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# Carrying class and gender: Cargo bikes as symbolic markers of egalitarian gender roles of urban middle classes in Dutch inner cities

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## ABSTRACT

In Dutch inner-cities, like Amsterdam, ‘cargo bikes’ have become a popular mode of transport for urban families. Remarkably, the cargo bike has become a highly contested object in both public space and public discourse. This paper uses the cargo bike as a lens to discuss the transformations of urban space from the perspective of class and gender. Based on a qualitative content analysis of national newspapers it argues that the cargo bike has become a symbol of the interdependence of specific residential, employment, consumption and mobility practices.

Cargo-bike drivers are portrayed as ‘yuppies’ or ‘elitist’, related to their class position; and described in terms of specific gender roles: cargo-bike mothers are described as career-focused mothers who are assertive and self-confident, while cargo-bike dads are portrayed as ‘soft’ yet also emancipated. These labels attest to the different expectations and normativities around being a ‘good’ mother or father, particularly within the context of urban space. This paper concludes that the cargo bike is a symbol of the way in which middle-class mothers and fathers challenge and negotiate these dominant norms around parenthood, who are thereby remaking the city.

## Transport de classe et de genre: les vélos cargos en tant que marqueurs symboliques des rôles égalitaires des genres chez les classes moyennes urbaines dans les centres villes néerlandais

### RÉSUMÉ

Dans les centres villes néerlandais, tels qu’Amsterdam, les « vélos cargos » sont devenus un mode de transport populaire pour les familles urbaines. Il est remarquable que le vélo cargo soit devenu un objet très contesté à la fois dans l’espace public et le discours public. Dans cet article, le vélo cargo est utilisé comme grille d’analyse

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género; ciclismo; habitus; aburguesamiento; espacio urbano

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pour discuter des transformations de l'espace urbain du point de vue des classes et du genre. En s'appuyant sur une analyse de contenu qualitative de journaux nationaux, l'article soutient que le vélo cargo est devenu un symbole de l'interdépendance de pratiques spécifiques de résidence, d'emploi, de consommation et de mobilités.

Les conducteurs de vélos cargos sont décrits comme des « yupies » ou des « élitistes », liés à leur position de classe et selon des rôles spécifiques aux genres: les mères des vélos cargos sont décrites en tant que mères se consacrant à leur carrière qui sont affirmées et sûres d'elles tandis que les pères des vélos cargos sont représentés comme « doux » mais aussi émancipés. Ces étiquettes témoignent des différentes attentes et normativités autour du fait que l'on soit une « bonne » mère ou un « bon » père, en particulier dans le contexte de l'espace urbain. Cet article conclut que le vélo cargo est un symbole de la façon dont les mères et les pères de classes moyennes questionnent et négocient ces normes dominantes dans le domaine parental, qui, de ce fait, refont la ville.

## **Llevar clase y género: las bicicletas de carga como marcadores simbólicos de los roles de género igualitarios de las clases medias urbanas en zonas urbanas holandesas**

### **RESUMEN**

En ciudades holandesas, como Ámsterdam, las 'bicicletas de carga' se han convertido en un medio de transporte popular para las familias urbanas. Sorprendentemente, la bicicleta de carga se ha convertido en un objeto muy disputado tanto en el espacio público como en el discurso público. Este documento utiliza la bicicleta de carga como una lente para discutir las transformaciones del espacio urbano desde la perspectiva de clase y género. Basado en un análisis cualitativo de contenido de periódicos nacionales, argumenta que la bicicleta de carga se ha convertido en un símbolo de la interdependencia de prácticas residenciales, de empleo, de consumo y de movilidad específicos.

Los conductores de bicicletas de carga son retratados como 'yupis' o 'elitistas', relacionados con su posición de clase; y se los describe en términos de roles de género específicos: las madres en bicicletas de carga se describen como madres enfocadas en la carrera que son asertivas y seguras de sí mismas, mientras que los papás en bicicletas de carga son retratados como 'blandos' pero también emancipados. Estas etiquetas dan fe de las diferentes expectativas y normatividades en torno a ser un 'buen' padre o madre, particularmente dentro del contexto del espacio urbano. Este documento concluye que la bicicleta de carga es un símbolo de la forma en que las madres y padres de clase media desafían y negocian estas normas dominantes en torno a la paternidad, y de este modo están rehaciendo la ciudad.

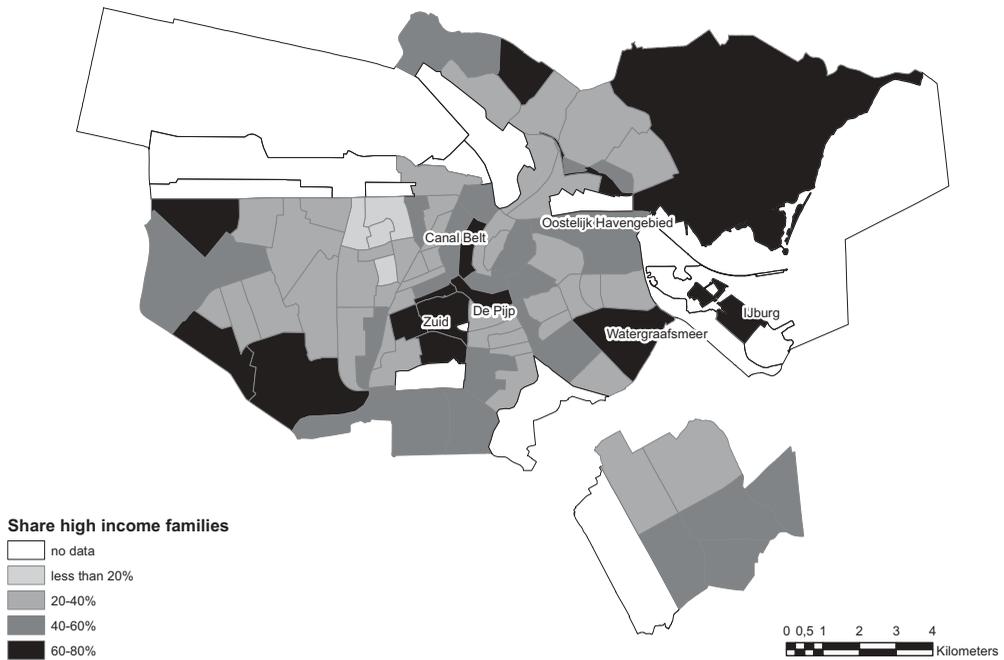
## **Introduction**

Cargo bikes are not a new phenomenon in the urban landscapes on the Netherlands. Before the wide availability of the car and cargo trucks, bikes were used to carry people

and large quantities of goods. The vast majority of trips in the city were made by bikes and many common groceries such as milk, potatoes and greens were carried by bike. While in new designs and brands, cargo bikes (Figure 1) are now subject of a remarkable revival. The bike that allows for carrying several children and large quantities of goods has become popular in the large urban areas of the Netherlands, like Amsterdam and Utrecht. The popularity of the cargo bike seems to be associated with a more general physical commercial and social transformation of the inner-cities, e.g. gentrification, and particularly to the growth in numbers of middle-class families who are increasingly settling down in cities, deliberately choosing an urban childhood for their children (Boterman, 2012). In public discourse, the cargo bike has become the symbol of these urban families and is often used as a marker of neighbourhood change (Van Den Berg, 2017; Van Eijk, 2015). Despite the lack of official statistical information on how many cargo-bikes ride through Dutch cities, it is evident from sales figures and media coverage that the numbers of cargo bikes have grown exponentially in Dutch cities and especially in Amsterdam. It is estimated by the Amsterdam municipality that about 2% of Amsterdam households own a cargo bike, which would amount to about 15,000 bikes (City of Amsterdam, 2016). While only a relatively marginal form of transport city-wide, the presence of cargo bike on the bike lanes sparks remarkably fierce debate. Interestingly, commentaries in national and local media about cargo bikes express very strong opinions and observations about the people who drive these bikes. Cargo-bike drivers are portrayed as upper middle class ('yuppies' or 'elitist') but also often described in terms of specific gender roles: cargo-bike mothers are described as career-focussed mothers who are assertive and self-confident, while cargo-bike dads are portrayed as 'soft' and emancipated fathers. Cargo bikes are interpreted as cultural signifiers and are tools for processes of inclusion as well as exclusion. The way in which cargo bikes are framed in public discourse present an interesting example of how a mode of transport is constructed as a carrier of social position.



**Figure 1.** Cargo-bike mum.



**Figure 2.** Share of higher income parents per neighbourhood in Amsterdam in 2015. Source: SSD, 2016, author.

In this paper, I will use the cargo bike as a lens to talk about how the transformation of Amsterdam's inner-urban spaces is related to a changing class structure and moreover how this intersects with changing gender roles. I argue that the symbolic meaning of a cargo bike is related to both its properties as an object, a status symbol in a way not dissimilar from how a car or a watch can be a symbol of a certain social class position; and the practice of urban cycling, which is not just something other people recognise and classify but also something you do which makes part of a broader pattern of time–space behaviour. These time–space practices are related to the way in which the family household functions as an economic unit, for instance, expressed in the division of paid and unpaid work. But they are also related to other aspects: schooling, leisure and consumption, and how space and place shape these patterns. In other words: cycling is also closely related to where you live. As such it also becomes one of the markers of practicing a certain lifestyle *in space*.

### Family gentrification in Amsterdam

The inner city of Amsterdam is commonly understood to be strongly affected by gentrification (Hochstenbach, 2017; Savini, Boterman, Van Gent, & Majoor, 2016). While there is wide agreement that gentrification should be understood as a class-based transformation of urban space, a substantial literature has advocated a multi-faceted approach to gentrification. Demographic processes connected to changes in the life course are consistently demonstrated to have played a key part in gentrification processes as well (Buzar, Ogden, & Hall, 2005; Ley, 1996; Rérat, 2012). Moreover, (feminist)

geographers have successfully argued for the role of gender in gentrification processes (Bondi, 1999; Karsten, 2003; Kern, 2010; Rose, 1984; Warde, 1991). It is increasingly recognised that understanding the transformations of urban space in the post-Fordist city requires an approach taking into account not just multiple factors, but studying how class and gender – among other things- crucially intersect (Boterman & Bridge, 2015; Curran, 2017; Van Den Berg, 2017).

In spite of both academic and public stereotypes about gentrification being a process associated with young single or dual-person households, gentrification is also carried out by middle-class families. When gentrifiers settle down and have kids, a substantial number may stay in the city (Boterman, Karsten, & Musterd, 2010). In Amsterdam the share of highly educated and high-income parents among all families has increased quite dramatically (Figure 2). Lower income families are increasingly pushed to peripheral parts of the metropolitan area, causing a strong segregation of children with different socio-economic backgrounds (Boterman 2018). Of all children attending primary school, for instance, now almost half have highly educated parents (OIS, 2016). This process of highly educated parents staying in specific parts of the city to raise their children has been coined *family gentrification* (Karsten, 2003, 2007). A range of studies have investigated this tendency of highly educated family households to prioritise location over other aspects of housing such as having a garden, more rooms and having access to parking space (Brun & Fagnani, 1994; Goodsell, 2013; Lilius, 2014). There are a number of dimensions that seem to play a role in shifting location decisions of middle-class families.

First, housing liberalisation and the expansion of private housing has facilitated gentrification processes across urban contexts (Harloe, 1995; Murie, 1991). The gradual reduction of social and other affordable rental housing and the expansion of owner-occupancy have been conducive to accommodating ever more middle-class households, including many families. In Amsterdam this is, for instance, manifest in the very high share of middle-class families that have settled in newly developed areas such as IJburg and Oostelijk Havengebied, but also in the effects of the sale of rental housing through which buying families replace renting singles (see Boterman & Van Gent, 2014).

Another key issue related to the rise of (family) gentrification is the changing position of women on the labour market (Bondi, 1999; Warde, 1991). The shift from Fordist modes of production to a service based economy has eroded the strict separation of reproductive and productive realms that characterised the Fordist economy (Rich, 1976). This shift has created both opportunities for women and new inequalities across gender and between women (and men) working in high-skilled permanent jobs and those working in low skilled, flexible and insecure jobs (McDowell, Ray, Perrons, Fagan, & Ward, 2005). As women massively entered the labour market but remained responsible for most of domestic and childcare tasks many women have to do what Hochschild (1989) called a 'second shift' (after work). The breakdown of the traditional male breadwinner model has resulted in a wide variety of arrangements at the household level.

In the Netherlands in 2016 about 71% of all women have paid work for at least 12 h a week (up from 51% in 1999). Also the number of weekly hours worked has gone up steadily from about 75% working more than 20 h to about 86% in 2016 (SCP, 2016). In large cities, such as Amsterdam, women work more often and more hours. This is largely related to the composition of the city in which a very large share of the working-age

population consists of young, highly educated women. Many of them also continue to work when they have children. Although most Dutch mothers, also in Amsterdam, tend to work part-time, the majority of family households have at least one full-time working spouse and one substantial part time earner (Boterman & Karsten, 2014). This implies that gentrification is further boosted by the pooling of two incomes at the level of the household. The rise of dual earner families has not only increased the number of households that can potentially afford centrally located housing, but also has increased demand for it (Bondi, 1999; Boterman et al., 2010). In studies on urban families, balancing work and care through reducing or optimising work-home commuting have been forwarded as essential (De Meester, Zorlu, & Mulder, 2011; Jarvis, 2005; Karsten, 2007). Urban families thus prioritise locational advantages and may (depending on opportunities and constraints) have to sacrifice some other residential preferences.

A fourth dimension explaining the rise of middle-class families is associated with identity and lifestyle partly expressed through consumption (Brun & Fagnani, 1994; Karsten, 2007). In a recent paper on the relationship between neighbourhood change and consumption infrastructure, Karsten (2014) demonstrates how family gentrification has spurred a gradual make-over of the Amsterdam neighbourhood Watergraafsmeer where speciality shops now offer baby cappuccinos and yoga for kids. In other studies she stresses the urban identity of family gentrifiers who identify themselves as 'sturdy' and 'tough' as they in some way do the upbringing of children in the supposedly hostile urban environment (see also Sennett, 1984, *Families against the city*). Consumption patterns should be understood in a broad sense and clearly interact with housing, which provides access to specific amenities such as restaurants, organic shops, yoga studio's, etc. The issue of distinction, which is more generally considered part of the explanations for gentrification (Bridge, 2006; May, 1996) is also one of the central arguments in another study of residential practices of middle-class families (Boterman, 2012). Cultural fractions of the middle classes are demonstrated to be relatively urban in their residential orientation. People with a focus on the accumulation of specific forms of cultural capital through, for instance, music and food taste, type of education and line of work (typically public and creative services) tend to stay more in the city than middle classes with a stronger focus on economic capital. Urban middle-class families differ from suburban and rural families in terms of their residential location but also in the way they have organised their everyday lives in terms of transport (Eyer & Ferreira, 2015; Rérat, 2016). Family gentrifiers have a whole set of *distinct* social-spatial arrangements that integrate various key fields such as housing, employment, consumption and mobility.

## Cycling and gentrification

The population change through gentrification has impact on various aspects of the urban landscape. Particularly the remaking of the commercial landscape has received a great deal of public and scholarly attention (Bridge & Dowling, 2001; Karsten, 2014; Zukin, 1987, 2010). Already in the earliest accounts of gentrification the changes in retail and cafés, bars and restaurants have been used as visual cues of gentrification (Warde, 1991; Zukin, 1987). Less attention has been paid to the changes in flows of mobility due to gentrification. Although several studies stress that new generations ('Millennials'), who are more urban in their residential orientation (Moos, 2016), may have different

priorities in terms of transport behaviour (McDonald, 2015), mobility is not strongly integrated into more critical gentrification literature. In fact, even though a wide range of aspects of consumption and lifestyle, food, coffee, clothing, vegetarianism, yoga and so on have all been used as cues for gentrification, transport is not very prominent (Rérat & Lees, 2011). Nonetheless, cycling does feature in some discussions of gentrification (Spinney, 2016; Stehlin, 2015). The counter-cultural life style that is associated with cycling (distinction!) is to be the most common angle. Planning for bike lanes in US cities is a practice that it welcomed by new middle-class residents, while is it also actively opposed by those at risk of being displaced (Flanagan, Lachapelle, & El-Geneidy, 2016). Although these studies clearly provide evidence of a relationship between gentrification and cycling, they are coming from contexts in which cycling is a relatively marginal practice. In European urban contexts where cycling constitutes the central rather than a marginal role in everyday mobility and is an integral part of the wider transport system, such as Copenhagen, Berlin or Amsterdam, the potential for distinction through cycling is much smaller.

In the Netherlands, cycling is so common that *as such* it is not part of a counter-cultural life style. It is argued to be part of a national habitus (Kuipers, 2013) and therefore also a quintessential part of Dutchness (Oosterhuis, 2016) and representing, what Billig (1995) calls, a banal form of nationalism. In this way, cycling may also serve as a way to fit in as a foreigner: by cycling as the Dutch do, one may be perceived as a local and experience a sense of belonging (Jordan, 2013). By adopting local practices such as cycling, the newcomer (i.e. expats) might (selectively) integrate thereby also positioning herself vis-à-vis other non-integrating migrants (Kunz, 2016). Despite the ubiquity of cycling in the Netherlands there are some clear social fault lines associated with bike use: for instance, lower educated, elderly and people with a migrant background cycle less (Harms, Bertolini, & Te Brömmelstroet, 2014). Also the spatial context is highly relevant: residential location and workplace clearly affect bike use: particularly in inner cities bicycle use is much higher than in non-urban areas (Boterman & Musterd, 2016; Harms et al., 2014). In areas where cycling is the norm such as Amsterdam's inner city, *not* practicing it may be construed as foreign and out of place. The absence of cycling can therefore sometimes be 'spectacular' (Jones, Robinson, & Turner, 2012) and may represent otherness and distinction. In the context of increasingly polarised political debate about migration, national identity and integration, cycling and non-cycling can enact 'Dutchness' or a lack of it (Duyvendak, Geschiere, & Tonkens, 2016). This may apply to Dutch citizens with a migration background but also for tourists who may — in the eye of locals — demonstrate their non-belonging through a certain inaptness in cycling (Pinkster & Boterman, 2017). Mobility can thus be seen as part of the everyday practices of belonging that are clearly associated with processes of inclusion and exclusion.

Moreover, the national habitus of cycling, which entails riding a *regular* or *normal* bicycle, seems to be increasingly eroded. In the context of highly normalised bicycle use, some forms of cycling are becoming highly distinctive practices. Even within the context of Dutch cities certain mobility practices have become associated with very specific social positions. The most evident case in point is the cargo bike that has become the distinctive practice of urban middle-class families, most evidently in the inner city of Amsterdam. This paper argues that the cargo bike has become a symbol of the

interdependence of specific residential, employment, consumption and mobility practices. While it is evident that class position of these family gentrifiers are central, I argue that the gendered dimensions are equally important for understanding how cargo-bike users are discursively constructed (Boterman & Bridge, 2015; Schwanen, 2007).

## Methods

This paper will draw on a qualitative content analysis (Riff et al. 2014) of articles about cargo bikes, making use of the database LexisNexis containing all national newspaper articles for the past decades. From this database, I selected four national Dutch newspapers: Het Parool, NRC Handelsblad, De Volkskrant and de Telegraaf, that have a nationwide distribution but are all based in the city. They represent different positions in terms of readership, covering various social and political positions. Het Parool does not have any specific political profile but explicitly covers local Amsterdam it is read by people of various social backgrounds. NRC Handelsblad is a – in the European sense – liberal newspaper with strong focus on business and international news. Readers are generally highly educated. De Volkskrant is a left-leaning newspaper, traditionally associated with the labour party, that has a national coverage but with a relatively strong focus on Amsterdam news. The Telegraaf is the biggest newspaper of the Netherlands. It has a conservative/populist profile with a strong focus on entertainment and sensational news. It is not a tabloid, however, and has a long standing of investigative journalism. While it also has a national coverage, the newspaper is traditionally well-read in Amsterdam and also brings much news from the city.

Furthermore, the paper also relies on insights from a qualitative study of middle-class families carried out between 2008 and 2011 in Amsterdam, which was concerned with the way in which families use the city in their everyday lives (for details see Boterman, 2012). While this study did not explicitly investigate cargo bikes, the sample of 53 interviews with mothers and fathers of young children contains many references to mobility practices, including cargo bikes, that provided both input for the coding of the newspaper articles as well as facilitates interpretation.

The content analysis started with a selection of articles from 1990 till July 2017 published in the four newspapers mentioning the term 'bakfiets', 'bakfietsmoeder'<sup>1</sup> or 'bakfietsvader'. This selection gave well over a thousand articles that mention one or more of these terms. Most articles just mention it once or twice and are not explicitly about cargo bikes as a topic (Table 1). The articles were all downloaded and analysed in Atlas TI. Much of the initial coding occurred based on search terms, including mentions of bakfiets in combination with 'mother', 'father', 'family' (and related terms). Those articles that contained mentions of cargo-bike mums and dads were then manually coded, both through inductive and deductive coding. From this intensive coding several nodes emerged which were then used to code all articles again (Table 2).

## Analysis

Although quite some articles explicitly focus on the phenomenon, most articles mention the term only a small number of times. Some articles discuss some of the businesses that manufacture the cargo bikes, to which countries they are exported or how they are used

**Table 1.** Newspapers and number of articles included in the analysis.

	NRC Handelsblad	Het Parool	De Volkskrant	De Telegraaf	Total
Number of articles	263	556	355	284	1458
Articles with 'cargo bike' in title	19	17	19	32	87
Mentions of cargo-bike <i>bakfiets</i>	447	987	618	437	2489
Mentions cargo-bike mum <i>bakfietsmoeder</i>	39	62	35	17	153
Mentions cargo-bike dad <i>bakfietsvader</i>	10	5	28	8	51

as delivery vehicles. In most articles, however, the term is employed as a quick cue for describing a social or spatial context. The term is usually not explained but used to quickly describe what kind of people are present at a festival, who live in a certain kind of neighbourhood or who frequent a shop. The content analysis reveals that the cargo bike is loaded with symbolic meanings which are strongly connected to social class and gender. Other dimensions such as cargo bikes as representations of 'Dutchness' and 'whiteness' also emerged from the coding but the references to issues of class and gender are much more pervasive. For instance, in discussing processes of neighbourhood renewal or the rise of new consumption spaces associated with the in-migration of highly educated white middle-class household in former working-class districts, cargo bikes are often listed among other consumption practices that are considered typical of those processes such as yoga studios, speciality coffee-bars and organic grocers (Shaker Ardekani & Rath, 2017). The gentrifying neighbourhood of De Pijp, for instance, is described as

a neighbourhood with head scarfs and cargo bikes, roti and quinoa salad, call centres and yoga schools (De Volkskrant 22–5–2015)

This entails also the negative connotations associated with processes of place-based displacement associated with gentrification:

These changes are not appreciated by everybody. An article in this newspaper about the advantages of building a bridge between the city centre and North provoked a series of online comments with remarkably venomous strikes at the new social groups coming to North. 'Cargobike mothers should just stay in South' was one of the most moderate

**Table 2.** Key nodes for coding: frequencies.

Key nodes for coding	<i>Selected terms associated with nodes</i>	<i>N-associated terms mentioned in all articles (n = 1458)</i>	<i>Of which: In combination with cargo bike (same paragraph)</i>	<i>N-mentioned In cargo-bike mum/dad articles (n = 179)</i>
Social position	'Elite'; 'yup'; 'hoogopgeleid'; 'middenklasse'; 'rijk'; 'hoge inkomens' 'kak'	159	23	79
Gender roles	'Hours a week' 'part time' 'fulltime' 'goede moeder' 'goede vader' 'echte man' 'carrière'; 'werk'; 'combineren'	129	21	17
Spatial change	'gentrification'; 'upgrading'; 'buurtverandering'; 'veryupping'; 'opgeknapt'; "opgepoetst"; 'transformatie'	104	18	20
Political positionality	'D66'; 'Groenlinks'; 'PvdA'; 'VVD'; 'SP'; 'PVV' 'links'; 'rechts'	510	25	61

comments, and 'In that way we get rid of these yuppies with their shite posh rides, good riddance!' The yuppie, the hipster they are perceived as the symbol of all evil, a life style that pushes itself forward into any corner of the city (Het Parool 14–2-2015)

A number of key terms return frequently in this respect: elite/elitist/posh (*elite/elitair/kak*); yuppies/yuppy thing (*yuppending*). Most of these terms in the Dutch context refer to social class position in a rather negative way. Although gentrification is not as politicised as, for instance, the UK or German context, yuppies (young urban professionals) are a very frequently used word to describe particular social groups who are identified through specific practices. Interestingly the term 'yuppies' is one of the few explicit ways to talk about social class. As Van Eijk (2013) explains in her account of self-identification in terms of social class, most people in the Netherlands prefer to refer to themselves as 'middenklasse'. Dutch class talk, she claims, is hostile to hierarchy and downplays class differences as well as conceals it. While the Dutch term *middenklasse* resembles the Anglophone use of 'middle class', it has the more the meaning of 'standard', 'normal', or 'average' rather than the connotation of being the dominant class as juxtaposed with working classes. Particularly in debates in relation to the transformation of urban space through processes of gentrification this is often a source of confusion. The displacement of working classes by the middle classes as described in Anglo-phone literature cannot so easily be translated into the Dutch terminology of *arbeidersklasse* (lit. working class) or *middenklasse* (lit. middle class). When Dutch scholars use the English terminology of middle class describing who are the agents of gentrification, Dutch policy-makers or journalists may rather see the 'middenklasse' who are being squeezed out of gentrifying areas due to the influx of highly educated more affluent groups. The agents of gentrification in the Dutch context, highly educated with well-above average incomes are generally referred to a yuppies (*yuppen*), elite and *kakkers*; or just simply highly educated (*hogeropgeleiden*) or high-incomes (*hoge inkomens*). While in most accounts of gentrification in the international literature these people are referred to as '(upper) middle class' in the Dutch context the term 'middenklasse' would be an ill fit. The vocabulary used to describe the middle classes in the Dutch urban context has been enriched by the terms 'cargo-bike family/mother/father/parent', which are very distinctive markers of social class. What is more, the term 'cargo bike' parent is also framed as a marker of a more specific fraction of the middle classes. While it is clearly used to describe people in social positions well-endowed with various forms of capital, it is within certain discourses primarily associated with more liberal/left-leaning fractions of the middle classes. *De Volkskrant* (8-6-2006) published an article on the cargo bike titled: 'the SUV of bikes' that tried to explain the phenomenon. It briefly traced back the origins of the cargo bike in the alternative scene in Copenhagen. The first modern cargo bikes in the Netherlands were made in Denmark and were based on the model conceived of in Christiania, the famous self-proclaimed free state/town in the centre of the Danish capital. The first modern Dutch-made cargo bikes were also built by a workshop associated with the alternative and squatter milieu in Amsterdam. The *Volkskrant* article (8-6-2006) argues that:

parents who in the nineties started to transport their kids in in cargobikes, had been left-wing activists. Before the year 2000 the cargo bike was outright left-wing. The cargo bike is still popular among the progressive part of the population but not exclusively anymore. Since the beginning of the new millennium the cargo bike has become

popular among young parents from various walks of life. Particularly in the expensive quarters of the big cities cargo bikes are queuing up in front of primary schools. The fancy father, already wearing a suit for work, the trendy mother in flowery skirt, the Filipina au-pair with three blonde children, they all arrive by cargo bike.

While *de Volkskrant* was claiming in 2006 that the cargo bike had moved out of a very specific sub-culture into the mainstream, the examples the article gives still very strongly point to the cargo bike being a marker of a specific social position. The popular blog *Geenstijl.nl* (owned at the time by Telegraaf Media Group) consistently links the cargo bike to the political party Groenlinks (Green Party) and to a lesser extent D66 (social/radical liberals) (*geenstijl.nl*, 2017). Interestingly, the scientific think tank of the Green Party in 2011 published a report called 'Bakfiesten and Rolluiken (Cargobikes and Shutters) the electoral geography of the Netherlands' (De Voogd, 2011) in which the cargo bike is indeed used as a cue for neighbourhoods in which the potential voters for the Greens can be found. As a cargo-bike mother writes in her column in *Het Parool* (29–10-2010):

The cargobike is criticised not so much for what it is, but what it stands for. It is a symbol for everything that is lefty, greeny, yuppy-like. Cargobikes are according to the authors [of the book *Cargobikes and Shutters*] a symbol for an open, curious movement that is focussed on societal progress, international engagement and a positive attitude towards cultural diversity.

The association of the cargo bike with highly educated and affluent individuals, progressive attitudes and specific spatial practices is particularly made by conservative media. The former chief editor of *de Telegraaf*, the biggest conservative/populist newspaper of the Netherlands, Sjuul Paradijs described in an interview (*de Volkskrant*, 27–2-2010) the 'cargo bike daddy' as follows:

it is a man who works four days a week, who takes the kids to school in the cargo bike and afterwards reads *The Volkskrant*. Sometimes *Het Parool*. Who thinks life should mainly be fun. With friends and reading a lot of books. Who votes D66 or Groenlinks. Wimps. Never wore a suit. And ...are they real men?

This quote touches upon a range of different ways in which the cargo bike is socially constructed. Many of them are not only about social class but also evidently about how class and gender intersect in particular ways of doing fatherhood. I will return to this later, for now it is important that mainly in right-wing conservative media cargo bikes are a symbol of left-wing (liberal) political attitudes. These attitudes are often mocked and constructed as naïve, unrealistic and sometimes even as unpatriotic. In a *De Telegraaf* article (28–2-2017) cargo bikes, consumption patterns and political attitudes are all summarised in a response from the interest group for heavy trucks:

How do you think that the -among Green Left people popular- organic supermarket gets its sourdough bread, goji berries and quinoa? Not by cargo bike, but by truck! Green Left lives in La La Land.

Moreover, as Paradijs also does in the previously cited interview, conservative media stress the inconsistency or hypocrisy of the left-liberal fraction of the middle classes. They frame the cargo bike as a symbol of privileged moral superiority: 'They have their heart to the left, the wallet to the right and a crate on the front of their bicycle' (*Het Parool* 29–10-2010). What is implied by this is summarised very clearly by Martin BosmaMP for the radical right-wing populist PVV party in a column in *NRC* (25–11-2010):

Are your kids exposed to your multicultural ideals?? And do you go to your black school at 8:30 in the morning? Is your Emma, Anne-Fleur of Mees happily in a classroom with Mohammeds and Alis? Ho, ho. Now we are getting crazy aren't we? When push comes to shove you rather drive on for another block with the cargo bike. You are not a racist after all. No, it's the computer room or the colour of the wall paper. Or something like that. Your friends of Minerva [fraternity of Leiden University] or the of the local D66-chapter [social liberals] in Amsterdam South nod in agreement. They do the same, you see...

The cargo bike in this quote is not just framed as a symbol of liberal hypocrisy is it also framed as a symbol of the political establishment against which the right-wing populists are fulminating. Minerva is a fraternity which is connected to the oldest and arguably the most prestigious university of the country. It is however, a bulwark of the conservative economic elite of the Netherlands rather than part of the liberal-left-wing establishment. Similarly, the local chapter of D66 of Amsterdam South is also more associated with rather conservative and economic social positions. What this quote hence illustrates is that for some the cargo bike is a symbol for everything they resent politically. Interestingly, both Bosma and Paradijs live in the Amsterdam neighbourhood of Watergraafsmeer, which has been referred to as the 'headquarters of the cargo bike' (Het Parool, 19-5-2015). Watergraafsmeer is among the best examples of family gentrification in Amsterdam. The neighbourhood had traditionally been (lower) middle class with civil servants, small shopkeepers and some doctors. Gradually the neighbourhood is upgrading even further and it now ranks among the most expensive neighbourhoods in the city.

It is a typical Watergraafsmeer street: over representation of highly educated dual earners who can pronounce the word quinoa correctly; scores of pretty kids with rubber boots of a French brand in cargo bikes (Het Parool 30-5-2014)

The cargo bike with kids is a symbol of the new elite. I live in the Watergraafsmeer, there you stumble over these things (Het Parool 14-5-2008)

Contrary to traditional gentrification processes the upgrading has been primarily been carried out by family households with two and -surprisingly often- three kids. These middle-class families are characterised by the class position, but also by specific ways in which they practice fatherhood and motherhood, which intersect with their class-habitus but also strongly related to their gender dispositions.

### **Discourse and practice: carrying gender**

Cargo bikes are often mentioned in the same breath as the mothers who primarily drive them. The 'cargobike mum' is the most frequently occurring combination in the selecting of newspaper articles. 'Cargobike dad' or 'cargobike parents' is also repeatedly mentioned but less often. The cargo-bike mum is framed in terms of the class positions that were discussed in the previous paragraph. She is portrayed as part of the liberal progressive urban middle classes, a yuppy, who lives in particular, gentrifying or gentrified areas of the city, such as Watergraafsmeer or South. What is more, she is also framed as a mother who tries to combine caring for the family and having a career. The balancing act of cycling through Amsterdam traffic with two kids and heavy groceries is a metaphor for the juggling of various responsibilities and positionalities as a woman. Martin Brill (De Volkskrant 2-9-2006) describes these struggles nicely in his column:

The cargo bike should make things easier and it probably does but yet she looks struggling and fretting, less light I should say. Before she had a cargo bike her motherhood had its downsides but now it seems the bike she has magnifies the burden she is carrying to theatrical proportions. She is so damn present! (...) In her way the mother that overtakes me is happy with her new vehicle, I presume. She has great control of her bike. She can handle it with just one hand, using the other to hold an umbrella or make a phone call. That's important because she has a busy life and that requires attention. She is the captain of her own ship. Sometimes she comes across as aggressive: get out of my way, coming through. I have two kids, bags full of groceries, a career, that's why I am on phone, asshole! I am not envied but I'll make it though. I work like a dog. But this aggression, or assertiveness is perhaps better also has a flavour of self-pity. What the heck did I got myself into? Now I'm on this stupid cargo bike.

This quote captures many of the ambiguities of what it means for a mother to pursue a career in the Netherlands. While labour market participation among mothers is quite high, the vast majority of Dutch mothers work part-time. Dutch mothers work on average about 25 h a week, fathers on average 40 h (SCP, 2016). Only a small minority of mothers with a partner (10%) has a full-time job. The most common arrangement in the Dutch context is a family household in which the father works full-time and the mother is employed for three days a week (Boterman & Karsten, 2014). For many Dutch parents the idea to send children to day care for more than three days a week is unthinkable and considered a pity for the children. Some scholars have referred to this as 'a Dutch culture of care' in which it is expected that mothers stay at home with the children (De Meester et al., 2011; Knijn, 2003). Historically this was reflected in the high share of traditional male breadwinner households until fairly recently. The one-and-a-half earner households that have emerged in the past decades are considered a new form of traditional gender roles and hence referred to the neo-traditional family. In Amsterdam, this is slightly different. The share of full-time workers is higher in urban areas and in Amsterdam in particular, but also the what has been referred to as the 'symmetrical part-time household' in which both partners work part-time for 32 h a week is a common arrangement among the urban middle classes (Boterman & Bridge, 2015). Working four days a week, and each partner taking care of the children one day a week has given rise to the phenomenon of a 'daddy day' (and 'mummy day', which is much less used) referring to the day that the parent takes on its role as carer as opposed to working that day. Professional women that pursue a career, whether working 32 h or full-time, as well as the daddy days are a typical urban phenomenon. What is more, these symmetrical households have a specific geography which corresponds closely to the phenomenon of family gentrification (Boterman & Karsten, 2014). Neighbourhoods with many middle-class families, often employed in the public sector, in creative and cultural; industries, but also in professions such as medicine or law typically have high shares of those symmetrical households: As Toine Heijmans writes in his *Volkskrant* article 'Cargo bike dad searches for career mother' (*De Volkskrant* 30-3-2010):

My parents had the ideal of the emancipated family: father and mother both working, parenting together and do the dishes together. My family corresponds completely to that ideal and I believe also that of most of the families around me. The emancipated family has become so ubiquitous that I begin to find my own situation quite ordinary: Cargo bike dad, career mother, three blonde chicks, babysitter, nothing special about it.

Areas of the city in which this kind of families are indeed common are sometimes referred to as *bakfietswijken* (cargo bike neighbourhoods) (see also Van Eijk, 2015).

The cargo-bike mum or dad, while part of the same social phenomenon, are discursively constructed very differently. As the quote from Martin Brill demonstrates, the cargo-bike mum is met with negative stereotyping. The fact that she tries to combine being a mother with having a career is challenging dominant ideologies of motherhood. She is practicing motherhood in a way that puts career and caring on a par. By juggling with it all, she refuses to be reduced to just one primary subjectivity: that of a mother. At the same time she is also clearly expressing an interest in being together with her children by bringing them to or fetching them from school, doing groceries with them, taxiing them to their sports clubs and so forth. She also wants to be a *good* mother. Her mobility practice is the physical manifestation of compromise and negotiation of these often conflictual positions. Brill talks about her 'being in control' and being 'the captain of her own ship'. Her life is about managing it all, which is oftentimes stressful and makes her hurry up. The phone calls, the impatience, the physical presence makes her quite an appearance: 'she is so damn present'. The cargo bike is thus represented as a symbol of norm-challenging practice; a mobile manifestation of occupying new social positions. As becomes clear from the content analysis, this practice is to many a *provocation*, which is framed as aggression or assertiveness. The cargo bike is referred to as the SUV among the bikes, big and aggressive. Aggression and assertiveness are recurrent themes in the discourse on cargo-bike women. This resonates clearly with the work of Benard and Correll (2010) who showed that mothers in successful careers are subjectified as assertive and aggressive and lacking in 'female' traits such as being likeable and being socially warm. Cargo-bike mother could be argued to suffer from what they refer to as the 'motherhood penalty'. It is difficult to be seen both as a good mother and being taken seriously professionally.

The cargo-bike dad is also practicing fatherhood differently than most men are. He, however, is taking a step back in terms of career and at least seemingly assumes a more serious role in caring and domestic work. This is also challenging existing (Dutch) gender roles. Bernard and Correll argue that in contrast to mothers, successful professional fathers are not suffering from this combination of roles: 'having children marks them in the eyes of others as kinder, more expressive – yet still masculine' (2010: 621). Although the quote of the chief editor of *Telegraaf* (above) demonstrates that there is also a negative discourse around part-time working fathers trying to combine fathering and a career, even questioning his manhood, the cargo-bike dad is also met with much more positive response:

The cargo bike dad is everywhere. One sees him in the park, at the school yard on his daddy day, or the terrace of a café where he carefully tinkers with a straw trying to fit it into the package of apple juice of his toddler. He appears on covers of lady's magazines and in the tv-show *my father is the best*, or in commercials for washing machines and prams. And: he speaks out. He founds interests groups such as *PapaPlus* and *Vitamine V* (the V of *Vader* (Father) and *Voorrecht* (Privilege)). He organises a conference about fatherhood or wins a father's day trophy, he writes manifestos and columns... (De *Volkskrant* 8–5-2010)

The cargo-bike dad is forwarded as a role model, as a man that takes responsibility for his children, a 'modern' man. Assuming the position of a responsible, emancipated man,

the father is often socially rewarded (see also Schwanen, 2007; Vincent et al 2006). It is a form of distinction allowing fathers to accumulate particular forms of symbolic capital. This quote illustrates that not only is the cargo-bike father *doing* parenthood, he also writes about it, and promotes it. Although there are plenty of mothers writing about motherhood in columns or in blogs who are not necessarily rewarded for this, the cargo-bike dad can capitalise on the fact that what he is doing is different and daring. This is of course not to say that fathers are doing what they do because of the social rewards. Dutch fathers are demonstrated to be committed to be good fathers, often also in contrast to their own fathers (SCP, 2016). They are also negotiating their role as part-time workers at their jobs and need to compromise in terms of how many hours they can invest in their careers (Boterman & Bridge, 2015). Notwithstanding, it is easier for fathers than for mothers to challenge the expectations around what it means to be a good parent. This is of course also strongly related to the fact that mothers continue to do the majority of household tasks and care for the children. Although Dutch women compared to other European countries have a relatively favourable life work balance (SCP, 2016), particularly women working in (almost) full-time jobs do experience the burden of running 'two shifts' (Hochschild, 1989). Only in households in which fathers assume a more equal role in terms of caring and household tasks, mother can really make a career (Komter, Keizer, & Dykstra, 2012). These authors argue that a commitment to egalitarian gender roles is not enough. For women to be professionally successful they need a man who actually *practices* manhood/fatherhood differently. The cargo bike may be a manifestation of an alternative way in which gender and parenthood are practiced. As the PappaPlus manifesto reads:

Fathers of the Netherlands! The time has come to liberate us from the shackles of full-time work and to shed the remains of the breadwinner model. One says about men that we can only be happy if we work 40, 50 h a week; that we are only interested in making money and having a career; that we look down at looking after the children because that doesn't reflect on your pay slip. That image is backward and false! (De Volkskrant 8-5-2010)

## Discussion

The cargo bike may seem a rather marginal and trivial subject of academic inquiry. It is a vehicle almost exclusively seen on the streets of Scandinavian and Dutch cities, albeit sales are also on the rise across North America and other parts of Europe. In this paper I argue that it is nonetheless a fruitful lens for studying the interconnections of gender, class and the transformation of urban space. The cargo bike is a both significant as a symbolic object that brings our attention to intersections of class and gender, and a practice, a way of doing motherhood and fatherhood. The cargo bike provides distinction in a Bourdieusian sense: it is an expression of taste, which is socially constructed as belonging to specific positions in social space. It is a carrier of class in that it is *recognized* by others as such. The symbolic capital it provides is associated with its price, it is a status symbol in the economic sense, but moreover as a symbol of an alternative lifestyle. It stands for the challenge of bringing up children in a spatial environment that is constructed as the anti-thesis of the suburbs (or the rural), which have historically grown into the natural habitat of middle-class families. The cargo bike represents the family gentrifier, the young urban professional parent (Karsten, 2014), who is *doing*

parenting differently than most parents. The cargo bike stands for the challenge of reconciling the expectations of being a good parent while at the same time pursuing a professional career. Being part of the consumption repertoire of the middle classes, it also carries the negative effects of gentrification. It is almost literally a vessel of class-based urban change. By being primarily associated with mothers and children it presents a deceptively friendly face of displacement: who can be against mothers and children? As Van Eijk (2014) argued in her critique of Rotterdam's urban policies, the cargo-bike neighbourhoods Rotterdam wants to build are a cue for getting rid of its poor population. Also Van den Berg (2013; 2017) sees the cargo-bike policies in Rotterdam as a gender-based displacement, genderfication as she calls it. No wonder that the cargo bike as it has become a carrier of class and gentrification also is implied in processes of displacement. The negative ways in which these class aspects are expressed in popular discourse ('kakfiets', 'yuppenbak') are directly related to the struggles over the transformation and the use of urban space. The cargo bike is the Chelsea tractor of Amsterdam (Boterman & Bridge, 2015), the SUV among bikes, which literally and figuratively consumes a lot of space and pushes others aside.

Driving a bike is a very physical and also a visible practice. Cycling in Amsterdam it is arguably the norm for how one should go from A to B, particularly for the urban middle classes. The slow, big cargo bikes deviate from this norm: it is the absence of just driving a normal bike. The drivers, particularly if they are mothers are framed as either blocking the flow, or as assertive ('get out of my way'). Their physical presence, the way they behave in traffic are offensive to some (many). This paper is not about whether they are truly in the way or taking up too much space on the narrow bike lanes of Amsterdam. The fact that they are discussed in these terms is what concerns me. Mothers who try to balance their different responsibilities in a *practical* sense, also *symbolically* negotiate different expectations of how they should behave. They are negotiating their role as a professional worker and what a good mother should do (Duncan, Edwards, Reynolds, & Alldred, 2003). This resonates strongly with other studies that have pointed out the complex negotiations of these roles in the every lives of professional women in the context of the gentrifying city (McDowell, Ward, Fagan, Perrons, & Ray, 2006; Schwanen, 2007; Ward, Fagan, McDowell, Perrons, & Ray, 2010). The fierceness of the debate around cargo-bike mums attests to the resistance one provokes when deviating from the norm: In this case, dominant ideas about motherhood in the Dutch context in which mother are the primary care givers and only rarely occupy managerial and other high-paid positions (De Meester et al., 2011). The urban professional mother challenges and morally negotiates (Duncan et al., 2003) these ideas by putting her motherhood and career on a par. Here, her middle-class habitus intersects with her gender dispositions (compare Butler & Hamenett 1994). The way she practices gender and class become blurred: her class dispositions are reflected in certain gendered practices and vice versa. It is this combination of being both a middle-class subject in the context of a gentrifying city, and a mother juggling her motherhood and professional identity that is particularly provoking to some. When this is also discursively linked to liberal political attitudes and voting, some conservative blogs refer to the 'cargo mum as Satan' (Daskapital.nl, 2017).

Cargo-bike dads are discussed in more ambiguous terms. There is clearly a positive sentiment around cargo-bike dads as being emancipated, modern, trendy men. Fatherhood is practiced in a particular way, which is received with some applause. The

fact that men are ‘helping out’ (Aitken, 2000) provides them with some symbolic benefits. However, as the male counterparts of the mums, part-time working fathers are also exposed to negative stereotyping. This focuses directly on their masculinity. Failing to pursue a real career and to provide for the family, their lack of ambition is equated to a lack of manliness. This weakness is also framed in political terms: cargo-bike dads have liberal – weak – political attitudes on, for instance, crime, immigration and multicultural society.

The cargo bike in this respect not only offers a case study of urban transformation and intersections of class and gender: it also becomes a symbol of political identity. In an increasingly politically polarised society, particularly around issues of national identity, the class and gender practices are linked to political attitudes, which on their turn become markers of electoral and other social geographies. As the right-wing populist MP Bosma is quoted as saying in this paper, the cargo bike stands for everything he opposes: liberal, emasculated and elitist. In a broader context, the gentrifying (Hochstenbach, 2017), internationalising and diversifying (Crul, 2016), and increasingly feminising city (Van Den Berg, 2017) is becoming politically detached from many non-urban parts of the country. This is not just a Dutch phenomenon but is one of the key issues facing western societies from post-Brexit UK to Trump’s America (Hochschild, 2016).

## Note

1. Moeder = mother in Dutch. Also -mama/-mamma; -papa/-pappa were used as search query suffixes.

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