Everyday autochthony: Difference, discontent and the politics of home in Amsterdam
Mepschen, P.J.H.

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In the late summer of 2009 I visited a festival on Plein 40-45, a central square in the oldest neighborhood of Amsterdam New West, Slotermeer, organized by the local municipality, to celebrate urban renewal. ‘Geuzenveld-Slotermeer verandert’ (Geuzenveld-Slotermeer is changing) could be read on banners and flyers, and residents could be informed - and seduced - by colorful pamphlets, images and videos depicting the aspired future of their neighborhood. A local folk dance group performed; children had their faces painted and enjoyed themselves on a bouncy castle; neighborhood organizations presented themselves, and local administrators explained how their policies would make things better, safer, and more beautiful. However, in the margins of the festival I encountered a group of residents who felt the less festive side of the politics of urban regeneration, residents who were happy to be living in their neighborhood, but who would have to
leave their home and community if the renewal plans were to be ratified. This group of people - mostly ‘white’ residents of the Louis Couperusbuurt and two neighboring quarters in Slotermeer - used the occasion of the festival to show their resistance to the plans.

The Louis Couperusbuurt consisted of 670 homes, almost all basic, low-rent apartments owned by semi-public housing corporations. In the plans for the renewal of this quarter, most of these homes were designated for demolition. In their place a completely new neighborhood was to arise - higher, more spacious, nicer, and for the most part, more expensive. A large part of the low-rent public housing would be replaced by owner-occupied and high-rent apartments.

A central figure in the resistance to these plans was Rick, whom I first met at the festival. Rick was a born Amsterdammer, fifty years old, who shared a low-rent apartment in the quarter with his partner and three cats. The two-room apartment of 32 square meters was ‘small’, as Rick put it, but he enjoyed his little garden, the wide, green surroundings, and good parking opportunities. Like other parts of New West, the Couperusbuurt was green and spacious, denoting the great priority that was given to the construction of green spaces in the area (cf. Feddes, 2011). Rick himself was a foreman at a company that constructed public gardens and courtyards in urban renewal areas so he knew from personal experience, he told me, that urban restructuring was on the Amsterdam agenda. Rick told me he had known a large number of people who had been ‘demolished away’ (weggesloopt), or ‘deported (gedeporteerd), as he and other residents would often call it, but he had not expected the ‘renewal mania’ (sloopwaanzin) to come his way. Rick thought his neighborhood quiet, respectable, and ordinary: ‘netjes en gewoon’. The fact that almost half of the residents of the Couperusbuurt were of (post-)migrant origin notwithstanding, Rick told me several times that in his perception the quarter was predominantly ‘white’. ‘The neighborhood here is for the greatest part white people.’ I will come back to this use of
the notion of whiteness - and its articulation with other categories used in everyday life - elsewhere in this chapter and in the book in general terms.

Rick emphasized that he considered most of his neighbors to be hard-working people who had a job to go to in the morning. ‘Sixty percent of the people here have a job. The other forty percent are either too old to work or they are jobless. And it’s the jobless people who are causing trouble!’ Rick felt that he and his ‘hardworking’, ‘ordinary’ neighbors were being punished for the unruly behavior of a small group of residents. He emphasized that the neighborhood was a quarter of ordinary Amsterdammers (gewone Amsterdammers). He impressed upon me, several times, that most of his neighbors did not cause trouble. I asked Rick about Mohammed Bouyeri, the Dutch-Moroccan, self-proclaimed Islamist who lived in the Louis Couperusbuurt when he murdered the filmmaker Theo van Gogh in 2004 (cf. Buruma, 2006; Stengs, 2009). That had caused some uproar in the neighborhood, as journalists and television crews had suddenly roamed the quarter looking for ‘the ghetto’. Rick asked: ‘Because one lunatic Moroccan lived here it is supposed to be a bad neighborhood? [...] Yes, so I cannot understand the position that indeed Mohammed B. lived here and we are blamed for that… What does it prove? What does it prove? Ha, ha...’

Rick thus defended the respectability of the Louis Couperusbuurt and spoke of the demolition plans in terms of disrespect and displacement: ‘What in my eyes is happening is that the people who live here are being evicted and pushed back into deprived neighborhoods.’ In contrast to the discursive construction of New West as disadvantaged and troubled, Rick localized the deprived neighborhood elsewhere. The Louis Couperusbuurt, in his eyes, was a respectable place.

While questions surrounding respectability, decency, and public space will be the central topics of the next chapter, here I will flesh out the conflict over the regeneration - the future - of
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the *Louis Couperusbuurt* in Amsterdam New West, and examine the construction and everyday employment or emergence of the symbolic category of ‘ordinary people’. I will show how the plans for the large-scale demolition and regeneration of the *Louis Couperusbuurt* created the space for what I call a discourse of displacement (Mepschen, 2012) within which certain ‘autochthonous’ residents were able to articulate a self-understanding, a *sens pratique* (Bourdieu, 1990), in antagonistic relations with Others - economic and political establishments, and sometimes people with a migration background. This discourse of displacement resonates strongly with the culturalist and populist imaginaries that circulate in the Dutch public sphere and that rest precisely on the rhetorical figure of the ordinary, hardworking, and respectable, ‘white’, autochthonous Dutch person. As I will substantiate in this chapter, this resonance makes the discourse of displacement, as I encountered it in New West, relevant beyond this particular case and local context.

**Toward an ethnography of populism**

As already argued in the Introduction, in the Netherlands the figure of the ordinary person has been construed as the victim of cultural and physical displacement and as such plays a key symbolic role in the politics of culturalist populism (and increasingly also in more mainstream political discourse). This populist discourse of displacement rests on the construction of a symbolic front - the ‘performance of boundary work’ (Lamont, 2000) between autochthons and ‘allochthones’ - but also divides the autochthonous community into antagonistic camps - the ordinary, hardworking Dutchmen as underdog vis-a-vis an ‘elite’ that is framed as alienated from the ‘authentic’ experiences of ordinary whites in pluri-ethnic, popular neighborhoods (cf. Uitermark et al., 2014b). This chapter investigates this resonance - but also the friction and ambiguity - between mass-mediated political discourses and imaginaries on
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the one hand and local, lived experience on the other. The charting of the discourse of displacement in Amsterdam New West offers insight into the conditions of emergence of Dutch populism, as well as the complex intersections of class, ‘race’, and political and social transformation in the contemporary Netherlands.

In analyzing the discourse of displacement in New West, I build on and develop a non-essentialist approach to populism (Panizza, 2005: 5), while locating the emergence of populist everyday discourse within a particular context of social and urban transformation. As Francisco Panizza argues, populism rests on the construction and imagination of a notion of ‘the people’. It is, at the core, ‘an anti-status quo discourse that simplifies the political space by symbolically dividing society between ‘the people’ (as the underdog) and its ‘other’’ (Panizza 2005: 3). The form that populist politics takes is dependent on the ways in which the antagonistic relationship between people and Other is defined in a particular time and place (Ibid: 4). To understand Dutch populism, we must analyze the construction and everyday appropriation of populist rhetoric and imaginaries in the Netherlands. What we need therefore, are detailed studies of the social construction of the people, the boundary practices that bring ‘the people’ to social life in particular local contexts, and in and through which their identity is forged and certain layers of citizens thus become called into being as part of a very particular partition of the social - ‘the people’.

Populism cannot be understood by taking the existence of ‘the people’ as a prime political actor or group as an a priori fact, but by developing a non-essentialist approach that focuses on people’s practical activity and self-understanding. The people and the other are political and social constructs. In other words, they have no ultimate meaning or fixed reality: they are empty signifiers (see Oudenaampsen, 2012; Farris, 2016; Panizza, 2005). At the same time, I feel I should stress that a non-essentialist approach cannot mean we can ignore the tangible aspects of inequalities
and power differences that have to do with the ways people are socially located. One of the challenges then, is to flesh out the articulation of symbolic boundaries - ‘conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space’ (Lamont and Molnar, 2002: 168) and social boundaries - ‘objectified forms of social differences manifested in unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources (material and nonmaterial) and social opportunities’ (Ibid.). In other words, what needs examination is the extent to which the symbolic boundaries that people draw are grounded in and articulate with ‘real’, material and political inequalities in terms of access to resources, democratic participation, and decision making. As the anthropologist Don Kalb argues:

It is the contradictions and disjunctures between everyday agential power fields, tactical state-based political environments (including political and media opportunity structures), and global structural power relationships—including the significations that are generated within and between these disjointed frames— that move the popular anxiety and paranoia. Such anxieties, in their turn, energize the nationalist populisms that are taking the place of the liberal modernisms gone awry. In a more narrowly political sense, populism, in the current conjuncture, is the rejection of liberal elites and ideologies that fail to use the resources of the democratic national state to harness global process to local needs and desires, that celebrate an elite cosmopolitanism, or that use state power and cosmopolitan ideologies for outright local dispossession. More broadly conceived, populism refers to the moods and sensibilities of the disenfranchised as they face the disjunctures between
everyday lives that seem to become increasingly chaotic and uncontrollable and the wider public power projects that are out of their reach and suspected of serving their ongoing disenfranchisement. (2009: 209)

An ethnographic approach is one of the ways in which an examination of these disjunctures can be made more tangible and intelligible. Until now, little ethnographic attention has been paid to agency and the appropriation and negotiation of populist rhetorics in everyday life-worlds (but see Kalb, 2009; 2011). This chapter, in contrast, offers an understanding of populism as an interpretive frame - a perspective on the world that people employ in making intellectual and emotional sense of their life-worlds by means of the construction of symbolic boundaries. Populism is thus approached as offering frames for perceiving and interpreting society and scripts for acting in it (cf. Brubaker 2005: 64-87). It describes a particular orientation towards external objects, other people, social institutions.

This is not to argue that the discourse of displacement that I chart in this chapter can be understood exclusively in terms of its resonance with the neonationalist populism of the likes of Pim Fortuyn or Geert Wilders. There is no causal determinism possible here: ‘actual outcomes on local grounds are intermediated by various path-dependent ‘critical junctions’ that link global process via particular national arenas and local histories, often hidden, to emergent and situated events and narratives’ (Kalb, 2009: 209). Indeed, the relation between mass-mediated and local discourses and forms of agency is often one of friction and ambiguity. Some residents who employ the idiom of displacement, for instance, may intensely dislike the culturalizing and sometimes racializing undertones this idiom gains in the narratives of some of their neighbors. Marian, whom I will introduce below, exemplifies this critical attitude. By analyzing various and sometimes contradictory
elements of the discourse of displacement in Slotermeer, as well as the divergent ways in which it is strategically and affectively employed in the struggle over the future of the area, this chapter shows that populist articulation is partial and contradictory and cannot be understood in totalizing terms.\footnote{The discourse of displacement can - in other words - also be politicized by political entrepreneurs outside the fold of contemporary Dutch culturalist and neonationalist populism. From a political point of view this observation is of central importance. It is possible and conceivable to politicize the demand for people to be heard in non-xenophobic ways.}

An ethnographic approach to populism can help uncover the relationship between social boundaries and symbolic boundaries. In contrast to a substantialist approach to populism, which takes for granted a direct, mechanical relationship between people’s position in the social structure and the practices and views that attach to them (Bourdieu, 1990), an ethnographic approach enables me to look closely at the complex and contradictory ways in which positions and practices are tied together. This is of importance because it brings into focus the variety of histories and narratives of disenfranchisement and symbolic and temporal displacement that call ‘the people’ into being as a lived reality (cf. Kalb, 2009; 2011) and as such ground populist articulation as multiple. To understand the rise of populist political parties and discourse it is necessary to get beyond the too simple view of the resentful or spoiled ‘citizen’ that underlies much social commentary and analysis on Dutch populism (see Oudenampsen, 2014 for a critique of such analyses). Rather than assuming that the rise of right-wing populism is simply the irrational outcome of popular ressentiment I approach populism as an interpretive frame, a vehicle for making sense of experiences and feelings of disenfranchisement and symbolic and/or material dislocation.
As scholars have in recent years pointed out, populism is notoriously difficult to conceptualize (cf. Panizza, 2005; Jansen, 2011; D’Eramo, 2013; Farris, 2016). The concept is elusive and vague, and its use in academic explanations of contemporary transformations in Europe is over-extended, while both academic and public intellectual discussions surrounding populism continue to rely heavily on folk theories (Jansen, 2011; D’Eramo, 2013). This reliance of popular conceptualizations produces an overtly normative, disqualifying view of populism as the ‘corrupt, undemocratic, and cynically opportunistic’ other of rational, liberal politics (D’Eramo, 2013; see also Oudenampsen, 2011: 10). As Marco D’Eramo says, ‘No one defines themselves as populist; it is an epithet pinned on you by your political enemy’ (2013: 8). Indeed, even in many academic and public intellectual discussions ‘populism’ remains a pejorative label (Jansen, 2011: 76). The fact that the term is used freely to describe both the populist right and the (far) left, including the Syriza government in Greece and the Spanish political formation Podemos, speaks volumes.

Much academic and public intellectual debate on the issue in fact seems motivated by a resentful distaste of populism and with the ‘masses’ associated with it - an ‘elite resentment’ that is grounded in the idea that a cultural degeneration of the masses has contributed to a vile civic and political climate in which pragmatic, reasonable, and civilized debate and policy are under pressure (Oudenampsen, 2011; Uitermark et al., 2014b). This elite resentment has led to what Kevin Levie and I have elsewhere called a ‘cosmopolitan groupism’ in which an ever larger arsenal of concepts is poured into a simplistic dichotomous model - people versus elite, nationalism versus cosmopolitanism, lower educated versus higher educated, winners versus losers (of globalization), conservative versus progressive, and materialist versus post-materialist. In these analyses it sometimes seems as if Dutch society is torn apart by a kind of culture war between cosmopolitan,
enlightened, progressive urbanites and introverted, less educated, conservative provincials (Mepschen and Levie, 2012).

This approach reproduces a substantialist understanding of 'the people' not as a political construct symbolically constituted in relations of antagonism, but as a bounded whole, an entity with a distinct substance - conservatism, nationalism, provincialism - acting under its own power. Understood in this way, populism becomes a property of particular groups as opposed to a performative effect, a construct taking shape within matrices of power relations and discursive inventions, emerging 'out of the very way in which figurations of relationships [...] are patterned and operate' (Emirbayer, 1997: 292). This approach of populism as the a-priori property of particular groups - the antagonistic other of the self-proclaimed cosmopolitan and rational liberal - in other words can be seen as a form of what Brubaker calls groupism - 'the tendency to take discrete, bounded groups as basic constituents of social life, chief protagonists of social conflicts, and fundamental units of analysis' (2005: 8). In its most extreme articulation, this approach goes as far as to sketch out 'the people' as a quasi-natural partition of the social world, as in the work of the aforementioned Anil Ramdas, who referred to 'white', working class, Dutch people as 'white trash', and painted them as a bounded, ethnic group - 'backward' and 'primitive' - with its own folklore, musical taste, and language (Ramdas, 2010).

Such analyses to a certain extent can be said to be complicit with populism, because they constitute a repetition of the populist claim that 'the people' exist as a bounded whole with a distinct substance, coherent will, and collective agency. In such analyses populist articulation comes to be understood in terms of a mimetic or descriptive conception of representation (see Oudenampsen, 2012; Laclau, 2005). It becomes seen as a 'pure' expression of the views and desires of a particular group of citizens, as opposed to a performative discourse and a particular 'distribution of the
sensible’ (Rancière, 2004a) that shapes (*not simply represents*) how people see the world, and feel and act in it. This particular form of substantialist reasoning is highly influential in Dutch populism studies, especially because of the important and influential work of the political scientists Bovens and Wille (2011). These scholars have developed a highly performative argument that delineates populism ‘in the first decade of the 21st century [as] a manifestation of a sudden eruption of resentment against the rise of *diplomadecracy*’ (2011: 100).

Their approach is part and parcel of a particular strand of research that has been developing since the 1990s, and in which populism is understood as ‘a symptom of weak democratic incorporation’ (Jansen, 2011: 81) of parts of the popular classes. The rise of populism in these analyses is more or less causally related to the expanding gap between citizens with a low and those with a high level of education, and the concomitant notion that the former are insufficiently incorporated and represented politically. The Belgian author David van Reybrouck (2008) for instance, in his influential ‘plea for populism’ argues that the problem is that there are no lower-educated people occupying a seat in parliament anymore. There is a new social division that is not based on income in the first place - a plumber might make more or less the same as a family doctor at the start of his career - but on education: and the lower-educated are excluded. Hence populism, says Van Reybrouck - is a political corrective to the structural exclusion of certain segments of the population.

In these analyses, the wishes and desires of the higher-educated - regarded as a relatively coherent group - are seen to have a larger presence in the political sphere, and to have better representation, than the group of lower-educated. In such approaches, populism must be seen as a correction to this bias (Bovens and Wille, 2011; Oudenampsen, 2012: 23). While Bovens and Wille - and Van Reybrouck - make important points regarding forms of structural
inequality in late-capitalist Europe of course, there is also ample reason to be critical here. As Oudenampsen points out, the two scholars offer a formalistic and causal analysis of the emergence of populism that is grounded in a substantialist simplification - a division of society into two antagonistic groups - and the concomitant obfuscation of differences and divisions within both ‘groups’ (see also Jansen, 2011: 81). Moreover, by focusing almost solely on the question of political incorporation, this approach is reductionist - it ignores (other) social and economic factors and political-economic developments possibly underlying populism (Jansen, 2011: 81). This approach also insufficiently distinguishes between various forms of populism, between for instance, the left populism of Podemos, Syriza, and to a certain extent, the Dutch SP and the German Linke, on the one hand, and that of the Front National and the Dutch Freedom Party on the other, and ignores the fact that ‘the people’ called upon in populism is often not a shapeless demos, but, in the case of rightwing, nationalist populism - a particular ethnos (cf. Farris, 2016) and in the case of leftwing, anticapitalist populism, a particular social class.

In the Netherlands, the dominant articulation of populism, as it has come into being in the 1990s, is connected to autochthony and tends to exclude citizens construed as Other on the basis of a culturalist conception of society.

The assault on public housing
Taking the relationship between symbolic and social boundaries seriously means taking into account, it seems to me, structural transformations in broader terms, how they affect people’s lives, and how they are understood. If populism can be seen as an interpretive frame to make sense of the world, what is it that people are making sense of? What are they actually talking about when they use that framework in the context of their everyday lifeworlds?

To try and answer these questions, I take the struggle over the demolition and regeneration of the city - more precisely, New
West in Amsterdam - as a starting point. As James Dunn has recently argued, ‘the housing sector has been a critical sector for the unfolding of neoliberalism, although relatively few aspects of this relationship have been examined in the mainstream literature on neoliberalism’ (2013, 183). I try to understand precisely the affective politics surrounding the structural transformation of the Amsterdam public housing tradition by focusing on residents’ sense of dislocation, grief, and humiliation in response to the regeneration plans. As I will argue, the unmaking of the spaces of the ‘old’, Fordist working class generates a receptiveness for alternative, ethno-populist ideologies that combine the attack on the liberal establishment with an aggressive assault on the lower tiers of society - the racialized ‘dangerous classes’ with whom working-class whites share urban spaces and who are seen - among other things - as agents of decreasing respectability (see Chapter 3). Structural transformations however, can only be fully accessed analytically by looking at people's everyday practices and idioms, and studying the emotional, intellectual, and interpretive work that goes into the making of local life-worlds. Thus by focusing the ethnographic lens on everyday perspectives and behavior, the emphasis in the social analysis of populism shifts from electoral politics and political discourse only, to processes of articulation, interpellation, and to agency. In order to understand the conditions of emergence of populism, my approach thus links local, lived experiences with mass-mediated, populist political articulations and mobilizations (Kalb, 2011).

Pluri-ethnic, popular neighborhoods like the *Louis Couperusbuurt* in Amsterdam New West index a society in crisis. They figure in public discourse and imagination as the stages on which a ‘multicultural drama’ is played out, and have come to indicate a broadly shared notion that Dutch society does not have its house in order (Duyvendak, 2011; Trommel, 2009), or that the body social is ‘unhealthy’ (Schinkel, 2007). Indeed, these spaces figure, in public representations, as sites of social disintegration and
of a developing culture of poverty (Blokland-Potters, 1998). Many forms of social anxiety, insecurity, and fear are projected onto these pluri-ethnic, ‘disadvantaged’ spaces: the alleged decrease of social cohesion, insecurity about national identity, the rise of Islam in the public sphere, problems with migration, segregation, and integration (see Van Eijk, 2010; see also Chapters 3, 4 and 5). It is in this context that Rick’s remark, as discussed in the opening vignette of this chapter, that his neighbors were mostly ‘white’ people must be understood. It points to the close relationship that in the Netherlands is suggested between the respectability of neighborhoods and the number of post-migrants living there. As Uitermark has pointed out, in so-called ‘livability-monitors’ that are supposed to ‘calculate’ the ‘livability’ of neighborhoods a high concentration of ‘non-western allochthons’ counts as a factor for a lower score (see Uitermark, 2011).

Rick’s strategy to defend the respectability and ‘livability’ of his neighborhood by denying the pluri-ethnic character of the quarter itself thus resonates strongly with an increasingly dominant discourse that associates ‘super-diversity’ with social problems, disintegration, and a lack of livability.

The magic words in tackling what is construed and perceived as a lack of livability in popular neighborhoods in recent decades have been ‘regeneration’ and ‘renewal’: large-scale urban

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15 Uitermark points out: ‘if we look at the operationalization that is used for calculating livability scores, it is evident that the concept has been completely redefined (Uitermark, 2005). Residents’ perceptions are still included in the operationalization, but the score is also said to be based on ‘objective’ criteria. For example, if a neighborhood has a high share of ethnic minorities, the score goes down. If it has a high share of lower income households, the score goes down. If it has a high share of affordable housing, the score goes down. In short, what is really being measured here is not the extent to which residents can live a pleasant and affordable life in neighborhoods, but the extent to which housing corporations and governments can govern these neighborhoods and extract profits out of them’ (2011).
restructuring is supposed to generate more social and cultural heterogeneity and set in motion a process of gentrification. These desired processes are considered vital to improving ‘livability’ in these popular quarters (e.g. Blokland-Potters, 1998; Oudenampsen, 2010; Uitermark, 2003; 2011; Van Eijk, 2010; Van Gent, 2013). New West has been a popular district in Amsterdam until the 1990s, with comparatively low levels of unemployment, social marginalization and petty crime (Hellinga, 2005). However, beginning in 1990, Amsterdam municipal services, local district boards, and city advisors began drawing ‘doomsday scenarios’ (Hellinga, 2005: 8) for the future of the garden cities. A new narrative emerged, staging the post-war areas of Amsterdam as the future arenas of a ‘new social question’ (cf. Scheffer, 2006). The main thread of that narrative was that a combination of physical decline of the housing stock and a culmination of social problems would lead to a downward spiral and ‘ghettoization’. The concentration of low-rent public housing and the projected growth of the share of ethnic minorities became construed as perils to the stability in what had become named and known as ‘concentration neighborhoods’ (see Uitermark, 2003).

This shift in thinking about New West - and its spatial future - coincided with a broader shift in thinking about public housing in the Netherlands. Until the early 1990s, many people in the political sphere and state apparatus considered public housing a basic right, and even viewed a high share of social rent homes as an asset to Dutch cities (Uitermark et al., 2007). Starting in the early 1990s however, public housing became associated in public and policy discourse with disorder, social dislocation, and ‘unlivable’ conditions. To facilitate the social management of working class and now ethnically mixed urban areas, as well as to improve the position of such areas within the urban housing market (Uitermark and Bosker, 2014), large-scale socio-spatial restructuring of these neighborhoods was proposed. In the so-called ‘development areas’
- the parts of the city, including New West, that were considered weakest - the main tools of the restructuring policy has been the demolition of social housing and the construction of owner-occupied housing (Ibid., 5-6).

The genealogy of these shifts can be traced to the early 1980s, when a new market oriented policy strategy in the city took shape as part of a ‘broad administrative reorientation’ in urban policy (Hajer, 1989). The goal of policy became focused on branding and marketing the city and changing the image and demographic composition of particular places, promoting Amsterdam as the location for investors and tourists (Oudenampsen, 2010a: 34). This process articulated with global urban redevelopment strategies aiming for an economic regeneration of cities. Urban areas were to become competitive and cities ‘entrepreneurial’, which depended on attracting high income residents and visitors (cf. Hall and Hubbard, 1998; Harvey, 2008; Swyngedouw, 1996). To illustrate, the 1990 report of the Physical Planning Department of Amsterdam points out that the housing situation in New West was appropriate for ‘the current population’, but not for ‘higher segments’ (Bouw-en Woningdienst Amsterdam, 1990; cf. Hellinga, 2005).

This transformation of policy orientation can be understood as a shift from ‘social to spatial make-ability’ (Oudenampsen, 2010a). Whereas the former combined the wish to regulate the city with efforts to emancipate and discipline its inhabitants, the latter concentrated more on the elevation of a spatial location (Oudenampsen, 2010a: 33) to attract new, more affluent, urban populations. This shift denoted a mode of urban regulation in which gentrification, referring to the ‘production of space for – and consumption by – a more affluent and very different incoming population’ (Slater et al., 2004: 1145) became ‘the sine qua non for promoting liveability’ (Uitermark et al., 2007: 128). Starting in the 1980s, the public housing policy tradition became seen as an obstacle for a well-functioning housing market (Uitermark,
Housing corporations were more or less privatized into semi-market players - corporations that operated independently from state supervision and residents’ participation and democratic control. The consensus about building and dwelling shifted. ‘The goal of ‘building for the neighborhood’ has been replaced by the goal of making neighborhoods ‘livable’ through altering the neighborhood population’ (Uitermark, 2011: 19). Urban renewal in popular neighborhoods no longer focused primarily on the population currently living there, but increasingly on ‘dreamed’ future residents. It is in this context - which I have already referred to as the unmaking of the spaces of the Fordist working and middle class - that the case of the Louis Couperusbuurt must be understood.

To be sure, the development described above did not mean that the ideals of social make-ability disappeared. New policies have not only focused on the physical renewal of neighborhoods but have also had a social and economic dimension. The influence of neoliberal ideologies on urban development and housing in the Netherlands has encountered many institutional and political limits (Van Gent, 2013). Institutional arrangements and societal ideas originating in the post-WW2 period of state expansion social-democratic entrenchment have remained important to the development of new policies, which has slowed down gentrification processes and alleviated its social consequences (Van Gent, 2013).

Moreover, as Gwen van Eijk has argued, the emphasis on livability - and the lack thereof - cannot only be understood as the result of neoliberalism (2010). Among policy-makers, there were real concerns about national and social cohesion, segregation, and the maintenance of order in multicultural urban neighborhoods (see Blokland-Potters, 1998; Van Eijk, 2010). Safety on the streets, the ‘integration’ of post-migrants, and dissatisfaction among ‘autochthonous’ residents became important social themes and functioned as a motor for the transformation of urban policy.

The shift from social to spatial make-ability thus has not been
complete. Indeed, the idea of make-ability remained important in urban policy, but changed character. The emphasis was put on improving the social infrastructure in neighborhoods, ‘the formal and informal frameworks that enable citizens to engage in social relationships’ (Duyvendak, 2002: 166). The post-war, ‘modernist’, ‘Forist’ pipe dream of upward mobility, emancipation, and progress for working class residents - which materialized in the modernist Garden Cities as a spatialized emancipatory project - faltered in favor of more modest ideals focused on the neighborhood and the alleviation of neighborhood effects - social cohesion, safety, and active citizenship. While it could be argued that important elements of ‘social make-ability’ were still present in this shift, especially in the idea of activating citizens, at the same time the shift reinforces and depends on an increasing belief in spatial make-ability - in changing the demographic landscape of the city. Indeed, to alleviate neighborhood effects and to create the ideal circumstances for social cohesion and citizens’ activation, the demographic composition of concentration neighborhoods had to change. Improving the social infrastructure of neighborhoods had come to presuppose the spatial make-over of neighborhoods to enable mixed-income redevelopment (Aalbers and Van Beckhoven, 2010; Uitermark, 2003; Van Gent, 2015). As Uitermark puts it:

For urban politicians, housing corporations, the police and a host of other organisations that actively sought to maintain order in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, an influx of affluent households would mean a change for the better because it would increase the manageability of disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Thus, measures to interfere with processes of concentration and segregation were from the early 1990s onwards increasingly seen as a necessary and integral part of measures to promote ‘liveability’. (2003: 543)
The strengthening of the social infrastructure of the neighborhood has played an important role in the development of plans for the regeneration of Slotermeer. The physical renewal of the district has gone hand in hand with a large number of projects focused on livability, integration, dialogue, neighborhood binding, and active citizenship (cf. De Wilde, 2013; Elshout, 2013; Tonkens and De Wilde, 2013). Moreover, the physical renewal of Slotermeer was accompanied by a plethora of activities to ensure the democratic participation of residents in drawing up plans for the future of the area. In fact, the district’s administration constantly spoke of ‘making plans together’. This slogan stands in stark contrast, however, to the sense of ‘voicelessness’ and bereavement that I encountered among many ‘ordinary’ residents of Slotermeer who did not feel that they had any real say in the drawing up of plans and who expressed a sense of disenfranchisement and displacement in the process. How is this disjuncture between the administration’s stated intentions and the experiences of many residents to be understood? I will explore the possible answer to that question by zooming in on the various elements of the discourse of displacement I encountered in Slotermeer, while taking into account the structural limitations of citizen’s participation in urban restructuring policy.

A discourse of inevitability
As mentioned, in 2007 several neighborhoods in Amsterdam New West - two of which were located in Slotermeer - were included in a list of forty top-priority ‘attention neighborhoods’ targeted for intensive regeneration in ten years. A large sum of money was allocated for this and the district administration was therefore confronted with new financial opportunities. It developed a ‘Neighborhood Action Plan’ that analyzed the local context in Slotermeer and formulated ambitions and plans for the future. Starting point was the observation that Slotermeer was at

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16 Gemeente Amsterdam, Stadsdeel Geuzenveld-Slotermeer (2007e)
the bottom of the list in Amsterdam when it came to ‘livability’. Whereas the report argued that the situation had stabilized since 2002, Slotermeer was still considered to be socially and economically weak: it was characterized by high levels of structural unemployment, low levels of education and low incomes, and a high percentage of school drop-outs. The report also stated that the district was marked by a concentration of too many small homes, in which ‘(too) large families’ lived (Ibid.: 4). It emphasized what was called the ‘dual population structure’ of the district, denoting the tense relationship between autochthonous residents over the age of fifty on the one hand and ‘families from ethnic minorities’ (Turkish, Moroccan, Surinam and Antillean) - including many youngsters - on the other. The Louis Couperusbuurt and some of its neighboring quarters were highlighted as especially problematic, having a large amount of cheap housing that attracted socially marginal renters with many social problems and without affective and relational ties to the neighborhood. The authors of the report argued that the situation in the quarter was particularly difficult as the result of vandalism, nuisance, petty crime, and poverty.

Slotermeer was thus designated a ‘renewal area’, and plans were drawn up for its physical, social, and economic regeneration that were to bring the neighborhood and its residents up to what was called the ‘normal Amsterdam level’ (Normaal Amsterdams Peil) in a period of ten years. Large-scale ‘physical’ renewal was deemed an inevitable aspect of this process, although the report explicitly stated that providing new opportunities for ‘current residents and entrepreneurs’ was the point of departure and the renewal of the neighborhood had to be a bottom-up project, the result of an ‘intensive participation trajectory’ as the basis for the development of Slotermeer into a beautiful and successful

Buurtactieplan Slotermeer (Slotermeer Noordoost en Zuidwest). http://www.euken.org/dsresource?objectid=167522&type=or
neighborhood. This focus on ‘making plans together’ and the idea that physical intervention was to benefit current residents stands in stark contrast with residents’ interpretation of developments, as I will substantiate below.

In the eyes of Stadgenoot, the housing corporation that owned most of the homes in the Louis Couperusbuurt, large-scale physical intervention in the quarter was inevitable.\textsuperscript{17} I spoke to Martine, who as a developer for the corporation was responsible for the renewal of Slotermeer. Martine was a young professional, in her early thirties, who had studied Real Estate and Housing in at the Technical University in Delft. When I spoke to her in 2010, she had been working in the Amsterdam housing sector for six years. I had already heard a lot about her - her name came up in many conversations. For many residents confronted with the plans for the restructuring of Slotermeer, she was the face of the corporation and therefore of the renewal plans that residents felt initiated their displacement. Martine lived in Den Haag and was seen by residents as an outsider - someone who did not really know the neighborhood but nonetheless had the power to decide. She was also seen, sometimes, as arrogant and harsh, but this is not how she came across to me. She did seem cautious, at times, which was connected to the tense situation surrounding the renewal plans.

Martine argued that the renewal plans for Slotermeer, especially the Couperusbuurt, had to be understood in the context of years of complaint about the state of the homes and the neighborhood. Residents and the corporation had been dealing with illegal subletting of homes, weed plantations in houses, residents with drinking problems, and difficulties with finding renters for the homes. As she said:

\textsuperscript{17} Stadgenoot was the result of a fusion of two Amsterdam housing corporations in 2008 and had its roots in the social democratic labor movement - the socialist ‘pillar’ of the late 19th and early 20th century (Het Oosten and the Algemene Woningbouw Vereniging (AWV).
There are probably many reasons for [these problems], but some of them are clear. The homes are small and the neighborhood is bad. For some people those small homes are fine of course. We understand that. But what we had been dealing with here were many new residents that ended up in this neighborhood because they had no other choice. Residents who did not really add something to the quality of the neighborhood. They did not really have a neighborhood feeling (*buurtnotie*) or a sense of responsibility for the quarter.

This remark is important, because it demonstrates the strong sense - among policy makers and corporation officials - that social problems were linked to a lack of place-attachment and a sense of belonging in the quarter.

The corporation’s solution for these problems was clear, and in line with the dominant discourse concerning social problems in ‘weak’ neighborhoods discussed above: more differentiation in the housing supply and a more diverse demographic make-up. To improve the social and economic infrastructure of the quarter it was deemed necessary to ‘intervene physically’. Some residents were outspoken supporters of these regeneration plans. One of them was Fatima, a 28-year old woman and a second generation Dutch-Moroccan. In addition to her job in a hospital, she was involved in all kinds of social activities in the quarter, mostly focused on women and the elderly. Although Fatima wanted to stay in the neighborhood and realized this was going to be difficult financially, she supported the renewal plans wholeheartedly. Her home was simply ‘awful’, she told me. Moreover, the first time she saw the place she was ‘shocked’ (*geschrokken*). The back door could not be opened because the garden was completely overgrown. The walls had ‘all the colors of the rainbow. It was a terrible mess.’ Before Fatima, more than ten prospective tenants had refused the
apartment. Fatima nonetheless accepted because she had had little choice: she needed a place to live. She loved her neighborhood, she said, but not her home:

It is a tiny little place of only 32 square meters. One can't do anything there. I do not even have a normal shower. I have to brush my teeth in the kitchen. And the house has been maintained terribly; the walls are very bad; there is no central heating. And the house is very, very noisy: I know everything my neighbor is doing. So there's no privacy, one hears everything the other one is doing. When I'm on my couch just reading a book or something, I can hear everything the neighbors are saying.

For these reasons Fatima was ready for ‘something else’. The renewal of Slotermeer offered a perspective of a new and better neighborhood and a nicer place to live.

When it comes to the division among residents between proponents and opponents of the regeneration plans, the ‘dual population structure’ of the neighborhood delineated in the municipality’s report discussed above is relevant. First of all, young residents like Fatima often held much more flexible views than older residents. Yes, Fatima preferred to return to the Louis Couperusbuurt after its regeneration, but told me that if this was impossible she was quite sure she could be happy elsewhere. As long as she did not have to live in the inner-city, which in her eyes was too noisy and busy, she felt she was going to be fine. Older residents did not have this kind of flexibility.

Generational differences thus played a role: young people seemed less place-attached and more willing and able to consider alternatives. Besides generation, other structural factors played a role. One of these was the overheated Amsterdam housing
market, in which it was (and is) very difficult for residents who
depended on public housing to find a new, affordable home.
Residents who live in restructuring areas and who are confronted
with the demolition of their homes receive ‘urgentie’, a declaration
that gives them priority (urgency) on the social rent market. For
many residents, receiving urgentie is the only way to find a new
place for an affordable price in Amsterdam. In other words, such a
declaration is highly attractive for residents like Fatima, who dream
of a nicer place to live, and also for residents whose homes have
become too small for their growing families but who are unable
to buy a home in expensive Amsterdam. It is much less relevant
for older residents with a high level of place attachment - and
especially irrelevant, even perilous, for residents whose income
has become too high for social rent housing. For the latter group,
demolition could mean the obligation to compete for housing on
the private market. I will explore this particular, material aspect of
urban regeneration below.

The active resistance to the demolition plans was concentrated
among people over the age of fifty who were not only emotionally
attached to their neighborhood, but also had something to lose in
terms of their financial well-being and their living pleasure, as I
will flesh out below. It was in the spring of 2008 that residents were
first invited to public meetings about the renewal of the district,
including an evening in the Couperusbuurt in which Rick lived.
That meeting was later referred to, by residents I spoke to, as ‘de
wolkjesavond’ (‘the night of small clouds’): residents were asked to
discuss annoyances and problems and write down, in drawings of
clouds on large strips of paper, their dreams for the future. The
meeting was part of a trajectory that had started several months
earlier, in which an external bureau of specialists on urban issues,
the Joop Hofman Allianties (JHA), was hired by the Slotermeer
municipality and the housing corporations to gather information
on the wishes and problems of residents. Five field workers of JHA
organized a series of activities to get to know the district and its inhabitants, and to ‘collect the agenda of the neighborhood’. The JHA interviewed people, organized meetings, and participated in local activities. In its final report, the bureau claimed that over 1,600 residents had participated, in one way or another, in the trajectory.

Looking back, several of my interlocutors complained that, at the time, they had had no idea of the purpose of JHA’s activities. The bureau’s activities were part and parcel of a trajectory leading up to the formulation of plans for the restructuring of Slotermeer, including the demolition of the *Louis Couperusbuurt* and the eviction of many residents, but many people later complained to have been in ignorance of this. Had they known the future of their home was at stake, they would have thought twice about complaining. ‘Nobody ever asked me if I wanted my house to be demolished,’ said Rick, for instance. The questions had been posed in more general ways. How did residents feel about the neighborhood? What problems did they encounter? What dreams did they have for the future? Many residents had jumped at the opportunity: finally they had a chance to voice their complaints. When I spoke to Rick about this, the focus of his narrative shifted from defending the respectability of the quarter to summing up problems. ‘Prostitution, burglaries, noise, annoyances between neighbors’. Many residents to whom I spoke complained particularly about the lack of maintenance of the housing stock, for which the housing corporation *Stadgenoot*, which played a key role in the development of the renewal plans, was responsible. Another important set of complaints concerned the policy to place people with problems in the neighborhood. In Rick’s words, ‘What happens here is a wrong allocation policy. People from the Jelinek [(former) alcoholics or junkies - PM], people with psychiatric problems, criminals [are placed here, PM]. In our eyes, they have done that on purpose. No wonder there’s trouble.’ These complaints resonated strongly with the narratives of Martine and Fatima, but
were interpreted in a very different way by the many opponents of demolition to whom I spoke.

Indeed, the corporation’s slackness in maintenance and its housing allocation policy were interpreted as deliberate, as a strategy to legitimize the future demolition of the quarter. This notion - that the corporation was engaged in a deliberate ‘metaphoric demolition’ of the neighborhood - was well captured by Rick, in one of our conversations. ‘They care about only one thing - breaking up the neighborhood. They do everything to create the arguments for demolition. They are deliberately downgrading the neighborhood!’ When the Slotermeer Labor Party leader Van Rijssel, who supported the demolition plans, named the Couperusbuurt ‘the worst neighborhood of Slotermeer’, this was interpreted as part and parcel of the symbolic demolition of the quarter and provoked outrage among residents.

In the spring of 2008 the JHA concluded in a report that while people had many complaints about the neighborhood, they absolutely did not want to leave it. The JHA wrote about the Louis Couperusbuurt: ‘Affordability is the central factor on which residents base whether or not something should happen.’ According to JHA, residents viewed mess and physical disarray in public space as their main problem - garbage not being deposited in the right way, smells and disorder in the halls of apartment buildings. Residents also felt that the supply of shops and services in Slotermeer was one-sided and the weekly market boring and not suitable for them. However, people emphasized they did not want to leave the neighborhood and would judge renewal plans first and foremost on grounds of financial affordability. Their main concern was whether they would be able to pay the rent in the future.

As pointed out, residents complained they had not really been involved in the drawing up of plans for the renewal of Slotermeer. Residents were convinced that the participation trajectory was a farce, that the corporations and the local administration had
already made up their minds about the future of Slotermeer before the residents were invited to participate. When I confronted corporation officials and local administrators with this discourse, they agreed that mistakes had been made, but also countered the notion that residents had been intentionally mislead. Martine, speaking from the perspective of Stadgenoot, said:

Of course, we already had some agenda points. But it is not true that all the plans had already been drawn up. We really wanted to know what was important to people, we were really interested in that [....] With hindsight, I would say that we should have been more transparent.... [....] We should have said: this is our analysis of the neighborhood; we think something has to change; this is our agenda. But it isn’t true that we already knew that we were going to demolish people’s homes. That wasn’t clear at that point. What we knew was that serious, physical intervention was inevitable. Just renovation was not enough - we had to do something to change the demographic composition of the neighborhood. And that meant serious physical intervention. Our intentions were really good [... but it did not work out very well.

The program manager of the renewal plans for the local municipality, Cees, also countered the suspicions of residents. He argued that the first part of the participation trajectory had actually gone very well. The process of charting the problems in the neighborhood in his eyes had been a success. Cees argued the trouble had started later, in the second phase, when communication between the corporations and local administrators and residents had faltered. Cees argued:
You have to understand, it was difficult for us, because the residents were not really organized. They only started organizing when we had already made up our minds. With hindsight, I think maybe we made the shift from analysis ['collecting the agenda of the neighborhood’ - PM] to developing actual policy too quickly - and too much from the conviction, ‘this is best, this is what must happen’. So the conversation became very difficult, because the two groups had come to clash.

Cees was very understanding of the frustrations among residents:

I mean, I think people are actually quite reasonable. I don’t know if I would have been that reasonable if someone from the municipality were to knock on my door suddenly and tell me my home was going to be demolished.

**A discourse of displacement**

In 2008 and early 2009 a project group of local civil servants and housing corporation officials, including Cees and Martine, developed their plans for the dramatic restructuring of Slotermeer, including the demolition of the Couperusbuurt and the replacement of low-rent public housing by high-rent apartments and resale property. In March 2009, almost a year after the ‘wolkjesavond’, the residents of the Couperusbuurt were again invited to a meeting. This was the first time most residents were confronted with concrete plans. One of my interlocutors, Marian, told me she had had an ominous feeling when she received the invitation for the new public meeting in the mail. ‘The invitation said that the meeting was going to be held to discuss ‘our neighborhood and our home’. I suddenly realized... ‘Oh no, this means demolition.”
Marian had grown up in Amsterdam New West, in a middle class, social-democratic family, only a six minute bicycle ride away from her current home in the Louis Couperusbuurt. She was a single woman with a job as an educator in a school for special-care children. She had just turned fifty when I first spoke to her, and had lived in the neighborhood since the early 1980s: it had been her first apartment after she had left her family home. As a long-time resident of New West, she had seen urban restructuring at work in other parts of the area, and said that she had always had a sad feeling when confronted with it.

I have seen everything happen, first in Osdorp. With pain my heart and tears in my eyes, that I thought, my god, what are they doing! The flat where I lived with my parents, where I was born. [...] Everything is simply, hup, swept away. It gives you a kind of bombardment feeling, like, bulldozed. Like, flattening the lot. [...] It’s like a part of your life, your existence is being demolished away.

Like Rick, Marian emphasized she saw no logical reason for the demolition of the Louis Couperusbuurt, which therefore came as a surprise.

Of course I have seen the whole neighborhood change [demographically - PM], but I have always experienced that as something very nice. [...] I was very surprised that we are now an ‘attention neighborhood’. I really thought: Heaven’s above! (Mijn hemel!) And during one of these evenings the Labor Party said that we were the worst neighborhood of Slotermeer. I have no idea where people get that idea, but it stings very badly. It made me think: where did you get that idea?’
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Marian emphasized that her neighborhood was anything but a dangerous ‘ghetto’. While she knew people who were sometimes afraid, especially at night, she felt this was nonsense. ‘Media and politicians fabricate this sense of insecurity. It has nothing to do with reality. These politicians have their own agenda.’ She remembered the March 2009 meeting as dramatic and emotional. She told me:

I came in and they had hung up all these maps of the neighborhood, which they had colored in. [...] That afternoon there had been a similar meeting - well, that one had got completely out of hand. People got very emotional, made quite some noise. So, they decided to adjust the evening meeting, take another approach. This meant that no discussion was possible at all. The plans were simply announced. The discussion was cut off. It was simply announced. You could ask some questions after, but that was very limited. [...] They employed a divide and rule-strategy. [...] We didn’t really have a chance.’

Various others of my interlocutors expressed similar sentiments, and did not tire of impressing upon me how they had felt when the plans were announced. ‘It felt like a bulldozer,’ an older resident told me when I was drinking a cup of coffee in the local mall. The man had been a member of the Labor Party most of his life, but he had felt abandoned by that party’s support for the renewal plans. ‘It seems they want to get rid of the normal working man,’ he said.

In December 2009 during a meeting of the district council in the district’s town hall, the definite decision about the renewal plans was made. Hundreds of residents showed up to follow the council meeting on television screens in various rooms; the meeting room itself was too small. A number of residents had
signed up to voice their complaints to the district council, to ‘have their say’ [inspreken]. One of them was an old man in his nineties who spoke about his resistance during the Nazi occupation between 1940 and 1945, which was born out of his anger with the mass deportations of Jewish citizens. ‘But five years of resistance was apparently not enough. Now we are again being deported.’ Another resident, Denise, argued the ‘real reason’ for the renewal plans, in her eyes, was the central location of the neighborhood, very close to Amsterdam Airport. ‘The grey suits see dollar bills. The inhabitants of Slotemeer are of the wrong kind and must apparently be replaced.’ If the council members say yes to the plans, Denise argued, they would give the ‘greedy grey suits what they desired. Is that what a social-democratic party wants?’

‘Big money’ and ‘big capital’ were often given by residents as the real but invisible forces behind the renewal of New West, and an often heard argument was that the renewal signaled a morality that favored profit over people. One of my interlocutors, a neighborhood activist called Truus, in one of the public meetings discussing the renewal plans, said:

There is much talk about the greater good, about general interest. But what do they mean? Do they mean the greater good of residents, or the general interest of ‘big money’? The city and the corporations have decided, years ago, that they wanted this large-scale transformation of Slotemeer. And now we are invited to ‘participate’. But that has nothing to with reality. We may give our opinion, but who decides what is the right opinion? Big money?

Opponents of the renewal plans thus spoke of the participation trajectory as a farce. While the local municipality talked of ‘making plans together’, my interlocutors emphasized that
they felt they had no real say, no voice. This sense of ‘voicelessness’ was reinforced by the territorial stigmatization (Wacquant, 2008) - or what I have called the symbolic or metaphoric demolition of the neighborhood - by politicians like Labor-party leader Van Rijssel, as recalled above. Moreover, several residents themselves had contributed to this territorial stigmatization by complaining a lot. This was pointed out to me by one of the community workers in Slotermeer. ‘You know the people in the Couperusbuurt, right?’ He asked me, laughingly.

The demolition is their own fault. They have given the municipality and the housing corporations many arguments in favor of demolition. They complain a lot! They are very good at complaining in that quarter. About living circumstances. A drug house here, illegals there, that there is no good. The people in the Couperusbuurt are difficult - they complained bitterly and had no idea they were digging their own grave.

This community worker pointed out that the stigmatization of the Couperusbuurt, a major source for people’s sense of voicelessness, was reinforced by residents’ own discourses of discontent. The sense of lacking a voice was strongly reinforced when an alderman was rumored to have said: ‘You can jump up and down all you want, your house is going to be demolished anyway.’ This story was contested - I was present various times when residents discussed, among themselves, sometimes angrily, whether or not the alderman had actually used these words. Nevertheless the story gained momentum and performative power. The remark exemplified what people already suspected - that the participation trajectory was a cover meant to conceal residents’ lack of ‘real’ voice and participation. ‘They do as they like; we are just numbers to them,’ is how one resident gave words to this suspicion. Rick
argued: ‘They tell us that we have the right to participate, that there is still time to give our point of view. But it is all bullshit. The decision has been made. Nobody really cares about what we think. They just want to demolish our houses. They care about making money. Money rules. The truth is that we are being fucked over.’ Marian summarized this discourse of voicelessness when in one of our conversations she said: ‘Not for one moment I had the idea that there was room for real discussion. You just felt that everything had already been decided.’

The politics of distrust
The distrust of the authorities by residents was highly exacerbated as the result of a controversy surrounding the mysterious disappearance of the architect’s conclusion, which even made it to the Amsterdam and national media arenas. The story went as follows. In 2007 one of the predecessors of housing corporation Stadgenoot had commissioned the architectural bureau Abeling to do research on the question if - from an architectural point of view - the homes could be refurbished in such a way that they could regain attractiveness on the housing market. In other words, were there alternatives to the demolition of the houses?

It is important to know that when the houses in the Couperusbuurt were built in the early 1950s, they had been divided into two single-floor apartments, both around 32 square meters. The choice for this, what was called duplexing, was made in response to the massive housing need in the post-war years. It enabled builders to produce twice as many homes, without compromising modernist, court-yard-oriented ideals concerning the construction of the neighborhood and public space. The idea at the time was that when the ‘housing need’ was over, the houses were going to be joined into more spacious, single-family homes. Opponents of the demolition plans - people like Rick and Marian, but also residents who were less vocal and active - had always argued
that renovation - including integrating the two floors of the duplex houses into larger single-family homes - was a valid alternative to demolition. For Stadgenoot however, this was not an attractive option. The corporation argued that the homes were simply too small, too old and unfit to meet middle-class demands: demolition, in their view, was the only possibility. The December 2009 decision of the district council to approve the demolition and renewal of the Couperusbuurt was based partly on the corporation’s insistence that there was no other option for these homes, which Stadgenoot claimed was also the view of experts. The argument was made that various technical reports had shown that demolition was the only option. In fact, a council member for the VVD - the ‘free-market’ liberal party that supported the demolition of the Couperusbuurt - had said that if there were any reports stating that other options were possible, he would vote against the demolition: but during the decision making process alternative options were represented as impossible.

In fact however, this was not the conclusion of the architect’s technical report. On the contrary, the architect argued that renovation and the ‘integration’ of apartments into single-family homes was a viable option that would make the houses in the Couperusbuurt attractive again in ‘the contemporary housing market’. When the opponents of the plans, assembled in the neighborhood committee led by Rick (among others), received the report, they found that its conclusion was missing. One of them, Hans, told me:

We had heard, during one of the many meetings, that the demolition of our neighborhood was supported by a technical report. We did not know that report, so we asked if we could see it. So I called up the guy responsible, who said: of course Hans, you can see it, I will send it to you. So I received it here. And we read
it, and in the table of contents it said that there was a conclusion. But there was no conclusion.

When Hans again called up the official responsible, to ask for the conclusion, he was informed that it had in fact never been part of the report, and that the council members had never seen it either. After that he called the people responsible at the corporation's office, but he got the same answer there. The conclusion had disappeared; it had in fact never existed. However, when Hans called the architectural bureau, the conclusion turned out to exist after all. Hans: ‘The architect called me back; said he had found the conclusion, he could deliver it at Stadgenoot’. So, I said: ‘Well, that’s very kind of you, but I do not work at Stadgenoot.’ Then he fell silent.’

The architect thus seemed to have ‘accidentally’ communicated to residents that the conclusion did exist. After this, Stadgenoot made an appointment with the resident’s committee and organized a meeting in which the architect was also present. During that meeting the members of the residents’ committee were told that a mistake had been made: there was in fact no ‘conclusion’ - suddenly nobody knew where it was. Hans had been on holiday, and when he came back and heard the story he was very angry. He says:

At this point they were lying to us. Because the conclusion was there. I called the architect, didn't I? He had found it in his archive! So, I got angry. I said: What are we going to do? Are we going to have to break into that office? Or are we going to start a riot? So, we started a riot!

Making use of the media network build up in the prior months of anti-demolition activism, residents informed the press,
and looked for and found support among local politicians. The Amsterdam TV-station AT5 made it into an item, interviewing Rick. The question of the missing conclusion quickly became an issue locally. During the district council meeting of September 28, 2010, Rick made a speech in which he argued that the decision to ratify the Slotermeer renewal plans was made on the basis of incomplete and thus false information. Various council members expressed their agreement with Rick, including the member of the rightist, liberal VVD, who said he had never even seen the report. Questions were asked in the district council by the spokesman for the Socialist Party, and district alderman Paulus de Wildt (of the the green, leftist GroenLinks) declared his annoyance with Stadgenoot.

When I discussed the case of the missing conclusion with Martine, she tried to put the affair in perspective. The report had not been commissioned by her (but by someone at another department of Stadgenoot) and, according to her, had not played a role in the decision making process. Moreover, the ‘missing’ conclusion, according to her, did not contain any new information at all, as the residents suggested. That renovation was a viable option according to the architect was already in the report. Residents (and politicians) had not been misled or tricked - the conclusion, in Martine's eyes, had certainly not been withheld on purpose.

Whether it was a case of miscommunication or one of explicit deception, the architect's missing conclusion exacerbated the distrust among residents and of course fed into the general sense that they were being misled and tricked by the proponents of demolition. These tropes were part of a broader discourse of displacement employed by white, working class residents in the Couperusbuurt, a discourse that construed ‘ordinary’ white residents as the victims of displacement and of powerful forces beyond their control.

18 http://www.zie.nl/profile/AT5/ingezonden/Stadgenoot-niet-eerlijk-over-sloop/m1fzp51fedop
Resistance and the right to the city
I understand this discourse as one of resistance (Goetz, 2012) in and through which residents enter into a struggle for their ‘right to the city’ (Harvey, 2008) - their right to stay put (Hartman, 2002). The discourse of displacement not only challenged the lack of transparency and ‘real’ democratic participation in the decision making process, but the very narrative that was being used to justify their displacement. At the heart of resident’s resistance is the defense of respectability (see Chapter 3) and the claim that housing corporations have deliberately ‘created the argument’ for demolition by means of intentional neglect and disinvestment. This representation of things implicitly challenges the common sense notion that high concentrations of public housing produce neighborhoods with social problems. Whereas the common notion has now become that specific features of the poor neighborhood itself causes deprivation - the dynamic referred to as ‘neighborhood effects’ in social science literature - residents blame policies of government neglect and (neoliberal) disinvestment. They engage in a struggle for their ‘right to the city’ by drawing boundaries between ordinary, respectable citizens and neglectful, inadequate, and undemocratic establishments, while criticizing a lack of local democracy concerning the lived environment. Within this boundary work, emerges the figure of the ordinary person whose ‘right to the city’ must be defended and who must seek to regain control over his own representation.

As we shall see in the next section, this peculiar articulation of the right to the city with the notion of displacement is a complex discourse in which the ‘right to stay put’ and the politics of home have become entwined - sometimes - with an ‘autochthonic’ discourse that presupposes the notion that certain bodies are ‘naturally’ (more) entitled to certain spaces. This representation continues to construe post-migrants that dwell in pluri-ethnic neighborhoods as ‘space invaders,’ as bodies out of place (Puwar,
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2004). This autochthonic discourse feeds into white residents’ sense of belonging and home, but also that of entitlement. In the struggle over public housing, welfare chauvinism emerges that denotes the construction of antagonism between ordinary Amsterdam citizens - racialized as white - and post-migrants.

**Scheefwoners and (post-)migrants**

When in March 2009 Marian realized that there were plans for the demolition of the *Couperusbuurt*, she worried that her whole life might be turned upside down. Both she and Rick exemplified a category of residents who feared that the demolition of their homes could have big personal, financial consequences. Both rented in the low-rent, social housing sector, in which they arrived respectively 16 and 30 years ago, when they had a much lower income than today. Protected by the remnants of a strong welfare state, they enjoyed a non-commercial rent. Both Rick and Marian had been socially mobile, but had not moved (up) in terms of their housing arrangements. The percentage of their monthly income that went to rent had thus gone down considerably since they had first moved into the *Couperusbuurt*.

People like Marian and Rick were referred to by policy makers and housing corporation officials as *scheefwoners*. These *scheefwoners*, people with a relatively high income who nonetheless live in social housing and thus profit from state-sponsored housing, are ‘the number 1 target group for current policies’ (Uitermark, 2011). This is at least in part the result of the growing influence of neoliberal ideologies in urban politics, which has been grounded in the notion that it is necessary to move away from public housing as a universal provision for Amsterdam citizens, and in a strong political and political-economic preference for owner-occupied and commercial rent housing arrangements. *Scheefwoners* in this context have come to be seen as people who should be seduced - or forced - into finding a home outside the public housing sector.
CHAPTER 2

and thus on the market. It is important to emphasize that this has not always been self-evident. In the 1970s and 1980s another view of public housing was dominant in Amsterdam. As Justus Uitermark argues:

The history of Amsterdam’s housing politics after 1960 was a double development: grassroots mobilization brought the state under democratic control and the housing market was gradually brought under state control. The resident movement and emerging institutions helped to create a decommodified housing stock that universalized accessibility and maximized affordability [...] These really were revolutionary developments: they gave the city to its people and they helped generate a vibrant creativity in spaces that had been freed from both the state and the market. (2011: 12-13)

The idea of public housing for all income groups unlinked the distribution of houses from the distribution of income (Uitermark, 2011), making public housing a form of progressive urban regulation as opposed to ‘only’ a solution for low-income households. This mode of urban regulation was put under pressure as a result of the rise of neoliberal thinking about urban development. The new consensus became that public housing should be available only to low-income households, whereas other groups would have to negotiate their place to live on the market. In these transformations explicitly liberal ideas about individual responsibility, good citizenship, the freedom to choose, and ownership articulated that represent a radical break with the Amsterdam public housing tradition.

Like several other residents in the Couperusbuurt, Rick and Marian, who had average incomes, had built their lives around
their low rents. Marian travelled. When I visited her home, the first thing I saw was a huge map of the world with hundreds of pins in it, indicating all the locations she had visited. She told me:

Ten years ago I thought of moving house. I had met a guy; we thought of living together. And we did for a while, in this house, but it is small, too small for two people. So, I looked around for a bigger apartment; thought of buying something in that new flat they had just built five minutes from here. But the costs! The transition would be extreme. And I thought: but I want to keep driving a car; and I want to keep traveling. I was happy with the way I lived. And ever since, the housing prices have just exploded. The transition would be even bigger now.

Rick and his partner had a ‘Japanese garden’ outside Amsterdam, where they resided during weekends and the summer. They also spent a lot of money on charities for animals. I once asked Rick if he would consider buying an apartment if the demolition could not be stopped:

No! That would mean I would have to change my whole life and I don’t want to do that. It is as simple as that. We want to keep going to the theater. [...] And we have the speedboat, a big one, which costs a lot of money. And I can do these things because I have a low rent, because I am satisfied with this small home. They call us scheefwoners, but why? We pay 240 euro rent every month, which is not much, but look at what we get for it: 32 square meters and a little garden, that’s all. It is the choice we make.
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Confronted with the plans for the demolition of their home, both Rick and Marian were faced with the prospect that not only their home, but their whole way of life would be ‘demolished’. For both of them it would be impossible to find a new home in the low-rent sector, as their income was too high. They would be forced to search for much more expensive housing on the stressed-out, overheated, and very expensive Amsterdam housing market: and that meant that they would have to give up many of the things they valued in their lives. This produced frustration, and a sense of displacement, as is revealed in Marian’s words:

Am I allowed to have a home at all? Do I have rights, as a single person? Do I have to make room for all those families? [...] It is other people’s opinion that my home is too small for me. That I don’t belong here. Yes, uhm, it’s a difficult question. Yes, I simply do not agree. I do not want to leave. I could have left if I wanted to, but I do not want to pinch and scrape only to be able to live in a large and expensive apartment.

Rick responded to the discourse of scheefwonen with an alternative notion of what scheefwonen actually was:

You can call this scheefwonen, but if I take a look at what some people pay who have housing benefits. People who live in a house of almost one hundred square meters - and that house should be much more expensive compared with what I have. Perhaps 800, 900 euro. And they have benefits! Everything. They pay 300 euro only. A nice place. So what is scheefwonen? That people live in a home they can only afford because they get benefits, or what I do? It is because I work and pay taxes that I make that possible. So people who can’t
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afford it are put in those houses and I pay 240 euro for a very small apartment, but I also pay for the home of those other people. Do you understand?

In Rick’s notion of *scheefwonen* we see his ideas about whiteness, which we already encountered in the introduction of this chapter, re-emerge. The figure of the common, hard-working Dutchman in Rick’s narrative is construed in antagonistic relation to the post-migrant, ‘allochthonous’ Other. This trope in a local discourse of autochthony, which constructs the ‘common Dutchman’ as a victim of displacement by (post-)migrants, by Rick is entangled into a personal narrative, in which a notion of displacement again plays a key role. Rick told me how years ago he had a florist’s business in a white neighborhood that had become populated by immigrants. His regular customers moved out and the shop could not be sustained because, Rick argued, ‘allochtonen’ didn’t buy flowers and stuff like that’. Rick thus lost his business, which he blamed on the demographic transformation of the neighborhood. As Rick said:

Now I am being driven out of my home again. And why? Because they want larger apartments! And why do they want larger apartments? For *allochtonen*! Because Dutch people (*Hollandse mensen*) are up to a maximum of four in a family. So I am again being driven out of my apartment. The houses that will be built here are for large families.

This peculiar representation of the restructuring plans - as if it was deliberately targeting white, Dutch, ‘ordinary’ residents - had a much wider base in Slotermeer. Rick himself insisted that ‘most of his friends’ shared the view that ‘ordinary Amsterdammers’ were being pushed out of town. ‘That is not a feeling I have, it is the
Among many of my interlocutors in Slotermeer, the renewal had reinforced a conviction that immigrants were being favored and ‘ordinary people’, racialized as ‘white’, were being displaced. Developing this perspective, Rick composed a narrative that construed an antagonistic relation between ‘Hollandse mensen’ on the one hand and (post-)migrants on the other, between ‘autochthonous’ and ‘allochthonous’, by imposing issues of welfare entitlement and the distribution of services and rights upon the debate about the socio-spatial restructuring of New West. He argued that he, as an ordinary Amsterdamer, had been forced to make room for ‘large ‘allochtonous’ families’:

Rick: Look, I understand, those people with big families also have to live somewhere. But, well, sorry, I have other ideas about that issue, but that is my own personal...’
PM: What is your idea about it, then?
Rick: They should just make sure they [the allochthones - PM] have fewer children. Why do they have four children, even five? Yes. Look, I will tell you again, they came to the Netherlands as guest workers back then. Yes - and at one point that changed very quickly to allochttoon. Yes, you know? So. Look, if people have to be helped, that’s fine with me, but not when it’s only for economic reasons. And that is how it happened with them. Look, most of our problems we have with all those people.
[PM] But, one second, which people?
Rick: Allochtonen! [...] The neighborhood here is mostly white people. A couple of them live here. They got a house here in the past. Because they came alone. But now they let their wife (hun vrouwtje) come over. And, well, then kids will follow soon; and, well, these homes
are too small for that. And those are the people who are in favor of the demolition. That’s the hard reality; that’s the truth.

The discourse of displacement that took shape in the context of people’s struggle for ‘the right to the city’ (Harvey, 2008), in other words, was built not only on the construction of a symbolic front between ‘the people’ and ‘the establishment’, but also on a ‘front’ between ‘autochthonous’ citizens and post-migrants. In this front dynamic we see the idea of autochthonous voicelessness re-emerging: the notion that ordinary people, racialized as white, lacked political representation and voice, while post-migrants were heard and even favored when it came to the distribution of homes and the redistribution of income by means of rent benefits. Post-migrants, construed as cultural outsiders, have become to be seen as the agents of social change, foreign bodies that threaten people’s everyday life-worlds in a direct, material way.

As can be seen in Rick’s comments above, the idea that strangers were pushing ‘ordinary people’ out became tangible when people talked about the rationality of the renewal plans. People did not tire of emphasizing that ‘autochthonous’ ordinary people were forced out of their small homes to make room for immigrants with larger families. One resident, Mary, told me she had moved to Slotermeer in the early 1980s from Amsterdam Old West to get away from ‘all the immigrants’. She interpreted the restructuring plans as an effort to displace white residents.

I have been on the run for those Moroccans all my life - at least, that’s how I feel. I know I am not supposed to say it, but, well, it’s the truth. Now they want to build a beautiful new neighborhood for Muslims
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and Moroccans and what have you here. A Muslim neighborhood! And why? Look at the politicians here! Do you think they are there for the common good? They don’t care about ordinary Dutch people anymore. They want to make this into a multicultural ghetto. They are pushing us out. (Mary, Couperusbuurt)

This sense of displacement, interpreted as a result of immigration, and also the feeling that (post-)migrants were being favored (see also De Gruijter et al. 2010) could also be heard when one listened to everyday discourse surrounding the Labor Party PvdA, (which remained the dominant political force in this district) as ‘de Partij van de Allochtonen’ - the party of allochthons. People told me for instance, they did not feel represented by Labor anymore now that most of its representatives in the municipality were from a post-migrant background. It was not just that post-migrants were somehow thought to have intimate ties to a political or civil society elite; it was also the sense that autochthonous Dutch residents had been abandoned, had lost precisely these ties and intimacies.

In this trope, the ‘right to the city’ was thus redefined in a very particular way: a sense of displacement had now become interwoven with issues of cultural and social entitlement and income redistribution in a shrinking welfare state. In Marian’s perspective, as opposed to that of Rick, these questions were not fully entwined with the issue of immigration. In fact in our conversations Marian would take considerable pains to distance herself from the anti-immigrant rhetoric of some of her ‘white’ neighbors, including Rick: but for Rick, his sense of displacement was clearly tied up

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19 This particular remark was in response to the remark made by the district chairman of Slotervaart, Ahmed Marcouch (see Chapter 5)
20 See Chapter 5 for more on this.
with the question of immigration and welfare redistribution in a demographically changed, ethnically heterogeneous city. He asserted his right to stay put in the Couperusbuurt by developing and reinforcing a discourse in which ‘ordinary’ ‘whites’ became victims of ‘allochtonous [welfare] spongers’ (cf. Ceuppens, 2006) and their elite sponsors. In this way, the right to the city became defined in connection to a culturalist discourse that framed certain citizens as more entitled - because they were ‘autochthonous’ - than Others.

‘You can’t control things’

In the spring and summer of 2010 it became clear that the plans for the restructuring of the Louis Couperusbuurt were not going to be executed. Although the plans were fully worked out and had been ratified by the district council in December 2009, the crisis in the Amsterdam housing and construction market - and the economic crisis in more general terms - stood in the way. Housing (and office) construction came to a complete halt in Amsterdam in 2010, when a ‘building stop’ was issued by the city’s administration. Only projects already initiated were going to be finished; projects that were not yet past that point were halted for the time being. Indeed, in October 2010 district alderman, Paulus de Wilt, responsible for Housing and Urban Renewal in New West, announced that the demolition of the 670 homes in the Louis Couperusbuurt was off the table and postponed indefinitely, and in the future would be fully reconsidered. If new renewal plans were to be developed, they would have to be newly ratified by the district council. Moreover, before any new plans could be ratified and executed a new residents’ participation trajectory would have to be initiated. It could be argued therefore, that the opponents of demolition had won, although residents held a different view.

Several of my interlocutors argued that their victory was ambiguous: in their view it was not a question of residents’ agency.
Instead, they argued, residents had been saved ‘by the economy’ or ‘by the crisis’. I spoke to Marian in a second long interview in February 2011. Alluding back to her sense of voicelessness and her notion of participation as a farce, I asked if she felt differently now. She responded, echoing the views of many of my other interlocutors:

Well, the fact that ‘the economy’ has decided - as far as one can use that term - this means that you don’t have it in your own hands. You don’t have that feeling in any way. Really, I keep feeling, even now that we have won ... That you can’t control things. [...] Nothing, really nothing has changed.

During our conversation, I pointed out that the Labor Party, still the dominant political force in Amsterdam New West, nonetheless had changed its tune on urban renewal, now pleading for more renovation and less demolition. Was not that partly the success of residents’ activities? But Marian countered:

Sure, but they were forced by the circumstances only. The crisis! It is not because of what we did [...] You simply notice that they think, by law, officially, residents must be involved in making decisions. So, they organize evenings, everybody gets to say something; they call it participation, but they already know what the outcome is. [...] Looking back, the feeling stays that whatever we as residents do, it doesn’t matter. I still have the feeling that we lost the battle anyway, because it really makes no difference if you come with arguments or not, because the decision has already been made. That’s what makes it so sour (wrang).
I also pointed out to Marian that the renewal plans in fact were modified after residents’ participation, when the district council demanded, partly on the basis of residents’ input, that the percentage of public housing to be built in the Couperusbuurt was elevated from thirty to forty percent. Marian’s response to this was illustrative of her distrust in the authorities responsible:

Yes, ha, ha, they pretend that they had not already calculated this in. When they begin with a new project of course they have ideas of how the process will go, and they know they will encounter resistance. And that they need some leverage. It’s the same process everywhere: in The Hague, in companies: before something new is started up, they already think of possible leverage, to make the process go more smoothly. Anyway, that’s how it feels to me.

For Marian and other residents, there was no real sense of victory. What residents were left with was a magnified sense of distrust, which was grounded, among other things, in the sense that outsiders without roots in the neighborhood were deciding about their livelihood, their home. Many of my interlocutors spoke of the large gulf they experienced between policy makers and corporation officials and Slotermeer residents. In our conversation, Marian and I discussed this issue as well. She argued that, even though she had less trouble than some of her neighbors in understanding and speaking the language of professionals, she recognized that sense of a divide between residents on the one hand, and authorities, professionals, and corporation officials on the other. It was, she argued, a ‘feeling’ one got:

Look, they are people who are not from here, who do not have any kind of feeling with neighborhoods like this.
Take Martine, for instance: she is an example of that. I’m sure she lives in a nice ‘own home’ (koopwoning) in The Hague, but she takes the liberty to decide about our little popular quarter, you know. (en die beslist hier wel over ons volksbuurtje zeg maar). So, this gap, I feel that as well.[.....] I feel that these people [professionals, PM] have this idea: ‘Ach, you don’t know what is best, you don’t have the right kind of knowledge, you are just a renter, you are very dumb people. That feeling I do have, and that feeling I also had when I went into dialogue with them.

PM: But how come? How does that work?

Marian: That’s a difficult one, it is, anyway (sowieso) in the feeling. I think, when you talk to them about it they will say: but that’s not our intention. So, it is in the feeling. Very much in the feeling. But it is also in things they do: keeping information from us; fully preparing what they are going to say and what they are not going to say: trying to manipulate things [...], lying.

I encountered sentiments - ‘feelings’ - like these constantly in New West. Even if people were unable to express these feelings in words - precisely because the register of the affective resists full discursive elaboration - these ‘diffused sentiments’ were of central importance to the way people shaped their self-understanding and sense of community.

**Conclusion**
In the Netherlands, the construction of ‘the people’ takes place within a particular context of political and social transformation - the culturalization of citizenship and the shift toward a post-Fordist
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society That is to say, Dutch populism rests on a culturalized and ethnicized construction of ‘ordinary people as ‘autochthonous’. Populism in the Netherlands in other words is grounded not only in the construction of an antagonistic relation between the people and the establishment, but in the exclusion of culturalized others from the very category of the people. In Sara Farris’ words, ‘the people that is called upon to act against the Other is not [...] a shapeless demos, but a specific ethnos or natio’ (fc. 2016). While many ‘autochthonous’ residents sense and argue they are rendered anachronistic - temporally and spatially displaced - right-wing, autochthonous populism can be said to hold the promise of re-centering and de-marginalizing precisely those white, working and middle class residents that feel they have become increasingly peripheral.

As I have argued in this chapter, urban regeneration and shifting housing policies signal a wider practice and public culture of neoliberal reform, gentrification, and creative class politics that renders ‘old’ Fordist working class spaces like Slotermeer anachronistic - spatially and temporally out of place. Many residents in New West engaged with the notion, circulating widely in debates about the future of Amsterdam New West, that the Western Garden Cities were ‘no longer of this time’. Whereas some residents protested by arguing for the contemporary relevance of the ideas of Van Eesteren and other modernists - and by actively construing modernism as cultural heritage - others developed a more defensive and ‘emotional’ response. ‘What they mean,’ I heard several residents argue, ‘is that we are no longer of this time’. Remarks like this denote an affective sense of temporal displacement and an ongoing attachment of people to a time now passed - a passing exemplified by the withering of the Amsterdam public housing tradition. As Andrea Muehlebach and Nitzan Shoshan suggest, reflecting on the Fordist-Keynesian compact well established in Europe until the late 1980s: ‘Housing [...] appeared as an index of
a peculiar affective relationship that citizens cultivated with the nation-state that often took on an elaborate and extensive caregiver role’ (Muehlebach and Shoshan, 2012: 329). In this perspective, the current, decidedly post-Fordist transformation of housing policies indicates a more fundamental transformation of the relationship between citizens, the nation-state, and government, in which certain ‘groups’ of citizens feel abandoned and bereft.

There is reason for some wonderment here. As I have argued in the Introduction, the rise of culturalist populism in the Netherlands since the 1990s - Bolkestein, Fortuyn, Wilders - is precisely grounded in a ‘transposed class discourse [that] frames the autochthonous, Dutch working class as a victim of cultural rather than economic liberalism and consequently espouses cultural rather than economic protectionism’ (Uitermark, 2012). Hence, if it is true that these dissatisfied, allegedly disenfranchised autochthons have been at the center of political discourse for almost two decades now, why do they cling to their sense of displacement and abandonment?

The answers to that question I have argued, can be found, only by taking a close look at the everyday, material realities of people's life-worlds - the articulation in other words between the symbolic boundaries people construct and ‘real’ social boundaries they encounter (Lamont and Molnar, 2002). Such a move shifts the focus to affect - to diffused sensitivities or moods like grief, humiliation, and bitterness. The challenge is to investigate the structural reasons for people's sense of abandonment or disenfranchisement: reasons that have to do with the structural transformation of their life-worlds in the era of ascending neoliberalism, and with the post-political, post-democratic character of urban decision making in the contemporary Netherlands. Following Dunn (2013), I argue that the analysis of the transformation of urban and housing policies, and especially the withering of the public housing tradition, sheds light on the affective consequences of neoliberal transformations.
Rather than simply a form of popular, apolitical *ressentiment*, the discourse of displacement, which I see as an important building block of political populism, must be understood in political terms - as a diffused discourse of resistance that engages with the neoliberal transformation of Dutch society, which is characterized by an increasing distrust in public authorities (Hall and Lamont, 2013: 9). Moreover, if the public housing tradition, historically, has represented practices of valuation - ‘matrices of worth’ based on morality, solidarity, and other attributes unrelated to income and socio-economic status alone (Ibid., 10), the decline of public housing represents the increasing normalization of neoliberal horizons of possibility that ‘elevate market criteria of worth.’ As Hall and Lamont have recently pointed out, the impact of neoliberalism - at the level of personal and social valuation and (self-)worth, human subjectivity, and the meaning of status and citizenship - are not to be underestimated, even if, obviously, ‘these changes cannot be understood as the imposition of neoliberal modes of thinking on entirely plastic individuals’ (Hall and Lamont, 2013: 5). Although neoliberal practices are variously distributed across space - and their effects cannot be neatly predicted - the increasing dominance of neoliberal ideas and modes of governmentality influence how people live and identify. Moreover, neoliberalism goes hand in hand with increasing material insecurity as well as ‘heightened status anxieties’ (Hall and Lamont, 2013). In the next chapter, I focus on discourses surrounding worth and respectability in New West - discourses that are part and parcel of a cultural practice of nostalgia in which a longing for public authority is articulated and a peculiar imaginary of the past is mobilized to shape self-understanding and community.