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Dynamics of power in Dutch integration politics

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9. The gentrification of civil society. Civil liberalism in Amsterdam in the 1990s

A new discourse on ethnic diversity and its governance was in the making while the institutions of ethnic corporatism were corroding. This discourse revolved around the notion of “diversity” and was premised on the idea that a diverse population presents opportunities, not only problems. This chapter locates the origins of this discourse and examines how it was institutionalized within government policy. The popularity of the diversity discourse needs to be understood in the context of the broader shift away from ethnic corporatism towards civil liberalism. This chapter identifies the main features of civil liberalism and examines the power relations inherent in it. Although the diversity discourse promised to value all citizens and to recognize their complex identities, in practice the government selectively incorporated partners who could help to produce positive images of diversity and multicultural society. However, growing anxieties over integration aggravated the contradictions of civil liberalism and forced the government to reconsider the ideas, notions and symbols of the diversity discourse.

The formation of civil liberalism

Amsterdam in the 1990s was the mirror image of Amsterdam in the 1980s. Unemployment was declining rapidly, the middle classes were buying their way into gentrifying inner-city neighborhoods, and social programs and repressive measures were ridding the streets of drug users and the homeless. The squatting movement had contracted, students were more interested in affirming rather than challenging the status quo, and the presence of anarchist and far-left political parties within the city council had become marginal. The city was flourishing; political conflicts had been brought back to manageable proportions. Amsterdam had become a much safer and a much more boring place.

Like other cities, Amsterdam came to see itself as an actor in the international marketplace (Hall & Hubbard, 1998; Harvey, 1989). Through city marketing campaigns and prestigious urban development projects, the city advertised itself to international investors and tourists (see Hajer, 1989; Oudenampsen, 2007; Ter Borg & Dijkink, 1995). There was never an ideological break with the idea that the government was responsible for the welfare of all its citizens, but administrators increasingly felt that this goal could only be reached if it

devoted more energy and resources to attracting mobile capital. The population increasingly came to be seen as a stock of human capital that the government needed to valorize.

As Jamie Peck and Nik Theodore suggest, neoliberalization – the process through which market mechanisms are brought to bear upon society and the state – unfolds in two analytically distinct moments: one of destruction and one of creation (Peck & Theodore, 2002). We examined the moment of destruction in the previous chapter, which showed that the complex of institutions representing minority interests came to be seen as inefficient and archaic. Although the backlash was not as brutal as it was elsewhere (Leitner *et al.*, 2007), the institutions that had been shaped by the movements of the 1970s and 1980s were dissolved, merged and transformed so that they could no longer do what they had been established to do, that is, promote particular interests and organize constituents. These moments of destruction, however, were followed by moments of creation. The minorities policy was not simply discontinued but transformed by a coalition that fused neoliberal management discourses with post-colonial critiques of multiculturalism.

The genesis of civil liberalism

The erosion of the institutions of ethnic corporatism created windows of opportunity for actors and discourses that had so far remained on the margins of the policy field. As the left-wing associations lost their privileged positions, alternative discourses could move to the center. These alternative discourses were cultivated in two vibrant discursive milieus. The *first* was located within the institutions of high culture. Intellectuals with migrant backgrounds like Anil Ramdas and Stephen Sanders argued – in high-brow magazines like *De Groene*, for the progressive broadcasting corporation VPRO and on the stages of Amsterdam’s cultural centers – that the notion of collective emancipation was fundamentally flawed. They argued that governments often reified and essentialized the identities of ethnic communities. “Dutch multiculturalism is well-intended but it keeps migrants in the straight jacket of their own group identity. Cultural institutions praise migrants more because of their cultural background than because of their talent” (Ramdas, 1995). Drawing upon a rapidly expanding international, post-multiculturalist literature (see Uitermark *et al.*, 2005), Ramdas and Sanders emphasized the dynamism and multidimensionality of cultural identification: through critical reflection and creative reinterpretation, both migrants and natives could free themselves from the paternalistic and essentializing understandings in which they were caught. The portrayal of migrants as groups that were both needy and exotic implied, for Sanders and Ramdas, a denial of their intellectual and artistic capabilities.

A *second* discursive milieu was located in the state bureaucracy. Professionals with migrant backgrounds often experienced that colleagues and superiors viewed them as ethnics rather than as professionals (Essed, 1991, 1997; Ghorasi, 2006; Anderson, 2004). The association of ethnicity and deprivation built into the minorities policy was an affront to a (very) small but (rapidly) growing segment of migrant professionals, who sought an alternative policy discourse that would recognize their qualities as individuals and professionals. In the policy field at large, the social scientist Philomena Essed was among the most influential critics of the minorities policy. She felt that policies should be directed at society as a whole, not just at minorities. Diversity politics, in her view, meant that the qualities and needs of all people are recognized and acknowledged (Essed, 1997, p. 8); differences along the lines of race, ethnicity, gender, ability, sexuality and age do not just lead to problems but also create possibilities (*ibid.*, p. 9). Minorities should not only be seen as target groups but as contributors: the elderly do not just need care, they can also provide it; migrants do not only have to be acknowledged by party programs, they can also inform them, and so on. Diversity furthermore implies that governments and organizations have an eye for individuality and quality; as container concepts are insufficient to capture the diversity of experience, a more open and probing attitude is required. For Essed and many others who had developed their views on diversity within anti-racist movements and drew inspiration from American business and academic literature,⁹⁰ diversity policy was the “next step” forward. Within the state bureaucracy, the Platform for Migrant Civil Servants (*Gemeentelijk Allochtonenoverleg*, GAO) promoted the diversity discourse.

The discourses emerging from these two milieus, while very different,⁹¹ worked together to undermine the legitimacy of the minorities policy and to advance alternatives that better reflected the positions of actors who were highly-educated, had high incomes and prestigious jobs. These actors – while they may have shared ethnic minority status with guest workers – did not need the minorities policy or ethnic corporatism to defend their individual interests. The minorities policy lumped them together with people with much lower status. The critics thus had every interest to challenge the rules of the game of ethnic corporatism: they wanted to break out of the bounds of imposed ethnic solidarity so that their (considerable) value as individuals would be recognized.

Although the ideas of thinkers such as Essed, Sanders and Ramdas were not formulated to support neoliberalism, they were nevertheless easily adapted to fit with the neoliberal transformation of Amsterdam’s governance institutions. The diversity discourse made ideals affordable. Diversity no longer required concessions in the form of specific

institutions, quotas, affirmative action or redistribution. It became a sign of prejudice rather than solidarity to call attention to the structural exclusion of specific groups, while the very idea of “groups” became suspect as such collective representations supposedly failed to recognize individual qualities. The role of government was now to facilitate individual contributions to society to the best of everyone’s abilities. These new conceptions of diversity have discursive affinities to neoliberalism in that they emphasize value, individuality and management rather than rights, collectives and struggle. The government of Amsterdam emerged as a leading client of the growing number of consultancy firms that promoted this notion of diversity and the practice of “diversity management.”

A definitive statement on diversity

Neoliberal reforms had been underway for some years when Labor Party leader and alderman of diversity, Jaap van der Aa, initiated the reorganization of the institutions of ethnic corporatism. Van der Aa published the first draft of a policy memorandum on diversity in 1998; in 1999 the council approved a definitive statement, *The Power of a Diverse City (De kracht van een diverse stad)*. This document represents the consolidation of a “diversity policy” (Gemeente Amsterdam, 1999) that “does not only want to address problems” but “aims to create opportunities” (*ibid.*, p. 3). It argues that “*everybody*” (original emphasis) can contribute to the city. Everybody is entitled to participate, not as a member of a group but as an individual with a multifaceted identity. Dichotomies are rejected: “Amsterdammers [residents of Amsterdam] cannot be captured in one group. They are part of many groups” (*ibid.*, p. 8). The minorities policy allegedly worked in the opposite direction by imposing categories on people and by associating them with negative stereotypes. The new aim was to break down the artificial barriers between groups and to portray diversity in a positive light.⁹²

The perspective has thus been reversed. The glass is now half-full, not half-empty. In the words of one senior civil servant: “you use the positive power of the city and the diverse power of the city. You see diversity as an asset for the city and not as an accumulation of problems” (Joris Rijbroek, cited in Van Steenberghe, 2009, p. 27). To unleash the city’s latent powers, the diversity discourse needs to be disseminated; employers and other private actors need to be convinced that they stand to benefit from harnessing diversity within their organizations. The resources of the diversity policy were mainly invested in the municipality’s own bureaucracy (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2000). In the first year, around 3 million guilders (1.4 million euros) were reserved for the Planning and Control cycle to ensure that the municipality’s own working environment was open to “diversity.” A further 1.2 million

guilders (0.5 million euros) were reserved for campaigns and communicative infrastructures to promote the idea that diversity is positive and to help governmental and non-governmental associations to manage and harness diversity. Here we witness government's first steps towards its new role, where the media is a crucial policy domain and communications is a central task. Diversity monitors, diversity gala nights, diversity websites, competitions for diversity prizes, diversity billboard campaigns and diversity television commercials – everything is mobilized to

change attitudes, to create a fertile soil for the diversity policy and to express that the diversity policy is of the utmost importance to the municipality. Attention will be mobilized through so-called “highlights” in the diversity policy, or the moments that products are delivered and concrete results become visible (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2000, p. 40).

It appears that the positive representation of diversity is itself considered a “concrete result”: the “implementation plan” contains 20 measures that all have more to do with communication (and to a lesser extent with management) than with implementation in the conventional sense of the word. It is assumed that once companies, citizens and associations have been informed of the benefits of diversity, they will invest to capitalize on its possibilities.

Taken together, these shifts are more than just incidental changes. Between 1990 and 2000, the entire problematique of ethnic diversity was reconceived. As the previous chapter showed, the government initially regarded the deprivation of minorities as the central problem. The solution then was to administer welfare and to open up decision-making channels to minority representatives. In contrast, the diversity discourse that emerged in the 1990s framed the emphasis on deprivation and collective representation as part of the problem. Instead of associating particular groups with problems, the government needed to actively encourage all citizens to contribute to urban vitality and to reward civil initiatives that break down ethnic barriers. We can thus speak of *civil liberalism*. It is *liberal* because the role of the government is not to support weak actors or reduce inequalities (as under ethnic corporatism) but to promote pride of place and to reward initiative. It is *civil* because it explicitly strives for civil unity and calls upon citizens to contribute to the city. How did the transformation from ethnic corporatism to civil liberalism affect power relations within governance figurations? Which actors bore the costs? Which actors reaped the rewards?

Power relations under civil liberalism

The diversity policy initially recognized minority associations and advisory councils as “partners.” But it was immediately clear that these actors did not fit the image of diversity that the government promoted. While the councils had functioned to represent their communities and to connect their constituents to the state, the diversity discourse devalued these roles. Migrants were now expected to contribute to society, not voice demands. The emergence of the diversity discourse thus reinforced the ongoing move away from minority representation; the reform of consultative structures and subsidy schemes institutionalized the ascendant civil discourse.

Advisory institutions

After the collapse of corporatism, experts filled the void that opened up. When the minority councils were abolished in 2003, a new institution was created that only included experts: the advisory council for diversity and integration (*adviesraad voor diversiteit en integratie*; in short, diversity council). Tellingly, Paul Scheffer and Anil Ramdas – both prominent critics of multiculturalism – were hired alongside Samira Boucetta of the Moroccan women’s association Oumnia to select candidates for this new council. They agreed with each other and with civil servants that the new council should have nothing to do with minority representation. As one of them remarked in an interview:

The councils all had their puny particular interests: the Turks, the Moroccans, ... This advisory council is mixed and completely different. Most people agree that the councils did not work at all and they know why. That is enough reason to now focus on concrete policy issues.

Whereas minority associations were previously evaluated on their ability to represent ethnic communities, candidates were now disqualified if there was suspicion that they represented particular (ethnic) interests. The new diversity council was made up of academics, consultants and other professionals (an architect and a medical specialist). Since the government – rather than constituents or civil society associations – selected its members, it is not surprising that the council operates within the parameters of the government’s discourse and is more likely to suggest improvements than changes.

The “social cohesion think tanks” are the neighborhood equivalents of the diversity

council.⁹³ The idea to use the networks of the neighborhood's higher-class groups was first advanced by a civil servant in Amsterdam East. She initially wanted to make a list of affluent persons in the district. It was later deemed preferable to recruit participants through the informal networks of administrators and civil servants. Members were only invited if they had careers, contacts with policy-makers and some affinity to integration issues. In practice this means that managers and directors (of schools, housing corporations), professionals and consultants staff the think tanks. While they work as volunteers, the neighborhood council makes funds available to finance their initiatives. The purported success of the think tank in Amsterdam East encouraged other neighborhood councils to establish them, and since 2007 the government of Amsterdam has been supporting the initiative. The think tanks differ from the advisory councils and the minority associations in that they are not predisposed towards criticism. To the best of my knowledge, up until 2009 none of the think tanks ever criticized government policy. Many of the participants, in fact, are policy-makers and since 2007 the think tanks have included elected politicians from neighborhood councils. Box 9.1 gives the example of Zeeburg though similar examples could be drawn from other neighbourhoods.

Box 9.1 Class conflict in Amsterdam's civil society

The professionals who staff think tanks and the volunteers who work for migrant associations have opposing interests but rarely come into conflict as they live in different worlds. The case of Zeeburg is illustrative. For civil society associations, the most dramatic event of 2006 was the privatization of welfare provisions. To cut spending, the council outsourced welfare provisions to a consortium of organizations called Civic. Civic immediately announced that it would close several neighborhood centers where small associations and informal groups organized activities such as cooking clubs, dance lessons, tea drinking sessions, information meetings and Dutch lessons. Civic renamed the remaining neighborhood centers “production houses” to remind their users that they had to generate resources in order to continue using the space. Civic also appointed “civil society developers” to write subsidy requests to increase what was now referred to as “output.”

Some civil society associations lost their accommodation. In interviews and informal conversations, volunteers expressed outrage and tremendous frustration. They had often worked on a voluntary basis for decades and were now told that they had to earn their space through project proposals and work plans. These associations lost many of their constituents while some ceased to exist. In the meantime, the neighborhood council established a social cohesion think tank to function as a “broker of networks” to bring together “different forces that will multiply and make efforts for our neighborhood” (Denktank Sociale Cohesie Zeeburg, 2009). The think tank focuses on “success projects” such as a walking tour of the neighborhood and a tree where people can hang cards with a “wish for the neighborhood.”

The destruction of existing networks was never a concern. In part this was because the think tank was told from the start that it needed to focus on success projects. Most participants – being consultants – deliver what is requested. Furthermore, think tank members cannot be critical of policies because they themselves are responsible for them. One of the members, in fact, is the alderman who made the decision to privatize welfare policies. The social cohesion think tank does not convene in the “production centers” but in the fancy Studio K – a complex of offices, movie theaters and a cafeteria established by the (privatized) housing corporation Ymere to attract buyers of social housing units in an effort to spur gentrification (Oudenampsen, 2005). Most of the associations that were evicted as part of the privatization of welfare are suspicious of this state-sponsored gentrification; some are mobilizing tenants to stand up for their rights. The think tank for social cohesion, however, applauds the efforts of the neighborhood council to make the neighborhood more “mixed” through the displacement of poor households. In the words of its chairman, Firoez Azarhoosh of Razar consultancy, Zeeburg has “potential and also realizes it” (Denktank Sociale Cohesie Zeeburg, 2009).

Borrowing a term from urban studies (Lees *et al.*, 2008; Smith, 1996), we can say that Amsterdam has witnessed a *gentrification* of representation: professionals with high levels of cultural capital, strong networks and prestigious jobs have displaced representatives of guest worker associations. The function of advisory institutions has also changed: while the old councils critically examined government policies and mobilized their constituents to reinforce their demands, the new institutions focus on assisting government initiatives and suggesting improvements to existing policies. As the participants in these new advisory institutions owe

their positions (and often their income) to the government, they are not disposed to criticism.

Subsidy relationships

Changes in the rules of the game did not just undermine the positions of the established associations; they also created opportunities for new actors. If we examine the subsidy fund through which minority associations were traditionally financed (the SIP Fund discussed in the previous chapter), we see that the beneficiaries of the shift towards project subsidies were refugee associations and other associations catering to smaller groups of migrants (see Table 8.1; Uitermark & Van Steenbergen, 2006). This was partly due to these groups' relatively higher levels of cultural capital, as well as their receiving help from (subsidized) community work associations such as *Vluchtelingenwerk* (Refugee Work). Another reason was that these associations were less likely to demand societal change and more likely to act as service providers helping individuals to find their way in society. The associations profiled themselves as gateways providing avenues into society, which fit well with the vision of diversity that Amsterdam had been promoting since the late 1990s.

The major transformations, however, did not take place within existing institutions but through the creation of new ones. Especially the assassination of Theo van Gogh occasioned an institutional overhaul under the banner of the policy program “Wij Amsterdammers.” While the next chapter discusses these reforms in detail, here I focus on one new fund for financing civil society associations – the so-called “reporting point for good ideas” (MGI, *Meldpunt Goede Ideeën*). MGI was established after the assassination of Theo van Gogh to support initiatives for immediate civil repair; it was later institutionalized as a subsidy fund alongside the SIP Fund. MGI fits with civil liberalism in that the government views itself as a facilitator of initiatives that emerge spontaneously. MGI, according to the government, “is based on the idea of empowerment: a government cannot do everything itself and needs [to] stimulate citizens to be creative and responsible” (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2006, p. A1). Unlike the SIP Fund inherited from the corporatist era, the MGI is a pure expression of the government's changed discourse. As one senior civil servant explains:

Associations within SIP are most of the time not so relevant to the municipality because they neither fit the image the municipality wants to communicate nor meet the specific objectives of the policy. From the government's perspective, the return on investment (*rendement*) is low. That is why new subsidy ordinances (*verordeningen*) are made and why new funds are found to support the desired partners.

Table 9.1 shows which actors received funding through MGI. More than half of the organizations are predominantly native Dutch (14 out of 24).⁹⁴ This fits the idea – central to the diversity discourse – that integration is not just a matter for minorities; the focus on ethnic mixing creates possibilities for native organizations to receive funding for projects that involve minorities in one way or another. Since many of these organizations have strong ties to civil servants and have experience writing proposals, they are much more likely than minority associations to claim and receive funding. The strong presence of Moroccan associations (45,000 euros) and mixed associations including Moroccans (249,000 euros) is also interesting, especially in light of the previous chapter’s findings on the marginalization of Moroccan associations. The intense stigmatization of Moroccans in fact led the government to invest heavily in those discursive milieus where Moroccans could be inculcated with civil dispositions. We thus see another example of the ambiguous functioning of the civil sphere: the stigmatization of a community leads to the incorporation of associations from that community (see also Chapter 6). It is only because so many Moroccans are portrayed as threats to the civil community that some Moroccans can appear as super-citizens. These subsidies to Moroccan associations are a precursor of the transformation to civil differentialism, which the next chapter discusses in more detail.

The presence of the Moroccan associations, however, is less prominent than the presence of professionals. It is striking that most recipients are not civil society associations or citizens, at least not in the conventional sense. Seventeen of the 24 projects funded by MGI were carried out by commercial bureaus or by associations connected to a commercial bureau. Actors in this category received 464,850 out of 598,300 euros, or 77.7 per cent of the total.

Table 9.1 Subsidies awarded through the Municipality of Amsterdam's "Reporting Point for Good Ideas" (Meldpunt Goede Ideeën, MGI) in 2005

<i>Name of organization</i>	<i>Subsidy granted (euros)</i>	<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Type of organization</i>	<i>Target groups</i>
"Pander" and Anita van der Stap Multicultural Onderzoek & Projectmanagement	12,400	Dutch	bureau	school children
AAED Management ism Mex-It	40,000	Varied	bureau	all Amsterdammers
Argan	20,000	Moroccan	community work	Muslim youth and elderly
Culturfabriek	30,000	Dutch	bureau	Migrant/Muslim women
De Slinger	44,000	Dutch	bureau	all Amsterdammers
e74 Productions	10,000	Dutch	bureau	all Amsterdammers
Ememo	15,000	Moroccan	(ethnic) association	Muslim community
Instituut Jeugd en Welzijn, VU	10,000	Varied	bureau	Muslim youth
Mex-It (ism Anne Frank Stichting)	50,000	Varied	bureau	Muslim youth
Montessori Scholen Gemeenschap ism Bureau Rumour	30,000	Dutch	bureau	varied
Nationaal Instituut Nederlands Slavenijverleden en Erfenis (NINsee)	5,000	Surinamese	(ethnic) association	Antillean women
Bureau Maatschappelijke Participatie ism OMWaNA	40,000	Dutch	bureau	older migrants
Stichting Amsterdam Ontmoet	35,000	Dutch	bureau	neighborhood residents
Stichting Audiovisuele Antropologie Nederland (SAVAN)	5,000	Dutch	bureau	Moroccan women
Stichting COC	15,700	Dutch	community work	Amsterdam homosexuals
Stichting Dialog Visuele Communicatie	20,000	Varied	other	neighborhood residents
Stichting Inner Gold Academy	18,000	Dutch	bureau	Migrant youth
Stichting Kleur in 't Werk	14,450	Dutch	bureau	Moroccan women
Stichting Los Imagos (Feestcommissie)	10,000	Moroccan	bureau	Moroccan youth
Stichting Mijn Wereld is overall	39,000	Varied	individual citizens	Muslim youth
Stichting Samenbinding ism Mex-It (Ramadan Festival)	50,000	Varied	bureau	all Amsterdammers
Stichting StadsSpelen	30,000	Dutch	bureau	all Amsterdammers
Frontmedia	36,000	Dutch	bureau	high school students
Stichting De Spreeksteen	18,750	Dutch	unknown	all Amsterdammers
Total	598,300			

Source: archives of the Municipality of Amsterdam; author's codes

Most of the projects, and especially the large ones, were proposed by organizations that have turned civil engagement into a profession. *Bevordering Maatschappelijke Participatie* (BMP, Promotion of Societal Participation), for instance, was previously funded by the provincial government. But since its privatization in 1992, it is a “project organization” that has to survive in the market for projects and subsidies. The workers are either permanent staff or flexible workers who earn their living from overhead. De Slinger is a similar organization. It was established by the Neighborhood Alliance, which previously operated in the market for government subsidies but has recently discovered private funds (see Uitermark & Duyvendak, 2008a). The BMP and the Neighborhood Alliance work with volunteers, their salaried personnel are committed and their directors have outspoken ideas on how to improve society. They nevertheless function as commercial bureaus that require a continuous flow of contracts to survive. In Table 9.1, one organization, Mex-It, appears no less than three times.⁹⁵ This is no accident. Mex-It was established by the founders of Towards A New Start (TANS), a national “network organization for highly-educated migrants,”⁹⁶ especially second-generation Moroccans working or studying in sectors like banking, consultancy and information technology. TANS caters to a rapidly growing group of students in higher vocational schools and universities. While Moroccans are under-represented in the educational system, the share of young adults entering higher education increased by more than 250 per cent between 1997 and 2007 (O&S, 2006, p. 61; O&S, 2007, p. 6).⁹⁷ This created fertile ground for associations like TANS which organize master classes, leadership summits, job markets and network events for ambitious students.

Just as the guest worker elite was inextricably linked to the minorities policy, Mex-It and TANS are the prime representatives and beneficiaries of the diversity policy: the municipality is an important client of Mex-It while both organizations aim to cast diversity in a positive light. As one of the founders of the company explains:

When we were looking at the debate as it was taking place in the Netherlands at that time [after the publication of Scheffer’s “The multicultural drama” in 2000, JU], we felt that we should not stay at the margins.... We felt that we were talking each other into negativity. There are indeed excesses and then you should act *really tough* [*keihard*]. But on the other hand, it is apparent that there is so much potential in this society and we believe you should do much more with this... We wanted to try to get into that playing field and to see how we could give it direction – to steer a little bit.

The associates of Mex-It and many of the other companies funded through MGI are “civil consultants” – committed individuals with visions of how to improve society *and* a strongly developed business sense. They are ideal partners for the government as they cater to its specific needs (as expressed in the conditions for attaining subsidies or contracts) and are convenient to work with: easily reached by phone or email, capable of financial administration and sensitive to the political climate. Because they operate as suppliers on a market, they provide exactly what the municipality demands. The number of civil consultants has exploded in recent years due to the incredible growth in the market for state-funded projects to promote inter-ethnic contact, to create civil unity, to research (the lack of) civil initiative, to improve civil skills and to manage public relations. Civil consultants are particularly well-placed to profit from the shift away from the mobilizing of communities towards image production evident throughout society and especially in the field of integration politics (Uitermark & Duyvendak, 2008a). The dispositions of these elites are shaped in booming economic sectors like public relations and brand management; they converted capital from these fields into civil power.

In sum, in the transition from ethnic corporatism to civil liberalism we see two related transformations in power relations. The first is the gentrification of civil initiative: both within the advisory councils and among the recipients of subsidies, actors with higher-class backgrounds are much more present than before. Traditional civil society associations that bring people together in pursuit of non-commercial objectives are virtually absent. The second is that there is a stronger focus on images and management at the expense of organization and mobilization. Organizations like TANS and Mex-It profited from both transformations and moved to the center of Amsterdam’s governance figuration. Nevertheless, civil liberalism is not a stable governance figuration as it is plagued with contradictions that make it vulnerable to challenges.

The contradictions and erosion of civil liberalism

A fundamental contradiction of the diversity discourse is the hypocrisy that diversity is valued while minorities are not. The concern for minorities stems from the belief that they are problematic: they do not mix enough, are not liberal enough, do not understand Dutch norms and values, are too often involved in crime, disproportionately drop out of school, are often unemployed, and so on. While the diversity discourse can reframe these problems as obstacles to be overcome and underused talents to be valorized, it cannot capture them in appealing

civil terms. This is why the discourse became popular with managers and policy-makers but did not disseminate in civil arenas. One expression of this failure is the very weak presence of the diversity discourse on the opinion pages (Table 3.1). While the discourse had considerable presence when the debate was relatively calm and when there was cross-party agreement on how integration should be achieved, it virtually disappeared when the debate heated up.

This is especially apparent in debates on crime and Islam. Moroccan criminals and Islamic radicals have been so thoroughly stigmatized in the media that the diversity policy's emphasis on obstacles and opportunities appears other-worldly. It is illustrative that the diversity discourse – literally – has no words for groups that other discourses refer to as problem youths, street youths or Moroccan street terrorists.⁹⁸ It is ironic that while Scheffer was trying out his article on the “multicultural drama” on learned audiences, civil servants at city hall were drafting *The Power of a Diverse City*. When Scheffer's article was published early in 2000, it immediately became apparent that the government did not have the discursive power, or even the will, to defend its own, positive vision in civil arenas. The mayor of Amsterdam, Schelto Patijn, attempted to rebut Scheffer's alarmist message by declaring that “Amsterdam does not have a Scheffer problem,” while the alderman for diversity, Van der Aa, suggested that Scheffer had failed to identify positive developments (interview Paul Scheffer). But this storm would not pass by Amsterdam. While the diversity discourse may have worked in government bureaucracies and companies, it was without power in the discursive arenas where integration politics increasingly played out, such as the media and parliament.

In retrospect, it is easy to see that Scheffer's article played upon ideas and feelings that were latently present and that had long been cultivated. Scheffer was right in suggesting that the delinquency of Moroccan young males had become proverbial. While the diversity policy had formally ceased to distinguish between ethnic communities, the media had not stopped reporting about Moroccans robbing, abusing, insulting and annoying natives (see Chapter 8). The intense stigmatization of Moroccans flagrantly contradicted the notions and ideas of diversity that the government was formally committed to. While the diversity policy stipulated that the government would not single out ethnic groups, the media and anxious citizens demanded that politicians address what had become widely recognized as a Moroccan problem.

In one of the historic moments of Dutch integration politics, the successor of Van der Aa, Rob Oudkerk, was caught on film whispering to Amsterdam mayor Job Cohen that he could not understand the magnitude of Fortuyn's success in Rotterdam compared to

Amsterdam because “we also have rotten Moroccans [*kut-Marokkanen*].”⁹⁹ This one private performance had much greater impact than the many staged diversity events. It was a definitive verdict: the alderman for diversity had launched a slur (*kut-Marokkanen*) that would resonate on websites, in rap songs and in everyday conversations. The incident also illustrated a pattern: outside of the purview of the diversity policy, administrators fall back on categorizations they have formally abandoned. Numerous politicians and administrators called upon stigmatized communities to “take responsibility” for what were – in spite of the individualizing diversity discourse – framed as the problems of specific ethnic or religious groups.

Ethnic corporatism had been designed to deal with problems and to organize communities but civil liberalism was designed to cater to successful and cooperative individuals. The mechanisms for the distribution of recognition and rewards under civil liberalism favor actors who are willing and able to promote the government’s discourse and exclude those who want to organize marginalized groups or promote radical discourses (see also Essed, 2008). Left-wing minority associations and community workers fell by the wayside and were replaced by advisors of various kinds (university professors, management consultants, Labor party intellectuals). But the latter did not have linkages to problem groups. The paradox is that the government wants to govern these problem groups but does not want to cooperate with the civil actors that represent and organize them. This paradox turned into an even more serious problem for the Amsterdam government when 9/11 and especially the assassination of Theo van Gogh threw fuel on the fire of integration politics.

Conclusion

Far from realizing a utopia of multiplying civil initiatives, the institutions of civil liberalism concentrated power in the hands of a few privileged actors. Civil consultants were recognized and rewarded as super-citizens doing the government’s bidding, namely, producing images and events that shed a positive light on diversity. But civil consultants did not make policy; they were merely its most valued mercenaries. It was, indeed, the government that won the most power in the shift from ethnic corporatism to civil liberalism. It gave itself the discretion to monitor the activities of civil society associations and to discontinue subsidies if they did not meet expectations. The government now dealt with numerous unconnected, small and uncritical associations instead of a handful of connected, large and critical ones. Under ethnic corporatism, institutional inertia and political contestation had circumscribed the power of the

government to impose its vision; under civil liberalism these constraints weakened. The balance of power shifted in favor of the government and its elite partners.

This chapter showed that the government tried to use its central position to promote what I have referred to as the diversity discourse. While its critics sometimes regarded the diversity policy as a remnant of archaic multiculturalism, it in fact was a brand new way of looking at the city: we no longer see groups, injustices, disadvantages or tensions but instead dynamic individuals, opportunities and civil creativity. This discourse originated in the milieu of managers, consultants and other professionals and found its way straight into the self-conception and self-presentation of the city. In the happy images of multicultural Amsterdam, there are no signs of the social injustices that the minority associations dominant under ethnic corporatism had so incessantly addressed.¹⁰⁰ Associations that catered to deprived groups were pushed out of what had now become a market. This also meant that the government only maintained ties with elite actors. While consultants and experts were seen as valuable citizens, they could not create bridges to the problem youths that featured so prominently in media reports and culturalist discourses. The government thus increasingly felt pressured to transform its institutions and reformulate its discourse to get a grip on these groups. The next chapter examines how the government and its partners tried to engineer these linkages and how they mobilized religion and religious institutions in an effort to discipline unruly groups.