society and Islamic society differ fundamentally from each other” (Pastors, 2005, p. 11). He conceded that Muslims could practise their religion because “the separation of church and state guarantees freedom of religion for all Dutch. But a condition for this is that the Islam starts to function as all other religions” (p. 10). Pastors thus articulated Fortuyn’s viewpoints on Islam during public debates, but equally important were his disqualifying remarks about Muslims in the media. To some extent, Pastors and other Leefbaar representatives had the support of their coalition partners to engage in these confrontational discursive politics. The ascendance of Fortuyn had shown, in their view,

that fear, anger and anxiety do not go away if the government continues to downplay problems related to integration.

At the same time, however, the other parties, and especially the Christian-Democrats, felt the need to promote more conciliatory discourses. Towards the end of the term, in the beginning of 2006, the Christian-Democrats could no longer support Pastors' line of action and, in spite of the national Christian-Democrat leadership urging them not to, they supported a motion of no confidence of the Green-Left party against him after yet another public criticism of Islam. (This time he had suggested that Muslim criminals find excuses for their crimes in their religion while this is not true for other groups.) Other members of the government, too, continued to follow Pim Fortuyn's line of breaking taboos in order to open new lines of governmental action. In the run-up to the elections of 2006, for instance, Marianne van den Anker, a Leefbaar Rotterdam councillor for social affairs, suggested that Antillean mothers should have a forced abortion if it was evident, from their drug use or their criminal record, that they would not be able to raise their children. While elsewhere such remarks might be considered as *gaffes* or incidents, in Rotterdam they were at the very heart of a self-conscious attempt to create space in the public debate for feelings of unrest and anxiety. One of the strongest concerns of both Fortuyn and his party had been the 'political correctness' of the élites and their attempts to take back the city involved an attempt to redefine legitimate discourse in order to open up the public sphere for the emotions and sentiments of Leefbaar's (potential) electoral supporters.

### **Radicalised anti-segregation ambitions.**

While all political parties in the Netherlands support policies against segregation and the formation of concentration neighbourhoods,<sup>6</sup> for Pim Fortuyn this issue was so

urgent that he proposed to use compulsory policy measures in order to prevent or halt such a development (Fortuyn, 2002). These proposals became central to the political debate when the Rotterdam Bureau of Statistics produced prognoses that by the year 2017 the neighbourhood of Charlois would consist of 85 per cent of ethnic minorities and the city as a whole just over 50 per cent. Such prognoses are made every year, but only in the new political configuration did they arouse major concerns. Some council members of Leefbaar Rotterdam argued for an *allochtonenstop*: a measure proposed to forbid ethnic minorities to move into the city. Again, this proposal was too radical for other parties in the coalition but nevertheless they embraced the notion that the influx of 'disadvantaged households' should be stopped and they proposed only to allow people who had income from employment to move into the city. For recent migrants, an extra condition would be that they had passed their citizenship examination, a mandatory test for new Dutch citizens from groups designated as ethnic minorities (see note 3).

In its address to the Cabinet, the government of Rotterdam presented the demographic prognoses and argued that

The influx of non-Western migrants concerns people from countries which deviate strongly from the Rotterdam average with respect to socioeconomic development, language, culture and religion. ... If different forms of segregation (language arrears, educational arrears, low 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; authors' own translation).

In this way, the ethnic composition of the city becomes the starting-point for policy debates on its economic, cultural and social life. This

represents not so much a complete reversal of policy approaches of previous governments as a radicalisation. For years already, the ethnic composition of urban neighbourhoods had been a prime concern for policy-makers. For instance, the national restructuring policy was formulated after the government agency SCP had published figures that showed that the number of ‘concentration neighbourhoods’ was rapidly rising. However, in most cases, policy measures that were directed specifically at ethnic minorities had been regarded as both too controversial and impractical because of anti-discrimination legislation. Hence, actual policies had always used income categories for their policies—the mixing of income-groups was supposed to serve as a solution for ethnic concentrations (Uitermark, 2003). However, the government of Rotterdam at this point felt the need to take more drastic measures because of the “public anxiety” expressed in the voting booths:

Public anxiety primarily has to do with the fact that disadvantaged groups concentrate in certain neighbourhoods (segregation). ... 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, 2003, p. 42; authors’ own translation)

In an attempt to take “targeted action” without (formally) discriminating against ethnic minorities, the coalition parties agreed on the credo that “colour is not the problem but the problem has a colour”. The actual request therefore did not mention ethnicity and did not mention extra conditions for recent migrants. 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 and Verdonk, 2003–2004). When it appeared that this measure may discriminate against university students who are positively valued by the local government, it was decided that the criterion would be changed and that everyone with a regular income from formal employment or studentships could migrate to four neighbourhoods.

In sum, the offensive of Rotterdam’s populist government was based on a few fundamental notions and assumptions. The starting-point was that it must be recognised that the immigration of ethnic and poor groups should be considered as a threat to the social stability of 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—not only for the middle class, but for their poor autochthonous Dutch neighbours as well. From this it follows that certain types of difference need to be problematised and eradicated in order to seduce and force migrants to integrate into neighbourhoods, Rotterdam and Dutch society. Dutch norms and values are supposed to be formulated explicitly 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, not to live segregated, but that they will have to mingle with the autochthonous Dutch population: they have to assimilate in order to be able to live in the same neighbourhoods, to visit the same schools and to develop a collective sense of responsibility and belonging.

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

#### 4.4 Restructuring Rotterdam

Administrators in Rotterdam routinely refer to New York and the alleged success of its safety policies.<sup>7</sup> There is no doubt that Rotterdam, like many other Dutch cities, is slowly adopting policies that are already hegemonic in the US. Rotterdam claimed major success for its tough approach on crime and, indeed, both the calculations of the administration and a national survey of subjective safety show considerable improvements. However, a secondary analysis of the data in this national survey shows that improvements of subjective safety in Rotterdam in 2002–05 were exactly equal to those of Amsterdam, which advocates a cautious policing strategy (Uitermark, 2006).

What about other differences and similarities between the Rotterdam approach and those applied in the US? Roughly speaking, the distinctiveness of Rotterdam's approach lies in the nature and intensity of its attempt to promote a process of enforced integration that will ultimately lead to a cohesive city. Two aspects of this strategy 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.

**Mixing up and locking out.** While the populist government of Rotterdam has generated considerable controversy with its housing policies, there were 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 5 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, a criterion that

was purposefully chosen to disperse ethnic minorities.

At present, such measures obviously do not offer a solution: the share of ethnic minorities is simply too high. Policies now often aim to generate social mixing through a strategy of state-sponsored gentrification (Uitermark *et al.*, 2007). The strategy of the populist government in this context is not fundamentally different from its predecessors or its successor. The government in power in 2000, dominated by social-democrats, had decided that no more social housing would be built in order to prevent a 'dual city' and to create 'differentiated' neighbourhoods (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2000). While the alderman who was responsible for this policy shift, Herman Meijer of the Green-Left party, repeatedly declared that Rotterdam should be a 'social' and 'undivided city'—the sub-title 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. The advisory council for multicultural issues fiercely objected to the policy, arguing that it did not pay sufficient attention to the 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 construct expensive houses. With the result that the policy did not really take off (*NRC Handelsblad*, 2004, authors' own translation).

While the discourse changed dramatically—under the populist government there was certainly no more talk of Rotterdam as a

social city—there were also some significant changes in the actual policy.<sup>8</sup> For one thing, the present alderman removed the exception that allowed the building of social housing at the fringe of the city: in the whole of Rotterdam, only privately owned dwellings for middle- and higher-income households were to be produced. In addition, while the implementation of the housing policy was very slow after it had been formulated in 2000, it gathered steam under the right-wing coalition. Rotterdam has demolished more social housing than any other municipality and is the only city in the Netherlands where the housing stock has declined. At the same time, in spite of its proclamations of success, the construction rates were not substantially higher than those of Amsterdam which advocates a more cautious approach (Uitermark, 2006).

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 terms (see Uitermark, 2003).

However, the seemingly most radical proposal of Rotterdam’s populist government, which was briefly alluded to earlier, has been to stop disadvantaged households from moving into some designated areas in the city. Some 20 000 houses have become inaccessible for unemployed individuals wishing to move into Rotterdam and this number was supposed to rise to 35 000 in the course of 2006. Even though the policy discourse now avoids ethnic categories, they return if we look at the criteria that are used for designating the neighbourhoods: 2 of the 12 criteria refer directly to the ethnic composition. So

far, the municipality has only evaluated a pilot area in the neighbourhood of Carnisse. It concluded, unsurprisingly, that the influx of lower-income households had decreased. Of the 377 prospective tenants, 60 were refused. Although the municipality argues on the basis of interviews with local stakeholders that the measure has positive effects on this neighbourhood, van der Laan Bouma-Doff and Ouwehand (2006) conclude that no positive effects for liveability can be found, in part because the municipality’s researchers talked only to their colleagues and made no effort to distinguish between the effects of different policy measures. While a more thorough evaluation is yet to be produced, it is clear that housing associations increasingly refuse to co-operate with the municipality because they fear that the designated areas and their residents will be stigmatised (van der Laan Bouma-Doff and Ouwehand, 2006).

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 the ethnic marginalised population than with strengthening the tax-base. This is quite understandable since the central state pays for the lion’s share of the costs that are associated with the presence of marginalised groups, whereas the municipality is responsible for the ‘management’ of these and other groups. The argument that the middle classes contribute to the economic base is rarely heard among policy-makers and politicians. They tend to characterise the middle classes as the ‘cement’ or ‘glue’ that keeps the city together. Most of all, they emphasise that they cannot govern a city that is homogeneously poor. Again, the populist government in this respect does not take a fundamentally different stance than the social-democratic governments before them. In fact, it was the social-democratic

representative of Charlois, Dominic Schrijer, who first exclaimed that “we cannot take it any longer” (Schrijer, 2003). It is no surprise, then, that the centre-leftist government formed after the elections of 2006 does not discontinue this most controversial proposal of its predecessor.<sup>9</sup>

In the case of Rotterdam, the strong connections between the city and the country helped to create intense public debate and prompt political action. The diverse measures that were used to achieve a more socioeconomically diverse (and White) population—selling social housing, sanctioning illegal landlords, denying access to low-income groups (read: ethnic minorities) to certain neighbourhoods—were all undertaken in co-operation with and with strong support from the central government, which both changed regulations and provided resources through the restructuring policy. Rather than saying ‘drop dead,’ as President Ford more or less did when New York witnessed its first major fiscal crisis, the central government declared its support and changed the law in order to facilitate Rotterdam’s plans.

**Fostering friendliness or preventing crime?** Apart from social mixing, the populist government also introduced many policies that were meant to encourage residents with different backgrounds to get into contact with each other. 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. As in the case of housing policies, it turns out to be much more efficient and opportune to reform and especially reframe the use of existing programmes.

A first example is the so-called street etiquette. The idea for this programme 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 should be developed for all age-groups. The original formulation of the project does not mention ethnicity or crime (Diekstra *et al.*, 2002). Instead, it emphasised that citizens needed to be aware of the consequences of their actions and that the government needed to involve citizens at 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. However, after the instalment of the populist government in 2002, the mayor framed street etiquette as part of a strategy to help 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; quoted in Diekstra *et al.*, 2002, p. 5, authors’ own translation).

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 un-safety. While the goals may be defined more narrowly, 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 mobilised to clean their streets, to organise youth and sport activities, and to have street barbecues in order to get into contact with each other (Duyvendak and van der Graaf, 2001). At least in its original formulation, Opzoomeren tried to capitalise on latent citizen qualities and had an outspoken emancipatory ambition. It valued the people living in these neighbourhoods and assumed that residents of different backgrounds could undertake and appreciate collective efforts. Although Fortuyn's party clearly had a less optimistic view, the government drastically increased the number of streets where the programme was implemented from 900 to 1700 (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2003). More significantly, it also developed another policy programme, *Mensen Maken de Stad* (MMS—People Make the City) that is more directly aimed at civilising disadvantaged areas. This programme is only implemented in 70 streets because it is much more intensive. Inhabitants of a street receive support from community workers to organise collective action for a period of three months. They also are provided with funds (4500 euros per year) to organise activities of their own choice. There is no longer an exclusive focus on social cohesion, but residents are expected to organise social control in their neighbourhoods. They organise supervision of playgrounds, organise contacts with the police and call upon youth workers to deal with youths causing a nuisance or engaging in delinquency. An evaluation of this programme shows that participants in the programme appreciate the (partial) shift from social cohesion to social control (Uitermark and Duyvendak, 2006). In some areas, the programme is very successful

and it helps to restore safety and a sense of community in public spaces that were previously dominated by vandalism and crime. In other areas, however, problems appear to be too severe and active neighbourhood residents often complain that they do not receive proper back-up from law enforcement in their attempts to 'take back' public space. It is clear that in many cases the levels of deprivation and disintegration are so high that these social programmes are not sufficient to provide sustainable solutions.

The transformation of Opzoomeren from a programme only aimed at social cohesion to a programme that explicitly aims to restore order in public space shows how social democratic policies can be redesigned to fit within a more revanchist agenda. This is not to suggest that these policies are themselves intrinsically revanchist. On the contrary, the example high-lights that, when it comes to policy practices, the differences between social democratic policies and revanchist policies are of a gradual nature. This point is underscored by the fact that the government that came into power in 2006 decided to expand the MMS programme and to consolidate the shift from social cohesion to social control.

## 5. Conclusion

Rotterdam is unique in that a populist party achieved an electoral victory of historical proportions from scratch. However, exactly because unmitigated revanchism is rarely found in Europe, the case of Rotterdam gives an impression of what may happen when populist parties take office elsewhere in continental Europe (as may happen, for instance, in France or Belgium) or when mainstream political parties develop more revanchist policies (as may happen anywhere).

The biggest change we observed was on the symbolic level: the Rotterdam government distanced itself from reformist and emancipatory policies and actively confronted

minority groups, especially Muslims. These changes are certainly not 'merely' symbolic because they have severe repercussions on citizens' feelings of belonging. On the level of policy practices, we observed a radicalisation of civilising offensives that typified social-democratic governance in previous decades. In spite of the outspoken critiques against social-democratic policies, we found that existing policies were not discontinued but instead were radicalised, reconfigured and redefined to fit the revanchist agenda. Part of the reason why the populist 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 and Theodore, 2002). In addition, there are some important similarities between Fortuyn's party and its social democratic arch-enemy. Both revanchist and social democratic governments are faced with advanced marginality that can not be solved at a local level. Therefore, they can only manage these problems and this is why we see the proliferation of—regressive or reformist—policies to generate social order and promote social control in urban spaces that are plagued by incivilities. Although the revanchist government took actions that were initially too radical for the social democrats, once the latter got back in power they did not undo these policy changes.

Both revanchist and reformist government strategies thus centre on the *management* of urban marginality. This commonality among adversaries is related to the two structural differences between the US and (continental) Europe that we identified in the beginning of the paper.

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 driven by economic imperatives.

If economic imperatives were the most important, a likely strategy would be to exclude poor households from cities. That may happen in Europe (and, indeed, Rotterdam tries to stop the influx of poor immigrants to some neighbourhoods) but it is important to recognise that the strategy to *civilise* the urban poor is a likely alternative or complementary strategy. Indeed, Rotterdam pursues such a strategy with strong support from the national government.

Secondly, such a strategy is all the more likely because of the specific position of ethnic minorities within national societies. Unlike the urban Black poor in the United States, ethnic minorities in European countries are subject to distinct policies (integration policies) that focus on policy areas that are less relevant in the US, such as religion, language and culture.<sup>10</sup> The case of Rotterdam shows how socio-cultural interventions intertwine with US-style revanchist policies to produce a fusion of repressive and integrative policies that might be described as a civilising offensive, an offensive that was incipient under social-democratic rule but radicalised with the coming to the power of Fortuyn's populist party. Such an offensive differs from American revanchist policies in that it entails measures that: are aimed explicitly and specifically at ethnic and religious groups; hold the middle ground between, or combine, penal and social policies; discipline poor households instead of excluding them (by segregation or imprisonment); and, are distinctly local but are nevertheless (almost) fully funded by central government.

As we have shown throughout this paper, the exact form of this civilising offensive differs strongly between left-wing and populist parties. At the same time, however, the social democrats do not provide a comprehensive alternative to the revanchist challenge because they, too, emphasise the necessity of managing and redressing incivilities. The emancipatory ideals that characterised post-war



urban development have thus been replaced by a less ambitious attempt to generate social order. The main difference between both approaches now is that populist parties are not afraid to stigmatise migrants while left-wing parties maintain that this is unacceptable. It is therefore no surprise that many migrants and leftists are relieved that Fortuyn's party has been pushed out of office in the municipal elections of 2006. Yet, the fact that the current social democratic government continues and consolidates the social and housing policies of its predecessor begs the question whether this may have been a Pyrrhic victory.

## Notes

1. 'Ethnic minorities' in Dutch political and policy debates refers to people who have at least one parent born in a non-Western country or who have been born in a non-Western country themselves. Thus, a person born in the Netherlands with parents from Turkey is a member of an ethnic minority, while a recently migrated American is not.
2. 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 vary widely. The same goes for European states, such as Germany, where the intermediate administrative and political levels 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 later.
3. '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 civilising offensive that was directed at 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 civilising offensive that would counter incivilities and that would reinstall middle-class norms in public life (van den Brink, 2004).
4. These data were gathered in national surveys. Since there is a strong correspondence between voting behaviour in the municipal elections of 2002 and the national elections in the same year (van Kempen and Bolt, 2002), it is safe to assume that similar patterns would be found at a local level.
5. Michon and Tillie (2003) discuss the importance of Rotterdam's civil society, and especially its migrant associations, for the political mobilisation of ethnic minorities (see also *De Volkskrant*, 2006).
6. In the vocabulary of Dutch policy-makers, 'concentration neighbourhoods' are neighbourhoods with a comparatively high proportion of ethnic minorities.
7. According to critics of zero-tolerance policing, crime rates were going down before the policy was implemented (for example, see Wacquant, 1999b).
8. 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 programmes. 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.
9. Another highly controversial decision of the populist government was to demolish 90 per cent of the houses in the neighbourhood of Crooswijk in spite of strong opposition by residents and housing activists. This decision, too, has not been reversed by the present government.
10. There may be a convergence between both continents as a result of the controversies around the influx of Hispanic migrants in the US. See Zolberg and Woon (1999) for a

comparison between (the resentment against) Hispanic migrants in the US and Muslim migrants in Europe.

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