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Mothering the post-industrial city: Family and gender in urban re-generation

van den Berg, M.A.

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CHAPTER I
REPertoires: Mothering, Planning, Rotterdam³
Borrowed meanings: interpretative repertoires

Parenting guidance policies and the transactions in which I participated are full of meanings that are, in a way, borrowed. Catalogues of meaning are used as interpretative repertoires in the transactions between professionals and mothers. Notions of motherhood in another era come up, dystopian images of the place in which children are raised set the scene, or views of democracy and personal autonomy are positioned as ultimate goals. In this chapter, I set out three broad categories of meaning that are relevant to the situations I encountered in my fieldwork. First, I set a scene of mothering. I interpret histories of mothering work, of motherhood as an institution and ideology and of Dutch mothering practices and thus relate the elements of a mothering catalogue. Second, I analyse Dutch traditions of planning and paternalism that are used in the practices I encountered as an interpretative instrument to understand the relationship between experts and mothers, the state and the family. Third, an analysis of the narratives and mythologies of Rotterdam help to understand the sense of exceptionality that guides many Rotterdam social policies.

These catalogues of meaning thus work as interpretative repertoires. I take interpretative repertoires to mean collections of meaning, words, concepts, narratives and images that are used by actors to interpret concrete situations. Repertoires inform what people say and do in concrete situations. To use a metaphor of Nigel Edley (2001: 198), interpretative repertoires can be thought of as books on a shelf, available for borrowing when needed. They are “relatively coherent ways of talking about objects and events in the world” (ibidem: 198). The books on the shelves that I analyse in this chapter are thus 1) mothering ideologies, histories and practices, 2) paternalism and urban planning and, 3) Rotterdam narratives of an industrial, masculine dystopia. These books are used in practices to legitimise certain actions, to explain phenomena or to understand particular dynamics, preferences, practices et cetera. But they are not only discursive instruments in the sense of “building blocks” for talk only (Edley, 2001). They inform action as well: what people do in certain situations, too, is informed by ways of thinking and talking about certain phenomena. The repertoires are activated in these situations in ways of doing as they are in ways of talking.

Of course, many more books are on these shelves and are used to borrow meanings in the practices of the parenting classes. However, the three repertoires that I deal with here constitute an interesting framework to understand the practices I studied because they were most dominant and they set the stage on which parenting guidance is legitimised as a policy practice. Policy intervention in the most private sphere is – at least in the case of parenting guidance – hardly discussed. I encountered a massive consensus about the necessity and usefulness of these practices and I think that this can be understood in the light of repertoires of paternalist thinking and feelings of Rotterdam’s exceptionality. The matter-of-fact way in which these interventions are targeted at mothers (and not fathers or others active in raising children) can be understood as a new episode in motherhood ideologies.
Mothering work contested

Moeders worden nooit meer mensen. Moeders blijven moeders.

Tom Lanoye, 2010

Motherhood as ideology and experience: Adrienne Rich

How mothering work is done, who is doing it, what possible consequences for children’s development are and how mothering practices serve larger groups is always contested. I do not claim to be discussing these contentions at full length here. I do however want to sketch 1) the way in which mothers (in the West) are historically often conceptualised as the most important environment of children and 2) the ways in which thought about what mothering is and what mothering should contribute to has developed historically. I will return to these themes throughout this thesis, but an introduction in such broad strokes I think helps the contextualisation of research here.

For these purposes, I depart from Adrienne Rich’s Of Woman Born. Rich’s intervention set the agenda for feminist discussions of motherhood from 1976 on and still informs much thinking about motherhood and mothering (O’Reilly, 2004a). Rich writes of her own experiences of mothering in the United States of the 1950s and 1960s, but also critiques the institution of motherhood. She distinguishes two meanings of motherhood: a potential relationship and an institution (Rich, 1976: 13). The second, she argues, superimposes the first in what she and others call patriarchy, and has been the cornerstone of much social and political structures. This institution has ensured that women are the ones made responsible for children’s care and education. Rich insightfully observes how, when we think of children’s environments, we think of mothers. In her words: “In the eyes of society, the mother is the child’s environment” (53, italics in the original). The 1950s and 60s division of mothers in their own houses rendered them especially powerless in an intense privatisation of the home, in which “woman is the embodied home” (42). Motherhood thus was a “powerless responsibility” (52), and was as such presented as women’s natural condition. Once women became mothers, the most important individuality they had to nourish was their children’s and not their own. Motherhood, as such, brought the end to the autonomous self of women, as is also poetically captured by Belgian novelist Tom Lanoye when he says that “Mothers never again become people, mothers remain mothers”. In motherhood manuals of the time, women were urged to remain calm, patient and Madonna-like2, because what was at stake was precisely the child’s subjectivity, not the mothers’ (see for other analyses of US 1950s and 60s manuals for women: Hochschild, 2003 and Ehrenreich & English, [1978] 2005). These characterisations of motherhood and motherhood ideals should be located not only in the
West in the post-war years, but also in higher middle class, white households. bell hooks has,
among others, shown many classist and racist assumptions in second wave feminist thought (for
this argument see: hooks, [1984] 2000). There are many texts on non-white and non-middle class
perspectives on motherhood (see for example O’Reilly 2004b on motherhood in the work of Toni
Morrison, or Walkerdine & Lucey’s (1989) work on UK working class mothering). The middle class
white practice of privatisation, the separation of genders and ideals of childrearing were, however,
set as norms for all. They therefore still resonate as catalogue of meaning.

Instead of questioning these motherhood styles alone, Rich called for a radical questioning
of the institution of motherhood. Questioning styles was and is the practice of paediatricians,
psychologists, social workers and other experts. Indeed, the danger of questioning mothering
as practice and not motherhood as institution, is that women are placed in a double bind; they
are at once the ones responsible for the creation of children’s problems and the ones responsible
for solving these same problems. They are at once “problem” and “protector” (Nakagawa,
2000; compare Van den Berg & Van Reekum, 2011). And this has proven to be a legitimation of
blaming-the-mother-discourses. Such discourses base themselves on a radical interpretation of
motherhood in which the mother is responsible for neutralising all other environmental factors,
such as poverty, structural inequality, disease or abuse.

The motherhood ideology that Rich analysed is distinctly modern. It was the separation of
production and reproduction that was the result of the Industrial Revolution that made such ideas
possible. As production came to take place in factories and reproduction in the home, a quite
dramatic change in perspectives on children, mothers and the family occurred. Rich wrote in the
1970s in the United States of her mothering experiences of the 1950s and 1960s. In the US of that
time, Fordism was at its height. David Harvey (1990) argued how after the Second World War,
Fordism as a “total way of life” (135) came into full being. Henry Ford intended his manufacturing
methods to be accompanied by the creation of a new type of man as early as the beginning of the
20th century (he even designed social work programmes to educate his workers into this new type
of man, Harvey, 1990: 126), but it was only after the Second World War, and supported by the new
welfare state that the stable system of corporate capital, organised labour and Keynesian policies
was perfected. This “new society” relied heavily on women providing a stable home environment.
Adrienne Rich’s experiences of motherhood were thus thoroughly coloured by modern and post-
war ideologies of family and home. And still, these decades of stability and relative prosperity
inform many ideals of love and care (Coontz, 2005). Harvey argues that something changed
around 1972. He speaks of a sea-change in the organisation of production and society towards a
regime of flexible accumulation (1990). Like earlier economic transitions, this led to changes in the
home. In the words of Linda McDowell, after 1972, the transition resulted in a “new gender order”: 
one that was established without “Father and Ford” (1991). How this change affected mothering and childrearing advice is one of the main objects of study in this thesis. But first, I want to write of the specific way in which motherhood changed as a result of the Industrial Revolution.

A new social order: modern motherhood
Social roles changed as a result of the new organisation of production and consumption of the 19th century. The private sphere and the sphere of the market were radically divided and not in a neutral way: the private sphere became distinctly feminine, the public sphere masculine, and crossing these lines came to be seen as a moral offense. This had profound consequences for women and for mothers in particular. As Ehrenreich and English eloquently put it: “when production entered the factory, the household was left with only the most personal biological activities - eating, sex, sleeping, the care of small children, and (...) birth and dying and the care of the sick and aged.” ([1978] 2005: 13). This in no way meant that women in general were not participating in production processes in the 19th and 20th century, but it did mean that production increasingly took place outside of the private realm and that a distinct ideology of home and family took form. Ehrenreich & English ([1978] 2005) argue that the fin-de-siècle “Woman Question” – the question about the role of women in society – had its material base in the emergence of Industrial capitalism and had a series of contradictory consequences: women became more free and more restricted. “Woman” as a social issue was resolved in a new equilibrium in which Romantic views prescribed for the “mysterious” woman to remain outside the masculine (public) spheres and in the feminine, domestic sphere of the home. In this ideology, the home came to be seen as the moral sphere, a sanctuary away from the amoral character of the market. The home was thought of as a “sanctuary”, the “last refuge” for modern men and children (Abramovitz, [1988] 1996; Ehrenreich & English, [1978] 2005).

These ideas became the basis of motherhood as an institution that Adrienne Rich questioned, and this particular constellation of motherhood was thus perfected in the Fordist decades after the Second World War. Theories of the “natural”, “biological” mother-child bond were especially influential in this period. Famously, Bowlby stressed the importance for the biological mother to be present and in the vicinity of the child in order for him or her to develop a “natural” attachment to her and, via this attachment, “normal” behaviour. In fact, he argued that deprivation of mother love in the early years of a child’s life could explain deviance later on (see for overviews of his argument: N. Rose, 1989; Walkerdine & Lucey, 1989; Lawler, 2000). The mother was thus made responsible for the behaviour of her children. And for these reasons, motherhood and childrearing increasingly became a job, an occupation, something that needed to be taught in books, girl schools and civilising offensives. While in many national contexts, many women worked, it was their first
and foremost (unpaid and domestic) job to produce the able-bodied workers for the market. The modern motherhood ideology thus lead to a new focus on how mothers socialised their children. Teaching specific work skills was replaced by teaching character traits that were deemed important for work in the industrialised economy (Abramovitz, [1988] 1996). As a consequence, the role of the mother thus went much beyond taking care of children alone. Mothers were increasingly expected to educate their children, to keep their husbands from drinking and to be guardians of morals. Women thus became important instruments of government in the industrial age. Their behaviour was both the target of government and the instrument for governing the private sphere of the family (N. Rose, 1989; Donzelot, 1977). To ensure reproduction processes, a myriad of programmes to influence the behaviours of mothers were designed in the 19th and 20th century in emerging welfare states. Nikolas Rose studied the way in which government works through “moulding the petty deals of the domestic conjugal and sexual lives of (...) parents” (1989: 121). The child as an idea was a target of policy for authorities in welfare states and as such connected to whatever aspirations these authorities had for the future. Experts intervened in the private lives of citizens to construct the ideal modern family. That modern family was to be responsible and autonomous and the “natural devotion” of the mother was to ensure the realisation of this ideal with the help of experts (N. Rose, 1989: 200).

Socialising democratic subjects
As mentioned before, the Fordist organisation of production and society of the 1950s and 60s allowed for a radical realisation of modern family ideals. With fathers earning income in the market and mothers providing a stable home, corporations providing jobs and the state a welfare safety net, authority was firmly in place. Starting in the 1960s and intensifying in the 1970s, however, protest against these set power relations grew. In Harvey’s (1990) account, the regime of accumulation of the after-war years, undermined itself through its rigidity: precisely the set power relations were what ushered in the regime’s demise.

The oil crisis of 1973 and the 1970s and 1980s political and economic restructuring were accompanied by changing social relations and cultural views. Feminisms of the late 1960s and 1970s (and likewise other social movements), including Adrienne Rich’s writing, can be seen to some extent to be a response to the power relations of the after-war years. The givenness of these power relations was precisely what was attacked. And so was the “natural” authority of parents over children. What was constructed from then on as “authoritarian” parenting – the idea that what father or mother says goes and children obey - came to be seen as anti-democratic. Autonomy and democracy surfaced as most important elements of raising children. But although there was some experimenting with alternative family forms and care arrangements, the nuclear
family did remain the most dominant form and mothers remained to be seen as the most important environment of children. What changed however, were ideas about what mothers were guarding: not power relations as they were and the production of workers for the market, but, instead, autonomous, democratic subjects. Part of the voices in the advocacy of this new ideology of democratic parenting were Frankfurt School intellectuals (Walkerdine & Lucey, 1989).

Especially Theodor Adorno critiqued authoritarianism. In fact, in his 1966 radio address called “Erziehung nach Auschwitz” (Education after Auschwitz), he stressed the importance of autonomy and the resistance to heteronomy: “The single genuine power standing against the principle of Auschwitz is autonomy (...)\[A\] the power of reflection, of self-determination, of not cooperating” (4). Adorno thus insisted that to prevent a future Auschwitz, education for autonomy was imperative. This example gives an idea of the heavy moral argument behind the perceived necessity of autonomy in those years. But because of the tradition of the nuclear family and the motherhood ideology, the person to produce these autonomous and democratic citizens remained (and today still is to a large extent) the mother.

In 1989, Valerie Walkerdine and Helen Lucey published their still inspiring *Democracy in the Kitchen; Regulating Mothers, Socialising Daughters*. In this book, they argued that parenting strategies of the working classes (in the United Kingdom) were deemed pathological in much research and that 1960s and 1970s ideals of autonomy were essentially middle class values. What they termed the model of “sensitive mothering” was a collection of middle class practices that were based on the idea that the mother is the most important educator of her children and that she should, therefore, always respond to her child’s needs. Her *sensitivity* to her child’s needs was, in theories of parenting that were – again – informed by Bowlby’s research, considered most important in guarding democracy. Walkerdine and Lucey showed how those particular middle-class values are validated in liberal and progressive discourses on parenting that simultaneously pathologise working-class “authoritarian” ones. Ironically, precisely leftist thinkers (like those of the Frankfurt School) thus provided ammunition to question working-class parenting practices, because those thinkers “held authoritarianism to be the very basis of oppression” (Walkerdine & Lucey, 1989: 25) and located authoritarianism with the working classes. Mothering, Walkerdine and Lucey argued, more and more came to be seen as a pedagogical task, of producing reasonable citizens that are autonomous, empowered and free. In this sense, they said: “the path to democracy begins in the kitchen of the sensitive mother” (101). For mothers, this resulted in much responsibility, and intensive, time-consuming mothering practices.

I will return to the ideas of *Democracy in the kitchen* later in this thesis because of the insightful analysis of the inequalities in thinking about parenting practices. In this paragraph, I think it suffices to say that parenting was in the West, indeed, located with mothers in a radical
way in modern ideals of the separation of genders. In the eyes of many still today, the mother
is the primary environment of the child. Combined with more recent ideals of autonomy and
democracy, mothers are consequently the ones made responsible for structural inequality,
democracy and harmony.

Dutch motherhood ideologies and practices
Arguably, this is even more radically the case in the Netherlands. Many authors have argued that
when compared to other European contexts, the Dutch have a very strong domestic tradition in
which the mother ideally cares for the house and the children and the father works outside of
the home (Kloek, 2009; Kremer, 2007; Van Daalen, 2010). Interestingly, though, for the Dutch, this
did and does not automatically result in an experience of inequality, as mothers traditionally
enjoyed much autonomy. To many of the Dutch, gender equality does not necessarily translate to
a gender equal division of labour or care. The cultural repertoire that is the result of this specific
historic background turned out to be highly relevant in the practices that I researched. In the
transactions in the practices and in the policy texts legitimising these practices, the mothers were
simultaneously constructed as in need of a process of emancipation from their family and spouses
and they were addressed in their role within the family, namely that of the mother. “Progressive”
ideas of gender equality in the Netherlands appear alongside a strong motherhood ideology and
family practices that leave most caring duties to mothers (I elaborated on this argument with Jan

When reviewing literature on motherhood and domestic life in the Netherlands, a Dutch
family ideal that consists of at least three elements surfaces. First, a strong preference for self-care,
that is to say that the Dutch government stimulates parents to take care of their children themselves,
instead of providing comprehensive schemes of childcare or promoting intergenerational care.
Most Dutch parents share in this ideal: they too feel that parents are the ones that should take
care of their own children and that children are best taken care of in the domestic sphere (Kremer,
2007). Second, the ideal prescribes the form of the nuclear family. Single parenthood is defined
as a problem and, again, the division of care tasks and work is thought to be solved among the
partners within the domestic sphere. Third, currently, a large portion of the Dutch as well as the
government, share the ideal of parental sharing (Kremer, 2007). The Dutch state actively engages
in facilitating mothers and fathers to share the care for children. For example, employees have
the legal right to change their job from fulltime to part-time to have more time to spend with
children (Kremer, 2007). The combination of work and care duties by both parents became the
goal of the Dutch government in the 1990s because of the emancipation of women, but, as
Plantenga has argued (2002), also because the Dutch government more broadly focuses on part-
time employment as a route to higher employment rates and labour market flexibility. In fact, the Netherlands have been termed “part-time paradise” (Duyvendak & Stavenuiter, 2006). And women (mothers in particular) are typically the ones working in those part-time jobs.

There are large discrepancies between the gender-equal ideals of the Dutch and their far more traditional practices. For example, the vast majority of care work for children in the Netherlands is the responsibility of mothers and therefore deserves the term “mothering work” (cf. Reay, 1995). In fact, the image of the Scandinavian countries in which much more responsibility for children is allocated with the state, often functions as a negative reference point when children’s interests for the best care (as given by the mother) are played out against women’s interests to paid employment (Kremer, 2007). However much the Dutch government aims for a model of two parents working and equally sharing caring duties, the everyday practice in the Netherlands turns out to be that fathers work fulltime and mothers have a part-time job for two or three days a week. In 2011, 64% of Dutch women worked more than 12 hours per week and only 27% of Dutch women worked fulltime (Merens et al., 2012). Women’s emancipation in the Netherlands in practice thus often means a “half-revolution” (Hochschild, 1989; Kremer, 2007) of part-time paid employment and, as a result, lower status jobs and less career opportunities no matter how much the Dutch pride themselves on their gender-equal values (Wekker, 2004; Schinkel, 2011a; Van den Berg & Schinkel, 2009).

This opposition between ideals and practices is the result of a specific Dutch history of the family. Compared to other West-European countries, a rather radical interpretation of the nuclear family became dominant in the Netherlands very early on. The bourgeois ideal originated in the seventeenth century and prescribed a high level of domesticity and a very strong gender division of labour (Van Daalen, 2010). Els Kloek has shown in her study “Vrouw des huizes. Een cultuurgeschiedenis van de Hollandse huisvrouw” (2009) (“A cultural history of the Dutch housewife”) that culturally, there has been a remarkable continuity in ideas and narratives about motherhood in the Netherlands. At least in ideals, Kloek argues, Dutch women prioritised their role of housewife: managing the household, keeping things clean and orderly. However, within this ideal, the highly gendered spheres did not necessarily mean unequal gendered relationships. In fact, Dutch housewives and mothers have historically often been depicted as bossy and entrepreneurial and in historic sources that Kloek analysed, foreign commentators stated how to them, Dutch women were strikingly equal to their spouse within the domestic sphere. Specifically, Dutch women were called “housewives” instead of “wife” or “spouse”, referring to their rather autonomous role of “house manager”. As such, she was often depicted as not the dependent “other half” of her husband, but rather his equal or even superior within the home.

Dutch nationalist narratives of ideal family life were very much based on the idea of the
housewife and fulltime mother that is equal to the father. In fact, for centuries and arguably still to some degree today, it was a measure of good taste and citizenship if women did not need to work outside the home and could spend most of their time on the household and the children (Kloek, 2009). To the Dutch, a gendered division of labour did not and still does not automatically signify inequality. Instead, *autonomy within* the household was and is an important aspect of Dutch motherhood repertoires.

To be sure, elements of this Dutch motherhood repertoire were and are to be found all over Europe and the United States. However, Rineke van Daalen (2010) suggests that the Dutch maintained a particularly radical nuclear family ideal. In fact, from historic sources, it appears that the Dutch lived in nuclear families before the industrial revolution entered the Netherlands (wich, incidentally, was relatively late when compared to other European countries). In the 19th and 20th century, Van Daalen argues, the different denominations in the Dutch system of pillarisation actively promoted the breadwinner model and motherhood ideal, in the form of civilising offensives in which higher middle class women and later on professionals taught lower class mothers how to mother. Pillarisation was a vertical organisation of society and social institutions into segments (“zuilen” in Dutch) along denominational or ideological lines. The hegemony of this motherhood ideology in the Netherlands was also reflected in the low labour participation of Dutch women when compared to women in surrounding countries. Research shows that for example that in 1920, in France 42% and in Germany 33% of women participated in paid labour, whereas only 18% of Dutch women did so (Diederiks et al., 1994: 345).

After the sexual and gender revolutions of the 1960s and 70s, it took Dutch women some decades longer to increase labour market participation than women in other West-European countries. And it took the Dutch state until the 1990s to put an end to formal gender differentiated policies in which, for example, motherhood was considered a legitimate basis for state entitlements (Korteweg, 2006). The breadwinner model of the Dutch welfare state was abandoned and the Dutch state urged women to earn economic independence (Lewis, 2005). As a consequence, from 1996 onwards, single mothers no longer received state support. Notwithstanding these formal changes, Anna Korteweg showed how policy practices in the Netherlands remained thoroughly gendered (2006). The cultural repertoire of domestic motherhood was not abandoned with the entrance of gender equal policies. Rosi Braidotti captured this in her analysis of the “Dutch paradox” (Braidotti, 1991: 7) of progressive ideas about gender relations on the one hand, and traditional practices on the other.

Interestingly, Dutch women are currently often presented (in public discourse as well as in policy) as the “endpoint of emancipation” (Wekker, 2004: 490). This presentation serves to exclude “other” women (black, migrant and refugee) from the liberated image of the Dutch national
identity. I have dealt with these presentations and exclusions elsewhere with Willem Schinkel, and will not repeat that argument here (Van den Berg & Schinkel, 2009). Here, it suffices to say that the Dutch model of emancipation that “other” women should appropriate, or so some argue today, does not necessarily put paid labour centre stage. Autonomy is important, but for the Dutch, this can be accomplished within the home.

**Dutch paternalism – a tradition of planning**

In 2008 and 2010, two books were published in the Netherlands that immediately reached relatively large audiences with stories of nineteenth century poverty, urbanity and early private efforts to “elevate” and “upgrade” (in Dutch: “verheffen”) the poor. First, Suzanna Jansen’s “Het pauperparadijs” (2008 “The Pauper Paradise”), relates the story of the author’s family history of poverty, re-education (in a special re-education camp) and, ultimately, emancipation. Second, Auve van der Woud’s “Koninkrijk vol sloppen” (2010 “Kingdom of Slums”) investigates the history of nineteenth century Dutch urban slums: the dirt, (lack of) sewage and early private education programmes. Both books investigate nineteenth century poverty and inequality with twenty-first century eyes and –strikingly- bourgeois (“burgerlijke”) citizens’ reactions to it. Jansen’s book uncovers the emergence of a sense of responsibility for poverty with relatively affluent burgers. In 1818, Johannes van den Bosch established a total institution for the poor, designed to eradicate poverty altogether. Jansen’s ancestors would come to live there. The story of her family poignantly shows the arbitrariness of such efforts; with the death of Van den Bosch, the institution withered and metamorphosed into a punitive camp.

Auve van der Woud shows how it took until halfway through the nineteenth century for early educational arrangements for the urban poor to be established. Those private initiatives strove to “elevate” poor youths by teaching them the virtues of order. Dutch sociologists that were inspired by the work of Norbert Elias came to call these efforts civilising offensives (most notably De Regt, 1984). I define a civilising offensive as a more or less planned effort to teach certain kinds of civility to a group of subjects that are deemed to be in lack of that civility. Civilising offensives can be state efforts, but are often also private undertakings to “uplift” and “normalise” the working classes, as in the cases of Jansen’s and Van der Woud’s books. The term civilising offensive denotes policy regimes in a specific Dutch historical context in which civility and the ambition to civilise continuously re-emerge as their primary focus.

Contemporary social policies to “elevate”, “emancipate” or “civilise” thus build on a rich history of private and public practices. When it comes to intervening in the daily life of citizens, The Netherlands has many “books on the shelf” or repertoires to use. Paternalistic policies are social policies aimed at supervising and directing lives in return for supporting them (cf. Mead, 1998).
Paternalistic social policies not only set criteria of entrance into social policy schemes but enforce certain behavioural requirements through close supervision. Notwithstanding the etymology of the term paternalism (going back to the Latin word for father-pater), historically women were the ones giving and receiving the most guidance. Because women were considered the guardians of morals and civilising offensives sought to intervene in the moral sphere, women were targeted. To be decent though poor was a woman’s task (De Regt, 1984). But the moral education was also performed by women. Like Jane Adams in Chicago, well-to-do-ladies taught the poor women in Rotterdam and Amsterdam how to keep house and raise children.

The public paternalism of the state arguably reached its height in the after-war years, when state intervention was largely unquestioned. In this period, targeted groups were called “antisocial” and those deemed such were housed in segregated neighbourhoods where they were taught how to run a respectable household that remained clean, quiet and orderly (Dercksen & Verplanke, 1984). The fifties and sixties were the years of the establishment of the welfare state, and this was, indeed, paternalistic welfare because support was exchanged for intervention into behaviour. As the Dutch sociologist Van Doorn (1984) argued, a powerful enlacement (vervlechting) of the state and civil society was the result, and it took until the 1980s for the government to aim at disenlacement.

Culturally, paternalism was fiercely attacked throughout the 1960s and 70s. Jan Willem Duyvendak (1999) argues how, as ideals of autonomy and democracy became popular, ideals of planning were under pressure. Leftist ideals of the development of autonomous selves thus discredited the planning of societal change. Duyvendak consequently argues that a period in which government aimed to plan for change was followed by a much less political and sociological aim for government to facilitate its citizens from the 1980s onwards. During the 1980s and 1990s, the prominence of citizen’s perspectives grew and paternalism remained the negative reference point of much social policy. In the late 1990s, paternalism was rediscovered, now formulated in terms of ‘unsolicited intervention’, ‘outreach programmes’ and ‘prevention programmes’. Today, paternalist interventions selectively target groups of inhabitants who are not yet considered full citizens (Schinkel & Van Houdt, 2010). They have to be helped by social professionals to become autonomous, modern, and progressive. The ‘paradox of paternalism’ (the idea that the government should intervene, yet people should remain autonomous subjects), now seems to be solved by implementing paternalistic policies for very specific groups of citizens who are “not yet” autonomous. This way, paternalism is very much publicly supported, yet for other people (Van den Berg & Duyvendak, 2012).
An urban tradition

Those new, selectively targeted forms of paternalism are most prevalent in the city. Dutch cities in the twenty-first century saw the re-emergence of paternalist policies of which the focus on inclusion of the “marginalised” and the belief in altering their behaviour are important ingredients (Uitermark & Duyvendak, 2008; Schinkel & Van den Berg, 2011; Van den Berg & Duyvendak, 2012). Much has been written about the criminalisation of the urban poor in for instance the United States (Wacquant, 2001; 2008). But in the Netherlands, the left hand of the state is not so much superseded by the right hand as it is supplemented by it, to use Bourdieu’s terminology (Bourdieu, 1999; Wacquant, 2001). In other words: while safety policies and repressive policy strategies have been deployed in Dutch urban areas and increasingly so (Van Houdt & Schinkel, forthcoming), they are supplemented by efforts to alter behaviours of inhabitants of selectively targeted urban areas. Parenting guidance can be seen as one such effort.

These strategies supplement physical restructuring and town planning. René Boomkens indeed argued how urban planning became “a national project after the Second World War” (2008: 10). The “self-evident” presence of spatial planning ambitions is, for example, evident in the fact that planners’ jargon (Vinex, groeikernen et cetera) is now fully integrated in Dutch everyday talk. The Dutch contemporary city and especially Rotterdam are thus heavily influenced by government interventions. In fact, urban planners in Rotterdam famously used the bombings of 1940 to realise their ideal modernist city. The functionalism of the modernist planning after the war spatially segregated the four functions of habitation, work, recreation and traffic (van Ulzen, 2007). After the Second World War and through the 1970s, Rotterdam primarily focused on building residential areas outside of the city centre and did not aim for a spatial mix of residential and economic functions, as urban planners do today. Rotterdam provided space for the automobile and for a city centre that was to function as a work and recreation space. Today, Rotterdam is trying to depart from precisely this heritage.

Although spatial planning came under attack from the 1980s on, just as paternalist policies did, the spatial determinism that was at its heart remains omnipresent. Rotterdam’s Urban Vision 2030 is an especially salient example. This “spatial development strategy” shows a Rotterdam that desires to be an “effervescent city”, a “city lounge”, full of young professionals, “high potentials”, artists and students. At least until the full effect of the economic crisis on the city’s budget became clear, extensive urban renewal programmes were implemented and higher-educated residents attracted with newly built housing. Boomkens (2008) defines this spatial determinism as the idea that “it is possible to conduct social policy through spatial interventions” (11). And, indeed, the theme of the 2009 Architecture Biennale in Rotterdam revealed such thinking: “Open City: Designing coexistence”. This event aimed to find an answer to the question: “how architects and
urban planners can contribute to the diversity, liveliness and liveability” of the city (Catalogue IABR, 2009: 7). It appears that the idea of planning ideal future cities is still very much alive.

**Rotterdam: Repertoires of dystopian thinking, industrialism and masculinity³**

To understand how this plays out in the urban context of Rotterdam, I draw the contours of repertoires of thinking about Rotterdam as the quintessential Dutch urban dystopia, industrialism and masculinity. Rotterdam is the second largest city in the Netherlands. It has a little over 600,000 inhabitants and 600,000 more in the direct suburban vicinity⁴. Rotterdam is the poorest, youngest, most industrial and at the same time the most ethnically diverse city in the Netherlands. Rotterdam has become the ultimate embodiment of the Dutch urban dystopia, in part because of these reasons. In 2000 a journalist for one of the largest daily newspapers of the Netherlands (based in Amsterdam), *de Volkskrant*, wrote an impression of Rotterdam thus:

> “On the street level, Rotterdam is still gloomy. (…) At night, strange-looking people harass you with panhandling. (…) The square in front of the station is unfriendly to pedestrians. (…) Going left to walk to the theatre is not an option, because in this dark alley, too, junkies dominate. Greetings from the city without a heart.”
> (De Volkskrant, August 26th, 2000⁵).

This excerpt can stand as an (perhaps somewhat extreme) example of many depictions of Rotterdam since the 1990s. Rotterdam, the former mayor Opstelten famously stated, is first on many of the “wrong lists”. With this statement, he referred to safety problems, poverty levels, ethnic tensions and unemployment. In other words: social problems are often depicted as more pressing and prominent in Rotterdam then elsewhere in the Netherlands. More recently (in 2011), Opstelten’s successor Aboutaleb was interviewed in a national TV show, where he was introduced by the host with the words: “You are the mayor of a city with major problems.” In this interview, Aboutaleb agreed with the analysis in a policy report that characterised problems in the South of Rotterdam as “un-Dutch”⁶. And this characterisation of the city’s problems is almost always accompanied by a sense of urgency, as it was in this interview, when the mayor said that “the social upgrading of the people (…) is going too slow.” With Willem Schinkel, I characterised this dystopian and urgent talk of Rotterdam as a *moral discourse of emergency* (Schinkel & Van den Berg, 2011). A telling example of this discourse was the way in which the Minister of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment Pieter Winsemius said in 2006 that the situation in poor urban areas (especially in Rotterdam) had deteriorated so terribly that he expected public disorder soon (as cited in Schinkel & Van den Berg, 2011). In his assessment, a time bomb was ticking in
these areas and administrators needed to act sooner rather than later. This moral discourse of
emergency was shared by politicians and administrators in Rotterdam when they stated that
Rotterdam deals with “disproportional problems” (Rotterdam Municipality, 2004a) in certain areas.

This dystopian thinking is bound up with characterisations of Rotterdam as an industrial
city. For example, the “un-Dutch” problems in the South of Rotterdam are said to stem from the
massive influx of poor workers from Dutch rural areas to the city in the nineteenth century,
migrating there to work in the growing harbour (for example in Team Deetman/Mans, 2011).
The image of a “working class” or “blue collar city” that was the result of these developments still
dominates discourses on Rotterdam. Every written or oral history of the city of Rotterdam starts
with the harbour (Becker et al. 2004; Engbersen & Burgers, 2001; Van Ulzen, 2007). The harbour has
been the most important symbol of Rotterdam for decades. The image of Rotterdam as “working
city” finds its origins in nineteenth and early twentieth century decades of ever growing harbour
activity. This growth attracted masses from the rural areas of Zeeland and Brabant. This was
largely the effect of the construction of the Nieuwe Waterweg (a large canal directly connecting
the North Sea to Rotterdam) in 1872 and the harbour’s transit function to the fast developing
areas of Western Germany. Rotterdam’s economy was dependent on the large harbour for decades
after 1870. Especially in the years after the Second World War until the second half of the 1970s,
the Rotterdam transport and manufacturing economy was booming and of huge importance for
the Dutch economy as a whole. However, the rationalisation of production and the outsourcing
of labour to low income countries gave rise to unemployment and a political and administrative
struggle to provide jobs and economic growth. Rotterdam remains the largest harbour of Europe
and the 4th on the world wide ranking (Shanghai, Ningbo/ Zhou Shan and Singapore are first,
second and third, Port of Rotterdam, 2013). And the harbour is still presented as Rotterdam’s
unique selling point, for example in marketing materials. In fact, the current promotional slogan
of the city is “Rotterdam: World Port, World City”.

The harbour is thus still important in the way in which people – and not in the least
administrators and politicians – think of Rotterdam. A second element in thinking about Rotterdam
is the 1940 World War II bombings and the rebuilding of the city (most of the city centre was bombed
by the Nazis and burnt out in the days after). The Rotterdam Marketing Bureau characterises
Rotterdam as a “war child” (Rotterdam Marketing, 2008a), still in need of rebuilding. And a recent
book to celebrate Rotterdam and to promote it to tourists and international business says:

“Most Rotterdammers have been used to it all their lives: a walk through the city centre
usually ends up with muddy shoes. There is always construction going on somewhere.”
(Van der Horst et al., 2008: 9)
In these narratives of the city as industrial and post-WWII, its “international allure”, “no-nonsense attitude” and “working class/blue collar” identity appear frequently. One of the great Dutch writers of the 20th century, F. Bordewijk, characterised the city as international when the main character of the book *Character* ([1938] 2009: 344) says:

“Amsterdam is our national city. Rotterdam is our international city. (...) It has received its mark by the sea, because the sea goes beyond boundaries, the sea is the only true cosmopolitan in this world.”

The feature of the “no-nonsense attitude” comes to the fore in the popular sayings that “In Rotterdam, shirts are sold with their sleeves already rolled up” (Martens & Dekker, 2008) and the adagio that “Actions speak louder than words” (*Geen woorden maar daden*). These sayings are used constantly in newspapers and statements by politicians and policy-makers. Blue collar work in the harbour is often cited as the cause or history of the down-to-earth mentality of Rotterdammers, for instance in the popular nostalgic song “Greetings from Rotterdam”, by the Berini’s (which is sung in heavy dialect):

“When, instead of blood, the river Maas flows through your veins
Then deep inside your heart you know this is your city
The most beautiful place on earth is where you were born
To that city, where people are still down-to-earth
I have lost my heart
The old harbours, an industry beautiful in its ugliness
It’s always Christmas in Pernis!”

“Christmas in Pernis” refers to the lights on the cranes and pipes in one of the old harbour areas with heavy industry. The rough and masculine character of working in the harbour and of the harbour itself are celebrated in the song as romantic elements of Rotterdam’s identity. This is also reflected in this quote in a promotional book on Rotterdam by Peter de Lange et al. (2001: 53, original in English): “In the old days, yes, Rotterdam was a city of bully boys and tough guys, of muscle-bound working men.” But the book quickly follows this statement with the idea that:

“Today’s Rotterdammers are much wiser. (...) The city no longer has such a need for musclemen. The majority of the people of Rotterdam are normal people. To be unusual, a city needs a lot of normal people.”
The working class image is in this quote very explicitly associated with a strong, masculine gender identity: Rotterdam, in this representation, a muscleman. It is stressed that today’s Rotterdammers are much “wiser”, which in this particular text refers to their higher-education, and much more “normal”, which later in the text is equalled by the author to “middle class”.

Today, the masculine imagery of the harbour, the “no-nonsense attitude” and the “international allure” are invoked to market Rotterdam for the future, but also deemed problematic.

The city administration finds the dominant blue collar image of Rotterdam to be mitigating vital innovations, and the Rotterdam administration today says that (Rotterdam Municipality, 2008a: 17):
“Rotterdam has a story that is longer than that of a workers city. There has always been more to Rotterdam than the harbour.”

In the representation of Rotterdam’s history in the planning texts, Rotterdam was a “work city” with modernist planning, but this period lasted until the 1980s, to be followed by a period of “correction” and – currently – the “post-industrial city” (Rotterdam Municipality, 2008a: 19-20).

**Activating repertoires**

The sense of disproportionality and “exceptional” problems that characterises thinking about Rotterdam today informs thinking about the necessity of intervention. Because administrators, journalist, politicians and others are often invoking these dystopian images, they create a sense of urgency and exceptionality that can legitimise quite far-reaching interventions into Rotterdammers’ private lives, especially when combined with a tradition of paternalism and state-intervention. These traditions and repertoires provide the building blocks for the legitimations of the practices that I study in this thesis. The matter-of-fact way in which people talked of interventions in the most private lives of Rotterdam citizens, as though intervention in parenting practices no longer needed any legitimation, can be understood when seen in the light of these repertoires of paternalism and Rotterdam dystopia. Furthermore, if the legitimation for intervention is accomplished thus, targeting mothers instead of fathers or others involved in raising children such as child-minders, grandparents and so on, appears as natural and logical at least in part because of a particular Dutch traditions of thinking about motherhood and mothering work. The repertoires that I have distinguished in this chapter serve as analytical tools for me in this thesis to understand the practices I studied. They inform – and this is part of my focus in the chapters to follow – the ways of speaking in the practices about motherhood, mothering work, the possibilities of intervention and planning, responsibilities and living in Rotterdam. Even more so: they inform what is done in the practices.

Rotterdam⁹ seeks ways to transform. City marketers and urban administrators aim to construe a new image with selective reference to the Rotterdam’s past, and they intervene in families and housing to establish a new and improved city that will be able to thrive in the post-industrial future. Rotterdam sees itself having to change its image and its built environment against the odds of the fierce image of the typical heavy-industrial urban dystopia. The ways in which Rotterdam tries to depart this industrial past, is dealt with in the following chapter, when I analyse Rotterdam’s aims for change.