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**Dynamics of power in Dutch integration politics**

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## **11. The rise of Culturalism and the resilience of minority associations. Civil corporatism in Rotterdam**

The recent history of integration politics in Rotterdam is at least as turbulent as that of Amsterdam. In 2002, Pim Fortuyn achieved his first great electoral victory in his hometown of Rotterdam. Fortuyn was virulently opposed to what he saw as the Islamization of the Netherlands (see Chapter 5). After his death, the council members and aldermen of his party – Leefbaar Rotterdam – continued Fortuyn’s promotion of culturalist discourse. Leefbaar Rotterdam was extremely critical of minorities and Muslims but, contrary to what we might expect, minority and Islamic associations flourished in this period. Why? The key to answering this question is the specific governance figuration that emerged in Rotterdam in the 1980s, one that has since remained stable and which I refer to as civil corporatism. The first section of this chapter examines civil corporatism’s genesis and evolution; the second shows how civil corporatism produced a balance of power between different types of actors. The third section then identifies three contradictions that plague civil corporatism. The fourth section concludes that Rotterdam’s governance figuration did not only foster stability; it may well have increased the power of minority associations as well.

### **The formation of civil corporatism**

The progressive movements of the 1970s and 1980s had a strong presence in Rotterdam but were not nearly as powerful as in Amsterdam. Those who were attracted to the feminist, gay, squatting and other movements gravitated to Amsterdam with its educational institutions, intellectual elites and cultural provisions. Rotterdam was and remains more of a working class city. It proved a fertile environment for various extreme-right parties and, in contrast to Amsterdam, there were a number of occasions when native mobs assaulted guest workers. The largest outbursts of violence against migrants in the Netherlands occurred in Rotterdam South in 1972. Pensions were set alight and guest workers assaulted. The riots that ensued lasted for days as native youths threw up barricades and fought the police (Dekker & Senstius, 2001).

Migrants received help from community workers and support groups, though these were not as large or as politicized as in Amsterdam. One consequence was that, in contrast to Amsterdam, the Welfare Foundation for Foreign Workers in Rotterdam did not collapse under

the pressure of internal conflicts. Nevertheless, some guest worker associations over the course of the 1970s grew increasingly dissatisfied with the alleged paternalism of native professionals and established, with the support of the government, the Platform for Foreigners in Rijnmond (*Platform Buitenlanders Rijnmond*, PBR) in 1981. Although the South European associations initially took the lead, associations like KMAN and HTIB (see Chapter 8) quickly became involved with PBR. Political refugees who had escaped repression in Greece, Spain, Morocco and Turkey were among the most active members and turned PBR into a bulwark for left-wing minority associations. The platform organized protests against budget-cuts for disability pensions, restrictions on immigration, discriminatory housing policies and many other policies that infringed on the rights of lower-income groups and workers. Like the left-wing associations in Amsterdam, the associations united in PBR refused to cooperate with conservative or Islamic associations. Two mosques requested to join the network but were rejected because they did not, according to PBR's director, "subscribe to the goals of emancipation and participation" (Babalidis, 1991, p. 11).

PBR thus had a similar political profile to the advisory councils in Amsterdam (it was dominated by political refugees and left-wing associations) but – and this is crucially important for understanding the trajectory of Rotterdam's governance figuration – it was not recognized as the official representative of Rotterdam's minorities. The Rotterdam government recognized PBR as a legitimate partner but also argued that it only represented a sub-section of the minority population. Hans Simons, who served as alderman of minority affairs for the Labor Party between 1982 and 1989, felt that the government should also incorporate minority groups that were more conservative and less likely to organize. As a veteran civil servant explains:

We saw that the mosque associations were very isolated. And so we asked community workers: what are you going to do about this? "Well, nothing," was the answer. The resident groups – *white* resident groups – obstructed such efforts. And then we said: "This is absurd." So we started subsidizing a platform, SPIOR, which still exists.

SPIOR (*Stichting Platform Islamitische Organisaties Rijnmond*, Foundation Platform Islamic Associations Rijnmond) was established in 1988 on the initiative of the city council, with help from some central figures in Rotterdam's Islamic civil society. The government and the mosque associations initially came together to discuss practical issues and to streamline the policy process for establishing mosques (Maussen, 2006). The government, however,

encouraged *all* existing mosques to participate in the new organization, not just the associations that dealt with building applications or other policy technicalities. The more entrepreneurial mosques were willing to help the government reach this objective and actively tried to foster linkages to mosque associations that had previously been isolated.

I refer to PBR and SPIOR as “civil corporations”: non-profit organizations that receive structural subsidies from the local government to support, unite and mobilize a large number of civil society associations. They do not provide direct material support but assist associations in managing their organizations, establishing linkages to other associations and dealing with the government. They also help to attract funds from neighborhood governments, the municipal government and charities. Member associations elect the board members of the civil corporations, thereby exerting control over their policies. The civil corporations, in short, are in the bosom of the state but nevertheless independent of it. In contrast to the councils of Amsterdam’s ethnic corporatism, PBR and SPIOR are not located in city hall but in a nearby office building.

Both PBR and SPIOR have expanded their constituencies over the years. Although it still prides itself as a progressive and secular organization, PBR has lost its radical edge and no longer has principled objections to working with Islamic or other religious associations. While conservative associations still dominate SPIOR, the civil corporation over the years has increasingly served associations not directly connected to mosques. PBR had 38 member associations in 2006 and provided commissioned support to 42 non-member associations (PBR, 2007). It had a staff of 12 salaried (full-time and part-time) workers and a board of 9 elected volunteers. SPIOR had 40 member associations – i.e. officially affiliated civil society associations – in 2007 (SPIOR, 2007). All member associations of SPIOR have a representative on the board that supervises the organization and its staff of nine full-time professionals. Both civil corporations serve as intermediaries between the government and target groups. When a government department has a project targeting groups represented by PBR or SPIOR, it can reach them through these civil corporations; PBR and SPIOR bring policy to their constituents, as it were. The civil corporations also train their member associations in public relations, management and administration so that they can play a role in governance networks.

While SPIOR and PBR are most relevant for Turkish and Moroccan associations, Rotterdam has many more civil corporations for migrants and other population groups. There is a civil corporation for Antillean and Cape Verdian associations, a federation for refugees, and so on. Other corporations cater to women or residents. Since civil corporations are the

cornerstones of Rotterdam's governance figuration, I refer to the figuration as *civil corporatism*. But how can we explain the figuration's remarkable stability? The next section suggests that civil corporations help to create balances of power among different civil actors and function as buffers between the government and civil society.

### **Power relations under civil corporatism**

Unlike the government of Amsterdam, the Rotterdam government provided structural subsidies to organizations from a budget specifically earmarked for minority integration.<sup>111</sup> While recipients of structural subsidies have to adjust to changing circumstances and demonstrate their relevance, they do not constantly have to prove their worth in competition with other civil actors. In this sense, the civil corporations had similar relationships to the government as the advisory councils in Amsterdam but they, in contrast to their counterparts, did not lose power over time. This section examines power relations under civil corporatism by first examining the distribution of structural subsidies. It then explores the balance of power between competing and cooperating civil actors, looking respectively at the relations between large and small civil actors, between progressive and conservative associations, and between the government and civil society.

#### *Structural subsidies*

Table 11.1 shows that, alongside PBR and SPIOR, other organizations cater to different ethnic groups such as the Chinese and Surinamese. Rotterdam also finances Radar, an organization that helps people to make a case if they have been discriminated against on the basis of their ethnicity, skin color, sexuality or gender. Radar has its origins in the anti-racist movement and maintains ties with civil society associations but, over the years, has become a professional and general service provider that no longer specifically caters to migrants. Other organizations are not funded from the budget for minorities but are nevertheless important for minority associations. For instance, a structurally subsidized organization like Scala has women as its target group but often works together with minority associations. Another example not included in Table 11.1 as it is funded from a different budget is BOM (*Bureau Opzoomer Mee*, named after the social policy program *Opzoomeren*), which supports resident groups. While resident groups have traditionally been dominated by natives (Duyvendak & De Graaf, 2001), it seems that the activities supported by BOM have more recently reached ethnically diverse groups (Uitermark & Duyvendak, 2006).

**Table 11.1 Structural subsidies of the Municipality of Rotterdam to various civil corporations in 2005 (euros)**

PBR (Platform for Foreigners)	285.210
SPIOR (Muslims)	314.656
Wah Fook Wui (Chinese)	140.306
ISWS (Surinamese)	24.447
AVANCO (Cape Verdians)	363.916
RADAR (Anti-racism)	385.833
SWA (Antillean)	567.604
De Meeuw (children)	113.733
Train (Surinamese)	178.572
Refugee Work Rijnmond	399.662
Foundation for Refugee organizations Rijnmond	484.395
PSWR (Surinamese)	769.562
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,027.896</b>

*Source:* Municipality of Rotterdam

As this overview indicates, Rotterdam has many organizations that receive structural subsidies to stimulate civil engagement among minorities or among the population at large. For Turkish and Moroccan associations, PBR and SPIOR are the most relevant organizations.<sup>112</sup> Data on subsidies indicate that their position consolidated in the years prior to this research. In 1998, SPIOR received an annual subsidy of 157,685 euros and PBR 146,235 euros. By 2006, both had doubled their annual subsidies to 317,645 euros and 287,920 euros respectively (Van Steenbergen, 2009, p. 59). As civil corporations have secure incomes, they can invest time and energy into attaining funds for incidental or periodical activities. In addition to subsidies from the municipality, they receive incidental subsidies from a range of sources, including the central government and charities. These civil corporations form the central axes of a figuration in which there is a balance between different types of civil actors.

#### *Balance between large and small actors*

Civil society associations are increasingly called upon to bid for resources. To see how such competition plays out, I focus on the allocation of the *Rotterdam Mee* fund (With Rotterdam, RM). Rotterdam Mee was established after the assassination of Theo van Gogh to support civil initiatives that contribute to civil integration. Table 11.2 shows the allocation of resources per type of civil actor. The bulk of the funds were directed to civil corporations and

civil society associations. PBR received the most funding at 34,000 euros; it organized 17 meetings in various neighborhood centers or in the offices of member associations. The target groups varied: sometimes the meetings aimed to bring together as many different groups as possible; at other times they targeted specific groups (such as the members of a Turkish-Islamic women’s association).

**Table 11.2 Recipients of the Rotterdam Mee subsidy fund for civil initiatives**

Type of organization	<i>Number of associations</i>	<i>Subsidy amount (euros)</i>	<i>% of total subsidy</i>
Civil corporation	6	68,000	22.8
Community work	9	48,000	16.1
Civil consultant	3	22,000	7.4
Migrant association			
Turkish	5	24,000	8.1
Moroccan	7	58,000	19.5
Mixed	4	10,000	3.4
Other ethnicities	16	40,000	13.4
Other types	14	28,000	9.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>298,000</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source:* archives Municipality of Rotterdam, data processed by author

Civil society associations received 44.3 per cent of the total amount. The seven Moroccan associations included four neighborhood associations, two general Moroccan associations and a women’s association. They organized events for their constituents such as debates, information meetings and social gatherings. Debates – on issues like the position of women, the stigmatization of Moroccans and the challenges of child-rearing – were by far the largest category (65 per cent of meetings,  $n=28$ ). The Turkish associations were likewise diverse, including two women’s associations, two Islamic associations and an association for Alevis.

The figures show that civil society associations catering to ethnically specific and typically lower-class constituents could claim state resources. They were not, as in Amsterdam, marginalized by more professional or larger associations. The civil corporations in fact helped these smaller associations to tap resources. Subsidy applications typically demand administrative competence and inside-information – precisely what these civil corporations provide to their member civil society associations. We thus see that the big players in the governance figuration did not push out the smaller players but instead helped

them to organize activities and to reap the rewards of incorporation into governance networks. Member associations within SPIOR and PBR received a total of 50,000 euros.<sup>113</sup>

These results indicate that Rotterdam's non-profit associations were capable of competing with professional associations. This was sometimes due to their having become quasi-professional associations themselves, and sometimes due to the support they received from professional associations (like civil corporations). Associations catering to lower-class groups could thus adapt to changing circumstances, such as more stringent administrative demands. The welfare organization Delmatur illustrates the cooperative relations between professional and civil society associations in Rotterdam. Delmatur is a professional welfare organization like many others but, unlike all others, was established by a coalition of four Turkish and four Moroccan associations. Rather than fading away – as ethnic associations did in Amsterdam – they evolved with the policy field. They could meet the increasing administrative demands because they could rely on an infrastructure – absent in Amsterdam – that provided sustained support.

#### *The balance between progressives and conservatives*

We saw that in Amsterdam there are sharp divisions between different types of associations. Tensions exist between associations with different ethnic and class backgrounds or with divergent political and religious ideas in Rotterdam as well. In the 1990s, for instance, a conflict erupted within SPIOR when certain Turkish associations no longer wished to cooperate with certain Moroccan associations. The Moroccan associations then decided to establish the Moroccan Federation and to request recognition and resources from the government. Progressives connected to the NCB (see Chapter 4) accused the Moroccan Federation of supporting the Amicales, the band of organizations loyal to Moroccan dictator Hassan II. The progressive critics argued that the government should not recognize the Moroccan Federation as a legitimate representative of the Moroccan community and should deny it subsidies. In the end, the government found no proof of the accusation but the Moroccan Federation never crystallized; the progressives retreated to the PBR and the conservatives to SPIOR (Gemeente Rotterdam, 1993). There were many other examples of such conflicts between progressives and conservatives, Berbers and Arabs, Turks and Moroccans, promoters of secularism and orthodox Muslims, etc. While these conflicts could have partitioned civil society into segregated camps, this did not happen. This is because Rotterdam's governance figuration generates strong centripetal forces that encourage civil society associations to take intermediate and mainstream positions and discourage them to



take idiosyncratic (very conservative, radical, liberal or extremist) positions. Whereas in Amsterdam there were sharp divisions between left-wing associations, orthodox Islamic associations and liberal Muslim leaders, in Rotterdam these divisions were not so clear and rivalry was muted.

The incentives to take intermediate positions result from the presence of civil corporations serving groups with different identities. An association capable of switching between identities and involved in diverse activities can tap different sources of funding. While a conservative Islamic association would normally only receive help from SPIOR, and a progressive secular association only from PBR, an association capable of transcending these identities or switching between them can use the services of both. For example, the association Ettahoud evolved over 15 years from an informal parent initiative to teach Arabic to Moroccan children into an association with 350 paying members and a constituency of well over 1,000. This was in part because Ettahoud could extend services to its members through Rotterdam's programs for child-rearing, resident activities, cultural debates and education. Operating with different identities (as youth, resident or migrant association with strong ties to a student association), it could tap diverse sources of funding and join many different networks.

The disincentives to take a radical position result from the immersion of minority associations in larger networks. If an association were to radicalize and develop extremist viewpoints, this could affect all associations. And due to the relationships between the different actors, it is likely that information about, for instance, an extremist preacher would quickly circulate through the governance network. The dense and fine-grained infrastructure makes it relatively easy for authorities and central figures in civil society to prevent or respond to the formation of uncivil discourses or mediatized incidents (Box 11.1). Most mosques are conservative and opposed to radicalism or extremism. This is the same in Rotterdam as in Amsterdam. But in Rotterdam, there is a city-wide network of corporations and associations that detect and counter these threats, thereby preventing mosques from venturing too far from the mainstream. The senior civil servant quoted above explains how these networks operate in case of a threat:

**Box 11.1 Imam El Moumni: “Homosexuals are lower than pigs and dogs”**

Scandals occur with great frequency in integration politics. Because scandals represent a disruption of the civil sphere, they are a good test of how civil societies and their networks function. One the most explosive incidents occurred in May 2001 when imam El Moumni of the Annasr Mosque stated on national television that homosexuality should be considered an infectious disease and that homosexuals are lower than pigs and dogs. El Moumni claimed that his words had been misunderstood and misrepresented. In a public letter addressed to Roger van Boxtel, El Moumni stated that “Muslims are not allowed to make such judgments” because “humans are the highest beings on earth.” The misunderstanding, El Moumni said, had arisen because he had recited Alaraf, verse 179: “many djins and people we have destined for hell. They have hearts with which they do not understand, they have eyes with which they cannot see, they have ears with which they cannot hear. They are like cattle, no they go astray even more. It is they who do not heed attention.” According to El Moumni, he had only stated that the deeds of the people referred to in this verse were lower than those of apes, dogs and pigs (Trouw 2001). El Moumni was angry with the television show for not broadcasting his additional remark that Islam does not justify violence against homosexuals. The imam himself could not explain this to journalists in Dutch but received help from a group of articulate Moroccan youths who publicly stated that they supported him because he had only recited what the Quran states.

For many actors in integration politics, El Moumni was the quintessential example of an uncivil Muslim: he did not speak Dutch after 10 years of residence in the Netherlands and consistently blamed others for controversies arising out of his media performances. The Moroccan authorities had barred him from preaching in his home country but in the Netherlands he was the spiritual leader of Rotterdam’s largest mosque. Over time, however, both El Moumni and the youths who supported him were incorporated in a variety of governance and civil society networks. This certainly does not mean that the mosque’s attendees or board members have become “liberal Muslims.” Nevertheless, they are now tightly interwoven with civil society associations and civil corporations. The mosque was the setting for some of the preparatory meetings for the Islam debates (see below), in which El Moumni participated without causing a scandal. The mosque now actively profiles itself as a center for social and cultural work where civil skills are cultivated. One of the youth who had supported El Moumni told me in an interview in 2006 that he and the rest of the group would no longer support the imam because they prefer having their own stance to supporting an imam who – they now felt – promotes archaic ideas in an archaic fashion. They were no longer active at the mosque, though some of them had become active elsewhere, organizing debates, events and activities for various civil society associations whose constituencies partly overlap with Annasr.

If there are things going wrong or in case of a threat, I receive a call. Immediately. For instance, when a weird imam – a guest preacher – arrives, we know it the next minute. SPIOR itself then intervenes and ensures that the party will not go on... How do they do that? They throw him out of the mosque. Simple. Well [... long pause ...]. No, I do not

want to comment on that. But let me say that I know the director very well. I personally took him off the shipyard. He worked under me for a number of years. He got his bachelor degree and then he moved to SPIOR. We know each other extremely well (*tot in de haarvaten*) and that has some, well, advantages – let me put it like that.

The above quote illustrates a number of features of civil corporatism. Strong ties exist between top civil servants and the directors of the civil corporations, who in turn maintain close contact with civil society associations. The government – i.e. elected or appointed officials – appears only in the background; it nevertheless maintains sensors in civil society as it has indirect yet structural ties to virtually all minority associations in the city.

#### *The balance between government and civil society*

Governments are naturally central actors within governance figurations. The government can cut subsidies and marginalize previously recognized associations, as we saw in the chapters on Amsterdam. The most profound rupture in Rotterdam – and probably the most profound rupture in post-war Dutch municipal politics – occurred in 2002 when Pim Fortuyn's Leefbaar Rotterdam achieved a momentous electoral victory. Fortuyn had an outspoken culturalist discourse, as we saw in Chapter 5. After his death, the aldermen and council members of Leefbaar continued to speak out against (political) Islam, claiming that the influx of migrants had ruined the city (see, e.g., Uitermark & Duyvendak, 2008b). They targeted minority associations in particular: one of the first motions the party proposed, together with the right-wing Liberals, was to reconsider all subsidies to minority associations (Leefbaar Rotterdam and VVD, 2003). In 2005, the leader of Leefbaar's municipal faction stated that his party wanted to “end subsidies of organizations that do not target all Rotterdammers. Cut the subsidies of all those who focus on just one group in society!” (Ronald Sørensen, cited in Van Steenbergen, 2009, p. 54).

Such interventions indicate that the support for minority associations is fragile. But the antipathy against minority associations is counter-balanced by dependency on these same associations. The coalition of Leefbaar, Christian Democrats and right-wing Liberals stated in its plan to promote civil integration that it was very pleased that

so many migrant and other associations have indicated that they are willing to contribute to civil integration and to make social-cultural improvements.... Migrant associations can play an important role in establishing contacts, disseminating

information and motivating groups that are hard to reach. We will more intensively use existing contacts and establish new contacts with organizations that have not yet been reached (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2002, pp. 6 and 11).

We see here yet another example of the ambiguous compulsion of the civil sphere: representatives from groups that suffer stigmatization are called upon to participate more actively (see also Chapters 6 and 10). Associations are used as vehicles to reach groups that are supposedly not integrated; their representatives are called upon to engage in the debate on minority integration in civil arenas. The government wanted to “break taboos” in religious and ethnic communities, to foster civil engagement and to connect people to Dutch society and culture – all of which requires knowledge of, and access to, minority groups. Minority associations and civil corporations were therefore not devalued after Labor was pushed from office – perhaps the opposite was the case. The structural subsidies to SPIOR and PBR, far from being cut, were corrected for inflation. In addition, they and their member associations could draw upon the growing resources made available to support incidental projects (including the subsidies of the Rotterdam Mee fund).

### *Balances of power*

The relationships within Rotterdam’s governance figuration were characterized by balances of power: between the government and civil corporations, between civil corporations and civil society associations, and between progressives and conservatives. While we see the same developments as in Amsterdam – the growing importance of Islamic instead of ethnic associations, the mediatization of integration politics, more stringent demands for subsidies – these only result in small alterations and adjustments. Rotterdam’s governance figuration was clearly more durable than Amsterdam’s ethnic corporatism. The next section examines civil corporatism after Leefbaar took office through an exemplary test of discursive power: the Islam debates.

### **Discursive struggles during the Islam debates**

The Islam debates exemplified the government’s approach to break taboos, to speak openly and frankly, and to identify problems. The nine debates were high-profile events that attracted attention from local, national and international media. The formal goal was to address anxieties over Islam through a public discussion of the relationship between Islam and

integration but antagonistic actors pursued divergent objectives. And so ensued an institutional struggle to determine the conditions of debate and a discursive struggle during the debates themselves. In the first, institutional struggle, four different actors had specific stakes.

1. For *Leefbaar Rotterdam* the debates were first and foremost an opportunity to profile itself in public. Although aldermen are normally required to defend their government's position, on this occasion they agreed to present their personal views. This meant that the Leefbaar aldermen had center stage to voice their criticisms of minorities. Two Leefbaar aldermen wrote essays very critical of Muslims. Marianne van den Anker argued that the time had come to critically examine a number of norms and values, including the male duty to protect the virginity of sisters and daughters, the pressure on women to wear headscarves and the lack of disciplining for boys. While she viewed some Muslims and ex-Muslims as partners in the struggle for gender equality, Muslim men were clearly not part of her coalition (Van den Anker, 2005). In his essay, Marco Pastors lauded the separation between church and state and argued that Islam challenges this separation. To earn its place in the Netherlands, Islam needs to become like other religions (Pastors, 2005). The media took a strong interest in the essays and extensively documented the Islam debates and Leefbaar's position in them. The Islam debates thus functioned as a vehicle to disseminate culturalist discourse.

2. For the *other coalition parties* – the Christian Democrats (whose alderman, Leonard Geluk, was formally responsible for integration) and the right-wing Liberals (a small fraction in the council but the party of the mayor, Ivo Opstelten) – something else was at stake. They wanted to show that they had learned from the Fortuyn revolt. They presented the Islam debates as proof that the government was not afraid to openly discuss controversial topics but they – unlike the discursive revolutionaries of Leefbaar – also argued for mutual understanding and sensitivity. Geluk wrote an essay in which he argued, after culturalists, that Islam needs to go through a process of enlightenment and that a large share of minority youths create difficulties because migrants fail to instill norms and values in their children. His discourse differed from that of Van den Anker and Pastors in that he also valued certain aspects of Islamic culture (such as family values) and opposed insults, arguing instead that people should think about the consequences of their words. The latter part of his message positioned Geluk in opposition to Leefbaar: he argued for stability and unity more than for (more) discursive revolutions.

3. For the state bureaucracy and civil corporations, the Islam debates were first of all a logistical challenge. They furthermore saw the debates as a chance to empower minorities and specifically Muslims to participate in civil politics. The actual organization of the debates was in the hands of a project bureau, PSI (*Projectbureau Sociale Integratie*, Project Bureau Social Integration). PSI operated in the corporatist tradition of Rotterdam and actively approached civil society associations for preparatory meetings. It hired SPIOR to organize a number of expert and information meetings with Islamic associations to discuss the themes of the debate. These expert and information meetings featured speakers who – with the possible exception of Paul Scheffer – were very critical of Culturalism. Under pressure from Leefbaar Rotterdam, the project was then handed over to PBR. PBR arranged 11 preparatory debates on the relationship between Islam and Rotterdam society in cooperation with Islamic associations. Almost 1,200 people participated. In a round of 14 extra debates organized on PBR's own initiative, almost 4,000 people participated. For three ethnic groups (Turks, Moroccans and Somalis), meetings were organized in their native language at the location of their civil society associations. Each meeting featured a speaker – often a scientific or religious authority from Turkey or Morocco – who addressed some aspect of the relationship between Islam and integration, including the position of women, self-organization, education and media representations. During the actual debates, PSI staged both left and right-wing politicians. But it also brought in actors that could authoritatively respond to the charges of Culturalism, such as Tariq Ramadan, perhaps the single most influential proponent of Civil Islam in the world (see Chapter 6).

4. For Rotterdam's migrant and Islamic associations, the Islam debates represented a double challenge. The first was to deliberate on their position in Rotterdam and within Dutch society. Reports of the internal debates show that Muslims used the occasion to express and sharpen their views on the position of Islam. The thread running through the meetings is that many cultural practices and beliefs should be abandoned but Islam itself is pure and entirely compatible with a successful life in the Netherlands. This is the discourse of Civil Islam that we observed in the national debate (Chapter 6) and in Amsterdam (Chapter 10): Islam demands that people invest in education, are honest, help their neighbors, engage in politics, respect women, respect the law, raise their children right, respect other beliefs, denounce violence, and so on (PSI, 2004). The second challenge was to respond to the discursive assaults on Muslims. The debates were being prepared when the Rotterdam government fell into the hands of a party outspoken in its rejection of Islam. National integration politics was

more intense than ever before and revolved almost exclusively around “Islam” (see Part II). Muslims were routinely and spectacularly ridiculed and criticized. The drive of Leefbaar to further stretch the discursive boundaries of the debate and to make the renunciation of Islam common sense was clearly felt as a threat. This is why many civil society associations initially resisted the initiative. But the internal debates were eventually used as rehearsals for the public debates; many prepared for the discursive confrontation with Leefbaar. Ettaouhid even organized a debating course for 25 of its members to further sharpen their rhetorical skills.

What actually happened during the debates is of course subject to interpretation but it is clear that Muslims had a relatively strong presence (compared, for instance, to the debate analyzed in Part II). Volunteers, professionals and members of civil society associations pushed each other to overcome their doubts about yet another debate on Muslims and to attend. And so they did. Leefbaar supporters were a minority in the audience (Wijkalliantie, 2005). The composition of the audience was also reflected in the voting. All participants were asked to stand in one of three boxes – “agree,” “doubt” and “disagree” – to indicate their positions on statements. Almost all participants agreed with propositions that emphasized the cultural obligations of migrants, such as “abiding the law is not enough, proficiency in Dutch is also needed” (PSI, 2005, p. 64). Large majorities supported propositions that allocated blame to traditional Muslims rather than to Islam, such as “the problem is family pressure, not Islam” or “it would be better for Rotterdam and the next generation if youths would be less concerned about family pressure” (*ibid.*, p. 71). During the final debate, participants in the discussions could vote on propositions for a civil charter. The most popular propositions argued against discrimination towards Muslims on the labor market. Other popular propositions emphasized the obligation of mosques to open up to Rotterdam society and of public institutions to address diversity issues (*ibid.*, pp. 124-125). Muslims not only dominated numerically but also rhetorically. Very few articulate culturalists made public statements. In some cases culturalist discourses were delegitimized thanks to their promoters, as in the case of a well-known extreme-right felon. Four out of seven times a Muslim woman won the “I have a dream prize” for the best debater of the evening: a quintessential civil trophy.<sup>114</sup>

In short, debates initiated by a government that perceived Muslims as a problem became a significant site for the dissemination of integration discourses antithetical to Culturalism. We might even say that discursive power was subverted: Leefbaar had wanted to address the relationship between Islam and integration but participants constantly raised the

issue of discrimination and racism. This ultimately culminated in a set of propositions – again determined through voting – that stressed the responsibility of employers and the government in removing obstacles to Muslim integration.<sup>115</sup>

This small case study of the Islam debates shows that civil society associations in Rotterdam did not lose power after Leefbaar came to power. They rose to the challenge and grasped the opportunity to counter the discursive assaults. Minority associations and civil corporations were crucial in this process as they prepared and mobilized people to make an articulate contribution to the debate. These mechanisms did not only operate during the Islam debates. Civil corporations and civil society associations constantly mobilize and organize constituents, both during large-scale events like the Rotterdam debates and during small projects carried out at the neighborhood level.

### **Contradictions of civil corporatism**

Rotterdam's governance figuration has been remarkably stable for at least two decades. The above sections explained why: the presence of civil corporations ensured balances of power between various actors and created a buffer between the government and civil society. But while the structure of Rotterdam's governance figuration has been stable, there are also processes that aggravate its contradictions.

The first is that political opposition to the institutions of civil corporatism is strong and may grow stronger. Civil corporatism does not exclusively support minority associations but it does provide much more support to these associations than to non-minority associations. While such support could initially be legitimized on the grounds that newcomers need extra support to establish themselves, the idea that migrants and their descendants are newcomers is rapidly becoming anachronistic. Rotterdam's governance figuration lowers the threshold to civil participation for various minority groups but not for native groups. Since there are no proposals to extend the institutions of civil corporatism to the substantial share of lower-class natives in the population, it is likely that, in time, civil corporatism will be considered a governance figuration biased in favor of minorities. So far, however, political opposition has not been strong enough to corrode civil corporatism.

A second contradiction is that civil politics in Rotterdam is not very exciting or spectacular. The temporary surge of Leefbaar Rotterdam pulled civil society associations into the civil sphere and made civil politics exciting, but after the re-installment of the Labor Party in 2006, things returned to normal. Minority associations tend to avoid confrontations and are



generally oriented towards stability and cohesion. This attitude – cultivated by the institutions of civil corporatism – has promoted stability but may also turn off younger generations from civil politics. Many civil society associations and civil corporations have seen a partial displacement of the first generation but this process has been slow and uneven, partly because of the conservatism of the older generation and partly because younger generations are not very interested in merely reproducing extant institutions. This is in contrast to Amsterdam where the excitement and volatility of civil politics entices the more assertive and engaged of the younger generation to take a stance and to establish their own institutions. Criticisms of key figures like Ahmed Marcouch and Ahmed Aboutaleb may fuel anger among minority groups but can also arouse interest in politics. If the media become more important channels for civil communication than civil society associations, the institutions of civil corporatism may lose their capacity to appeal to, and incorporate, younger generations.

The third contradiction concerns the crumbling of one of the foundations of civil corporatism: structural subsidies. In 2003, the government appointed a commission to critically review subsidy relations. It concluded that the allocation and use of subsidies should be better registered and monitored (Commissie Van Middelkoop, 2003). In recent years, the audit office – which judges subsidies according to their immediately observable efficiency and efficacy – has acquired a more central position. Since the subsidies to civil corporations create a structure rather than deliver a product, they may be seen as anachronistic, as stemming from a time when governments were overly generous and did not demand value for money. Were the government to adopt such a perspective, subsidies to civil corporations would likely be discontinued and redistributed according to a competitive logic. It is therefore likely that Rotterdam merely lags behind Amsterdam and that everything solid in Rotterdam's civil society, too, will eventually melt into thin air. So far the introduction of market and accountability mechanisms have not had drastic consequences. Some organizations have been forced to merge but most have managed to adjust to changing circumstances. Civil servants responsible for integration policies have guided the associations and corporations in this process, especially trying to convince the smaller associations that they need to prepare for more stringent demands. Such support may help civil society associations and civil corporations to survive the transition towards more competition but, in time, they may be less inclined to make long-term investments to expand their constituencies than to secure funding to ensure short-term survival.

## Conclusion

This chapter examined the genesis and evolution of civil corporatism in Rotterdam. As civil corporatism remained remarkably resilient, it was necessary – in contrast to earlier chapters – to explain continuity rather than change. In the formative years of civil corporatism, the government created institutions encompassing as many associations and groups as possible. The government was heavily involved, but from a distance. Rather than intervening directly in civil society, it encouraged civil actors to establish and manage civil corporations and civil society associations. These interventions in the 1980s created a governance figuration that remained resilient throughout the 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century. The figuration was stable because it balanced power relations between different actors. On the one hand, the institutions of civil corporatism could incorporate many different kinds of associations – conservative, small and marginal ones included. Conservative associations were united through SPIOR, progressive associations through PBR. On the other hand, the specific form of corporatism in Rotterdam created strong centripetal forces: associations that fell in the middle of the progressive-conservative continuum and that mobilized through multiple identities won the most resources and recognition.

Rotterdam's governance figuration remained intact during the greatest political earthquake in Dutch local politics since World War II. Pim Fortuyn's *Leefbaar Rotterdam* sought to change discursive power relations and to make acceptable what had previously been frowned upon. It also set itself the goal to reduce the power of minority associations. But the institutions of civil corporatism remained resilient. This was not only because the impact of *Leefbaar Rotterdam* was buffered by corporatist institutions but also because the government itself was ambivalent. It wanted to dismantle institutions for specific groups but also called upon these same groups to engage in debate and to foster civil repair. *Leefbaar* confronted rather than marginalized minority associations. And the institutions of civil corporatism enabled minority associations to rise to the challenge.

Having established that the cities' governance figurations qualitatively differ, we can now more systematically investigate the nature and implications of these differences. This chapter argued *in passim* that Rotterdam's minority associations, due to the support of civil corporations, reach more constituents, have more harmonious relationships and exert more influence on government policy than civil society associations in Amsterdam. The next chapter connects and elaborates on these disparate observations and tests the argument that Rotterdam has stronger minority associations than Amsterdam.