The inverse culture of poverty

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Abstract

Low-income groups develop a 'culture of poverty' because of their marginalized position. Neighborhood effect studies use this notion as a point of departure. The culture of poverty provides necessary contacts for the informal economy, socializes diverging norms, and reproduces inequality trough genealogical lines. This culture retains the poor in their non-middle class life style. This article makes use of an antithesis of culture. Culture, as a mode of life style, taste, and cultural capital, can also be utilized as a weapon to keep others at a distance. By reversing the essentialist imperial concept of culture, this study will illustrate that low-income groups distance, are distanced and set apart by other status groups in the neighborhood. These tensions between class fractions decelerate building up social capital and thus contradicting the 'neighborhood effect studies' axiom.

Introduction

This article questions the axiom of the neighborhood effect studies. The axiom in the theory of the neighborhood effects is 'that culture-of-poverty behavior perpetuates itself through local peer networks' (Bauder, 2001; p. 595). The culture of poverty argument suggests that low-income groups develop a self-defeating tradition in which they are trapped. In the Netherlands, primarily statistical research illustrates that under specific circumstances living in the 'pockets of poverty' can have an effect on social mobility, more or less taking into account the culture of poverty truism. The utilized concept of culture is suggesting that it is bonding, producing certain norms and values, and engenders to pursue divergent life strategies. Nevertheless, this study attempts to bend the stick the other way.

For instance, Pierre Bourdieu is emphasizing that culture can also be utilized as a means to exclude people. Culture as a mode of lifestyle and cultural capital, can rule out people from the field in which the main forms of capital are distributed. Members of class fractions, who don't fit in the life style of the legitimate class, can suffer from condescension practices e.g. discriminating, stigmatizing and give the other the feeling of being of a lesser virtue. However, the omission of Bourdieu's work is that he doesn't elaborate how these practices operate. The work of Bourdieu resembles much of the work of Elias. Both work out the idea that status differences can reproduce inequality, but Elias neighborhood study demonstrated how established neighbors attempted to impose their definitions of situations on newcomers. The newcomers developed a negative self-image of their group and reinforced social inequality between the groups (cf. Blokland, 2003a; p. 10).

The central question is if the culture of poverty reversal offers a fruitful perspective to explain enduring social inequality. Thus, first [1] results of neighborhood effect studies are presented, then [2] the work of Bourdieu and Elias is outlined, [3] the empirical results are offered and finally [4] the central question is answered.

Acknowledgement

southeast districts of Amsterdam and a sub municipality in Rotterdam, henceforth Noord, Bijlmer, and Delfshaven. These districts contain a high percentage of benefit recipients among its inhabitants (cf. Engbersen & Snel, 1996; Engbersen, 1997) and are therefore the Dutch equivalent of the jobless areas portrayed by Wilson (1987, 1996).

Neighborhood effects

Segregation –or concentration of low-income households- acts as a motor that drives social inequality (cf. Hanhörster, 2001, p. 329). For that reason, interest in the impact of the neighborhood on the life-chances of individuals is an undying dispute among social scientists (cf. Buck 2001). The focal point is: does living in a deprived area constitutes the disadvantage experienced by its residents, and do the area effects contribute to a lack of social mobility (cf. Atkinson & Kintrea, 2001; p. 2277; Small & Newman, 2001; p. 29). We outline some results produced in the Netherlands (see Pinkster, 2005 for an overview). First,[1] Musterd et al. (2003) focused on both the employed and unemployed and brought into being that socio-economic perspectives of low-income residents in jobless areas were not at variance then elsewhere. The environment has only a modest influence on the social mobility of households with a weak economic position, but proved to have a more powerful effect on the social mobility of households with a stronger economic position (Musterd et al., 2003; p. 877). Second, [2] Van der Klaauw en Van Ours (2003) empirical results show that the neighborhood affects the individual transition rates form welfare to work of young Dutch welfare recipients. These transition rates are lower if the unemployment rate within a neighborhood is higher. Other neighborhood characteristics do not have any effect (ibid.; p. 983). Third, [3] Wenda van der Laan Bouma – Doff (2004) discovered that that social integration of ethnic minorities in concentration neighborhoods was indeed negatively correlated with a more segregated residential context, but that there was considerable variation among different ethnic groups (cited in Pinkster 2005). Consequently, these studies point at a neighborhood effect. Without a doubt, these studies are of high quality and offer an excellent ground for further research. However, these studies use more or less the culture of poverty axiom. This axiom stems from the fear that this culture will result from excessive concentrations of low-income groups, who take unemployment and welfare benefits for granted and lack role models in their surroundings (cf. Blokland, 2003b; p. 2). We need to take a closer look at this culture of poverty thesis.

The culture of poverty

Oscar Lewis coined the culture of poverty thesis in *The Children of Sanchez* (1961) as a way of characterizing how impoverished Mexicans and Puerto Ricans had a set of common practices designed to cope with the hardships of poverty. Lewis' original term reflected both its positive and negative uses. The culture of poverty was a set of cultural resources -culture as shared behaviors and values- that grew out of extreme hardship and helped people cope with it. Yet for Lewis, the "culture of poverty" was also something people were trapped in: a debilitating, self-defeating culture that discouraged people from acting middle class, e.g. exercising self-discipline, being motivated, planning ahead, being hopeful about their future. The culture of poverty appeared where poor people suffered from very limited resources, difficult living conditions, and isolations from the socioeconomic and political institutions of the larger society. Those who developed a culture of poverty adapted a series of traits unlike the more affluent: few formal organizations, broken families, provinciality, a present orientation, and a sense of helplessness and alienation (see for all the traits Lewis, 1965; p. xlii – lii).

The culture of poverty can be criticized: [1]culture is at risk of becoming an imperial concept colonizing all social life and in the process it is getting stretched too far and in trying to explain everything, it explains nothing, [2] this cultural concept becomes a relative persistent attribute of individuals e.g. the fatalism underlying the culture of poverty affects everything they do (cf. Rosenbaum et al., 2001; p. 71-2), [3] the behavior of the poor is explained by the behavior of the poor, and thus tautological. [4] The main omission is that this notion suggests that the poor are detached from the rest of society and live in relative isolation. They have no tensions or struggles with 'other' class fractions. Thus, the concept is relational, but only relational among the poor. The cultural notion in inward bound, focusing merely on the behavior among the poor and not between the poor and the non-poor. The cultural notion drawn up by Bourdieu can offer an escape.

Bourdieu on culture

Bourdieu is impressed by the power of the possessors of legitimate culture to keep others in their place and stay ahead of those busily acquiring sufficient capital in order to ensure that they, themselves, do not slip down the hierarchy (cf. Berger, 1986; p. 1449). Therefore, cultural capital, lifestyle and taste are central in Bourdieu's social inequality reproduction theory (see Bourdieu, 1984). Bourdieu emphasizes differences in cultural, social and economic capital within class fractions, but also proves that class fractions use these differences for distancing inferior class fractions. Life style and taste are not a matter of dispute, but operate as a weapon.

Familiarization with legitimate cultural goods is exercised as an instrument to make social distinctions. The lack of 'good taste' is used as a pretext to exclude members of the lower classes from the bourgeoisie and thus from certain jobs. Distinguishing and distancing are firmly connected and invigorate each other: distinguishing by distancing, distancing by distinguishing. The dominant class succeeds in accepting their life style and taste as the only legitimate. The less privileged have to change their behavior if they want to be accepted by the dominant class. The only option is to imitate the life style and taste of the dominant class. If not, they place themselves finally outside the field in which attractive positions are allocated. Imitation of the life style offers no guarantee, only a slight chance to succeed, because their 'low descent' will reveal them (cf. De Jong, 2001; p. 78-9).

The upper class fractions denigrate the lower class fractions by the use of condescension practices (Bourdieu, 1989; p. 16; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; p. 145). Note: condescension denotes 'show that one feels superior'. These practices determine the social space between classes and form the 'Goffmanian' interactionist analyses, which Bourdieu sees as the necessary, though not sufficient part of every sociological analysis. Bourdieu is more or less suggesting that these practices can be used as a heuristic device, writing… there is no better opportunity to observe the functioning of this sense of the place one occupies than in de condescension strategies, which presuppose both in the author of the strategy and in the victims a practical knowledge of the gap between the place really occupied and the place fictitiously indicated by the behavior adopted (Bourdieu, 1984; p. 472).

We criticize his study for two reasons: [1] in his study *Distinction,* a clear-cut interaction between class fractions is missing. Although Bourdieu writes in an interview protocol that 'he is somewhat condescending about people who…' (Bourdieu, 1984; p. 275), his study misses any lucid text in which he describes the exact functioning of these practices. [2] Second, Bourdieu fails to account for e.g. ethnic, religious and regional diversity. These differences constitute contemporary society and cannot be neglected. Thus, Bourdieu links social status and power to cultural distinction. This cultural distinction is also an important part of Elias' explanation of the cohesion among the established and their techniques of stigmatizing outsiders. But what Elias adds to this, is to show how power is exercised and reproduced in everyday interactions (May, 2004; p. 2176).

Elias' established-outsider figuration

The theory of the established-outsider figuration can be used as a compelling tool for analyzing power differentials of different groups in relation to the pattern of social space (May 2004, p. 2159). Elias – Bourdieu refers much to him- contradicted the idea that social inequality can be reduced to the unequal distribution of resources (Marx) or that the traditional class analyses should be expanded with rank and party (Weber). The reciprocal influence of power formation and the meaning that is giving to it are central in his work and thus exceeding the classical explanations. Power is a multiple, due to social figurations generated quality of all social interdependencies. He searched for taxonomies that enabled him to grasp social inequality within the dynamics of the existing and changing social relations, resulting in the theory of social relations between the established and the outsiders. Power balances are linked to cultural customs and traditions (De Jong, 1997; p. 194-5).

Elias empirical study –resulting in his theory- deals with the isolated residential district Winston Parva that was clearly divided into three zones (Elias & Scotson, 1994). In zone I lived upper middle class professionals and businessmen in sizable houses. Everybody considered this the upper neighborhood. Zone II and III could not be distinguished on appearances. Working class people in smaller houses lived in both zones. Nevertheless, the inhabitants made a distinction between the zones. Zone II was the city centre, which contained the public facilities like the church and the cinema. The residents considered themselves as respectable citizens. The presence of a minority of the upper middle class in zone II class confirmed this. Zone III was deemed inferior by the others zones. The inhabitants were judged rough,

uncivilized, not able to control their children, had unclean houses and fights took place everyday. This was applicable for only a minority of the people in zone III. More social cohesion existed among the zone II inhabitants and thus a sense of community occurred. They saw themselves as descendents of old families and as proud aristocrats. This diverged form the weak social ties among the zone III inhabitants.

The explanation of this social figuration can be located in the genesis of Winston Parva. Zone II was the oldest zone and the inhabitants considered themselves as the standard. Zone I inhabitants gave the neighborhood more prestige and thus were easily accepted. Zone III included people from outside– as a consequence of labor migration- and were not indubitably accepted. Doing the same work as the established, they did not get along with each other, due to differences in traditions and life styles. Both zones did not try to improve the bonds. It was not intended to keep a distance between the groups; it was certainly a consequence of their behavior. The detachedly welcome of the established, in public spaces, gave segregation a hand (cf. De Jong, 1997; p. 196). This was the unintended consequence of (self) exclusion processes.

The social distance between the zones did not get any closer. The 'intruders' were excluded from social clubs and the city council elections. They were labeled as loud, uncivilized and criminal. The established distorted the image of the newcomers increasingly by gossip and backbiting. Only a small part of the outsiders confirmed this behavior, nevertheless the entire group was labeled negatively. The established closed ranks against them and stigmatized them generally as people of a lesser human worth (Elias & Scotson, 1994; p. xv). Within the established some deviated from the standard, but this did not contribute to a negative image. The image of the outsiders was confirmed by a minority of the 'worst' and the established image was upheld by a minority of the 'best'. Thus, this 'stigmatization' often works as a double-sided process. The established attribute to themselves a special 'group charisma' that confirms their virtue and superiority, while at the same time imputing the outsiders a special 'group disgrace' which proves their anomie and inferiority (May, 2004; p. 2162).

Social tensions and conflicts form an intrinsic part of status hierarchies. People approve with their status, due to imposition or incapability of changing their position. This is even applicable for the majority with the least status. The number is not decisive. The density of the network is of much importance. A solid minority can have more power than a loosely majority. The old established network formed such a power resource. The minority held key positions. The ability of one group to pin the badge of human inferiority on another human group and make it stick is a function of a specific figuration formed by the two groups with one another. The centerpiece of such a figuration is an uneven, tensile, balance of power (Mennell, 1989; p. 212).

The reproduction of social inequality occurs along lines of life style, habits, and customs. The established gave the outsiders a feeling of being inferior because of their customs and thus the outsiders accepted…with a kind of puzzled resignation that they belonged to a group of lesser virtue and respectability (Elias & Scotson, 1994; p. xvi). Finally, Elias summarizes his theory…exclusion and stigmatization of the outsiders by the established group were thus powerful weapons used by the latter to maintain their identity, to assert their superiority, keeping others firmly in their place (ibid; p. xviii), and the quintessence of the theory is simply…give a group a bad name and it is likely they live up to it (ibid; p. xxviii).

Thus, [1] both Elias and Bourdieu tried to explain social inequality by means of cultural differences, [2] utilized culture (customs, habits, norms and values) as relational and exterior and [3] both departed from the idea that we cannot understand social inequality by studying the qualities of a single group, like Lewis did. Therefore the work Elias and Bourdieu offers a fruitful perspective to molest the culture of poverty notion and thus the axiom of the neighborhood effect studies. This resembles Massey & Denton's (1993) study, whose intent is to provide a mechanism for how neighborhood segregation affects life chances. They argue that black people develop their culture as an oppositional stance against 'white' cultural traits (Small & Newman, 2001; p. 36).

The neighborhoods under study

Before we turn to the empirical analyses, we first present the genesis of the neighborhoods under study. The genesis of the neighborhoods moderately constitutes social figurations. The three neighborhoods under study are dissimilar with regard to urban planning, history and demographic composition. These variables contribute to the neighborhood culture and the manner in which people cohabit. A short description is delineated.

Delfshaven. Since the birth of the sub municipality Delfshaven, it always attracted migrants. Around 1860 entrepreneurs started to build cheap houses to accommodate migrants from the southwest of the Netherlands. The contemporary shape was established between 1870 and 1920. The neighborhood kept intact after the 1940 German bombardments on Rotterdam. Delfshaven is a district full of contrast. The opposition between the wide, stylishness avenues and the in between clamped neighborhoods with its densely, sober houses is considerable.

Newcomers from all over the world replace the 'native' Dutch migrants, who originally lived in the neighborhoods and worked in the harbor economy. The consequences are lucid: the overall language changed, entrepreneurs modified their merchandise or were swapped by migrant entrepreneurs, cultural differences occurred and the indigenous Dutch moved out. Two third of the inhabitants are from non-Dutch decent. An ethnic heterogeneous district like Delfshaven possesses besides traditional migrants (e.g. people from Suriname, Turkey, Cape Verde, Morocco) many migrants from different countries that have hardly anything to do with the Dutch colonial past or the 1960's labor migration. Therefore, many migrant organizations, churches, mosques arose in the district.

Data collection took place in the neighborhoods, which are part of the sub municipality Delfshaven: Spangen, Bospolder/Tussendijken, Schiemond, Oud-Mathenesse, Middelland, Het Nieuwe Westen, en Het Witte Dorp. In general, these neighborhoods are described as 'backlog areas', 'welfare neighborhoods', 'concentrations districts' or even 'the Dutch ghettos'. (cf. Staring et al., 2002; p. 15-6). According to social indicators such as the educational level, the number of people on welfare, average income, unemployment numbers this district achieves badly (ibid, p. 20). Sub municipality Delfshaven has a definite multi-ethnic character. One distinctive feature is the vast residential mobility. Inhabitants continuously move and newcomers e.g. migrants from Turkey or Cape Verde can establish in the neighborhood with the support of social networks (cf. Staring, 2001; Staring et al., 2002; p. 16).

Bijlmer. The Bijlmermeer was originally built up (as from 1963) by the ideas of the architect Le Corbusier. He was in favor of separating the different functions of the city e.g. living, working, transportation, recreation et cetera. The sizeable apartments were destined for the middle class. It should have been a futuristic city in which the middle class could live heavenly amidst the green parks. The Bijlmer contains relative high apartment buildings of approximately ten stores.

However, the outcome of the original intentions is different. The original intention was to vary among the heights of the apartments. In addition, the parking garages differed from the first planning, causing considerable dark places. From the start, the neighborhood dealt with an image problem and due to the fact that facilities developed slowly, the middle class avoided the Bijlmer and chose other new built cities. Many apartments were vacant. Suriname became independent from the Netherlands in 1975. Therefore, the municipality dispensed the apartments to many Surinamese. As a result, the Bijlmer contains one of the largest Surinamese communities in the world. In the Bijlmer is one third of the residents is native Dutch; one third is from Surinamese decent, and the rest from non-western societies.

The Bijlmer suffers from a spatial mismatch between the supply and demand of labor. On the one hand, many banking and insurance companies are in the near, offering high qualified jobs. These jobs hardly can be fulfilled with the relatively low educated migrants who are living in the Bijlmer. This is one of the reasons why unemployment is a problem for this district.

In addition, this district suffers from an unsafe reputation. The crime rate is far above the Amsterdam average. The Bijlmer offers a hide out for drug runners and users who have been driven out of the city centre. The many escape routes and dark places are an excellent place for drug dealing. The unsafe feelings among the inhabitants grounds for a high residential mobility. Besides the negative connotation that bears the name Bijlmer, it needs to be emphasized that the Bijlmer is a lively neighborhood. Many festivals are organized, there is a market, and migrant organizations flourish (Ypeij & Snel, 2002; p. 11-9).

Noord. Just after the First World War, Noord was built. The city of Amsterdam was expanding and therefore the need for houses grew. Noord exists out of a set of small villages with a rural character. The idea was that the working class could live in a healthy environment. The district looks like a chain of small villages (Ypeij & Snel, 2002; p. 30).

The district of Amsterdam Noord includes some of the poorest neighborhoods of the Netherlands. This non-touristy side of Amsterdam, contained homogenous working and middle class neighborhoods. The inhabitants worked in the shipbuilding and other related industries in the Amsterdam harbor area. Much of these industries had to compete with low wage Asian shipbuilding companies. Because of the

vanishing of the industries in the mid 1980's, many people got unemployed (cf. Ypeij & Snel, 2002; p. 28). Nevertheless, this was not the only cause of the high poverty rate in Noord. Many of the '1980's' unemployed did not live on poverty for the reason that [1] several of them got a financial better disability benefit, [2] became retired [3] did not live in these neighborhoods but came from other cities. As a result, half of the respondents worked in other industries and did low paid work. They lived practically all their life in the neighborhood and experienced the changing working class neighborhood. The other half was migrants or accidentally crashed in the neighborhood.

Until beginning of the 1980's, these neighborhoods were not seen as problematic. From the mid 1980's, the neighborhood was seen as a breading ground for cultures of unemployment in which people live detachedly from the rest of society.

Summing-up concisely, Delfshaven is familiar with migration and ethnic diversity. The Bijlmer is also multi-ethnic, although the Surinamese community is the majority. This neighborhood also suffers from a bad and unsafe reputation. Both the Bijlmer and Delfshaven deal with a high residential mobility. Noord contains remainders of the old working class and 'old families'. It is a bit of a non-urban environment and it suffers from high poverty rates.

Genesis of the social figurations

In the past paragraph the neighborhood developments were sketched, focusing on macro and historical changes. These changes shaped the experiences of the denizens. The respondents experienced [1] the shift from a Fordist to a post-Fordist economy, [2] the process of modernity e.g. individualizing, and [3] the demographic change from a working-class to a multi-ethnic neighborhood. These changes constitute contemporary neighborhood culture and structure, and acts as a departure for analyzing social figurations.

Economic changes. The changes in the economy are far-reaching. The district of Amsterdam Noord and Rotterdam suffered from 1980's decline due to the vanishing of the traditional low skilled labor, offering a stable income for many. Wacquant (1999; p. 1641) polemically writes 'witness the virtual emptying of the harbor of Rotterdam, perhaps the most modern in the world and a major contributor to the rise of unemployment to above the 20 per cent mark. These changes affected the neighborhood culture, as a 64-your-old woman in Noord explains.

> We lived just to our colleagues in Noord. Always a couple of them around you, very handy. That brings about a special bond when everybody is in the same [shipbuilding] business. At a certain moment, all the men were sitting home [being unemployed]. You could see them in the streets. They could not lose their energy, incomes declined, don't finding their way. That applied for the whole neighborhood. Some women were unhappy with the situation…a man around the house all day. So tensions arose.

The economic restructuring preceded the neighborhood culture, alternating the daily lives of the people. Labor is no longer regulating; incomes declined and resentment evolved as a consequence of feeling abandoned by the state. This process is intensified by overall changes in society.

Modernity. A sharp diminution of the sense of community, that used to characterize older working-class locales, occurred (Wacquant, 1999; p. 1644). It is no longer a familiar and reaffirming landscape suffused with collective meanings and forms of mutuality (ibid.). Interdependencies are more loosening and people rely less on each other. These processes are umbrella terms for modernization. Urban bonds change and this contemplates in daily interactions. A 73-year-old woman in Noord is satisfied with her home but less with the neighborhood. She barely gets in touch with her neighbors.

> That is modern, people are always busy and do not have time to socialize.

People only say hello or don't know each other at all. Networks of the urban residents hardly coincide with the neighborhood. Consequently, the neighborhood suffers from a decline in decency. Anonymity corresponds with less cleanness, as an older man living in Noord suggests. The second quote stems from 58-your-old woman in the Bijlmer.

> In the early days, it was a nice neighborhood, but now it is pauperized. I have young neighbors with whom I hardly socialize. They only say hello. I would rather have elder neighbors. You can see were the elder and the younger people are living. The younger people are not that clean as we used to be.

> I like the neighborhood, but not its people. They're sloppy. They throw all the garbage from above. I always try to keep it clean, just as my mother taught me: 'were you live belongs to you, so you have to keep it clean'.

The respondents verbalized the idea that the coming of younger people modified the social relations. This even got stronger at the moment the neighborhoods became multi-ethnic.

Multi-ethnic neighborhoods. Form the 1960's on, the Netherlands started to recruit migrants from different countries –especially Turkey and Morocco- to reinforce the Dutch economy. Suriname became independent from the Netherlands in 1975 causing a migration flow. The harbor of Rotterdam has always been a safe haven for migrants who worked on the ships, like people from Cape Verde. The migrants practically all settled in the older inner-city neighborhoods with low rentals. From that moment, the urban neighborhoods changed of 'color'. Many indigenous Dutch left the inner cities and moved to the outskirts. After approximately four decades, almost half of all people in the two largest cities (Rotterdam and Amsterdam) consist of former (descendents of) migrants. A 38-year-old Turk in Delfshaven sheds light on this phenomenon. The second quote refers to the feeling of living in a ghetto.

> Everybody knows this is not a very good neighborhood. In this street, probably five out of the two hundred houses belong to indigenous Dutch. There used to be more, but they all fled the city. It's better to live together, all sorts of nationalities.

> It's becoming a sort of ghetto! When you look at what 'Nieuw Amsterdam' (the housing association) puts in to the flats!

Labor is no longer the regulating aspect for many urban residents in their daily practice: the industrial regime is replaced by welfare, so that new forms independence and conflict are created. The dichotomous worldview – characteristic for the homogenous working-class quarter- has disappeared: the 'we-them' scheme of labor versus capital is replaced by a double polarity: on the one side the native residents versus the nation state and the local institutions, and on the other hand the migrants. Nevertheless, these dividing lines do not hold in reality. Depending on the problem, different alliances and dividing lines are formed. So many residents of old urban neighborhoods develop refined *distinction strategies* and complex social hierarchies to cope with the changing urban environment (cf. Engbersen & Snel, 1996; p. 140 *my emphasis*). These changing urban environments are central in de next paragraph.

Social figurations

Norbert Elias undoubtedly distinguished between established and outsiders. Today, that is multifaceted: [1] residential mobility is feasible [2] neighborhoods change due to e.g. urban restructuring and [3] social economic position not always concurs with place as in Winston Parva. However, based [a] on the neighborhood genesis, [b] demographic changes [c] the statements of the inhabitants, we hypothesize that [A] in Noord the established are the indigenous Dutch and they are confronted with (former) migrants as outsiders, [B] Delfshaven is to such an extent multi-ethnic, that differences are fuzzy and [C] the Bijlmer encloses a considerable Surinamese community that probably this community is the established and the indigenous Dutch the outsiders. These hypotheses are guidelines for the next paragraph.

Noord. In Noord, many old families live, just like Winston Parva. They refer to Noord with its rural traits as a village and they think Noord is a little detached from the rest of Amsterdam. This is underlined by the impression that many people from the inner city do not want to live in Noord. A strong distinction between 'real' Amsterdam and the Northern district is made. Some older indigenous Dutch still emphasize a sense of community. They enjoy living in the neighborhood. A 52-year-old woman summarizes this in the first quote. The exclusion practices, which are a result of the sense of community, are contemplated in the second.

We're one. We all deal with the same difficulties.

Sometimes, newcomers enter the neighborhood. Then it is the question what quality they have. I have nothing against outsiders, but you never know if they are as communal as we are. Many families live in this neighborhood. They are all family. If a house is vacant, we are trying to put a member of the family in.

The old established members of the neighborhood actively try to exclude newcomers. Speaking of the 1990's, Elias study is still not outdated. This sense of community is consolidated by discriminatory repertoires. The older residents do not really discriminate in public, but their statements on newcomers are condescending. In their eyes, the rise of criminality is associated with the coming of the migrants, as two women explain. The third quote reflects a double standard. Although some newcomers are seen as friendly people, the overall negative image of the migrants still holds ground.

Those blacks, they deprive you. They don't want to work for it. They break into your house and steal everything, that's much easier.

The tobacco shop… robbed again. I heard them talking about it. It was done round five o'clock. And the fellows who done it, I know them. At that moment, I came from the chemist's, I saw them walking away. I said later on, let them hang! That might sound a little strange, but let us be honest, we Dutch are very different!

I don't want to discriminate, but I don't want to live as the only Dutch among so many migrants. Sometimes I get sick of it. I don't oppose to them, because my neighbors are Turkish, very friendly people. Over there, some Surinamese…nice people. But as the only white person…I won't feel at home.

The established have a strong we-image. They see people from outside as a thread for the community, whether they are migrants or native Dutch. This is already in an advanced stage. Although it is complicated to point at the outsiders, those who feel excluded or suffer from condescension practices can be classified as the outsiders. These exclusion processes are illuminated by the practices of distancing. The first situation sketch is lucid. It is clear that the young woman who it concerns doesn't feel welcome. She already comes to terms with her situation. The same situation occurs in the second verbatim. Both are native Dutch and resign in their situation.

From the moment I came to the neighborhood it went wrong. One time, I went to the bakery to buy some bread for my children. At the bakery, I could hear two women talking: "I heard that a single mother with five children is coming to the neighborhood, can you imagine?" I thought, are they talking about me? Should I say something about it? The house I live in was meant for someone's sister. From the moment they heard the way in which I got the house, they started to bully…but I don't care anymore.

I never felt at home in this neighborhood. The people have a different mentality. We are rejected. Here, the families rule. In the early days, you had big families with 14, 15 children. They all moved out of the neighborhood. They all want to come back. If a house is empty, the families manage to put a member of them into the new house.

The previous respondents already felt excluded. One of the techniques to keep a social distance is by gossiping and backbiting. Though this can also have an integrating function, it primarily serves as a highly effective instrument of rejection (Elias & Scotson, 1994; p. 94). Those who cannot or do not want to join the gossip feel excluded. There is a connection between the manner in which the urban environment is planned and the communication amidst the residents; a small village brings about gossip.

The neighborhood is like a small village. Everybody tries to get information form each other. If they don't get information whatsoever, they make up their own stories. It's like the Prive or the Story (gossip magazines). There has got to be something!

People here are nosy as hell. They meddle with other people's business, they try to find out everything. I live here for five years, by some I'm accepted, but most….no. They think I have an attitude. I don't like to interfere with everybody…so I have an attitude.

The district Noord resembles the old established-outsider figuration as in Elias' study. Although the entering of migrants is seen as a serious threat for the old families. Nevertheless, it seems that native Dutch are excluded from the neighborhood as well. They suffer from gossiping and exclusion techniques. The result is that the outsiders toss in the towel and stop building up a network in the neighborhood.

Delfshaven. The figuration in Delfshaven is indistinguishable. It is challenging to make distinctions for the reason that so many different ethnicities live in the district. Nevertheless, two points can be made. [1] In the first place, the last withdrawal of the indigenous Dutch takes place. They are swapping places with migrants, in an advanced condition. They indigenous feel abandoned in the neighborhood. They feel estranged and as a result, they withdraw out of the everyday life. In addition, they are not familiar anymore what is happening in the neighborhood.

When there is a [public] party in the neighborhood, you see more migrants than native Dutch. The Dutch, you see those fewer. But I don't leave for that reason. That's nonsense. But you do get a little estranged…I withdraw as a Dutch person, because I think, I'm the only one left in the neighborhood…more then half of the residents are from Moroccan and Turkish descent.

I think this neighborhood has become a D-neighborhood. That is a neighborhood for displaced people…or they are from abroad, or they have a criminal record or they live on welfare…those people are ditched in Spangen. This is a dump neighborhood….and those of Dutch descent don't like it at all, they all leave….Spangen doesn't have a bad name, they gave Spangen a bad name.

Migrants concur social space, but with some ambivalence. They live in a multi-ethnic enclave but not wholeheartedly, as a 41-year-old Turk puts forward. He is emphasizing that he hardly gets the opportunity to get in contact with others. As a result, a battle between indigenous and migrants scarcely occur within the neighborhood. Certainly, many Turks suffer from discrimination on the labor market. Nevertheless, within the neighborhood it occasionally happens, as in the second verbatim from a 46-year-old Turk. He speaks about a neighbor who was letting his dog out. The dog was defecating in front of his house. After a couple of times, he asked if this could happen elsewhere.

When I look around, I don't feel like I'm living in the Netherlands. For real. At the schools and in the clubs, hardly any Dutch is present. When I look around, I can count the number of Dutch citizens on one hand. There are many migrants. For that reason, few opportunities arise to speak Dutch. Some Dutch are in the neighborhood, but I hardly talk to them. It should be better to talk more often, but that depends if they have time or if they want to talk to you. We only greet each other.

You know what he said? 'Go back to Turkey, we are here in the Netherlands, go back to Turkey'. But I have a Dutch passport and I feel like Turkish and Dutch!

Second, [2] as a consequence of the ethnic diversity, the old diving line between 'black' and 'white' diminish. Probably an ethnic hierarchy expands in the district Delfshaven. A good deal of research has shown that multi-ethnic societies tend to form hierarchies of their ethnic groups (Hagendoorn et al., 1998; Hagendoorn, 1995; cited in Snellman & Ekehammar, 2005; p. 83). In-group preferences and stereotyping play an important role in aerating hierarchies. A Turkish man doesn't like Moroccans. He sketches the process of the indigenous withdrawal, that coincides with the coming of migrants.

The Dutch left and the migrants entered the neighborhood. Many Moroccans entered the neighborhood…many migrant children don't do so well. They curse, dirty words, dirty. I don't want that. I want my children to grow up well. There are many migrants, and then many problems arise between the neighbors.

In addition, many people from Cape Verde are condescending about Turks. Alternately, this gives rise to the idea that tensions arise out of the multi-ethnic district.

The neighborhood is negatively changed. More Turkish and Moroccan people live in the neighborhood and they mess up.

The backdoor used to be always open, but not anymore. More Turks and Moroccans live in this neighborhood. The Dutch left. Only migrants live in this neighborhood.

Thus, the established-outsider figuration can be analyzed along non-indigenous lines. The native Dutch withdraw out of urban space, giving room to migrants, who consequently form new status hierarchies. These hierarchies can be seen as new figurations.

Bijlmer. In the Bijlmer, dividing lines are easier to distinguish. As a consequence of the Surinamese majority, the Surinamese feel especially at home. It is a safeguard to discrimination. They even refer to the Bijlmer as a part of Suriname. This is exemplified by the verbatims of two Surinamese women.

Yes, especially in the Bijlmer [she feels at home], many nationalities. I feel like I'm in Suriname. Especially when I go to the market. I can identify myself with these people.

Since I moved to this neighborhood, I love it. I did not think it would be so nice, you can see many migrants like me. For that reason, I feel safer, you start to think about discrimination. Also, nobody is a nuisance to me. I see my neighbors, I greet them, and you talk to them shortly.

Consequently, living already for three decades, the Surinamese community is established in the neighborhood. Implicitly it can be suggested that the indigenous Dutch are the outsiders. They feel discriminated and set apart. They sometimes don't feel at home in their own country. The dividing line between 'white' and 'black' retains.

As a white person, do you know what I detest most? So much is organized for the black community, people from Ghana, and so on. Not for white people. I feel a little discriminated in my own country. Go to the market, bump accidentally into someone, I guarantee you, it's black and it doesn't say sorry! And then I think, in my own country! Well, I do not discriminate, but this is out of the line.

As a Westerner, you are an 'allochtoon' [immigrant] as well. I think, that all the people, no matter where they come from, they should adapt in a certain fashion, in the manner it's conform our habits…to keep it livable. It's bizarre to demand that I –as Dutch- have to fit in here. To whom I have to adapt? To my Antillean neighbors, or the neighbors from Ghana? Or the Russians next down the hall?

Remarkable is that besides feeling discriminated, and not knowing to whom to adapt, the indigenous feel excluded from the public organizations. The dividing between black and white is confirmed by the words of a Surinamese woman who is 'a little too white'. She is discriminated by Surinamese people and she doesn't feel at home in both the Netherlands and Suriname.

I don't like the environment [its people], but I like the neighborhood. That's the difference. I don't like the men out here. My own people. I've been beat down trice by my own people, because I'm too white. They see me as a Dutch. Under these circumstances, you can hit me! And the same situation occurs to me in Suriname, so I'm stuck between a rock and a hard place. I don't know

where to live! In Suriname they say 'mercenary, go back!'. You can hear it in my accent when I speak, but you can't see it from my looks. Very odd.

Thus, sharp distinctions exist between being 'white' versus 'black'. However, this time, the common sense notion that the indigenous are excluding others can be crossed out. This time, the indigenous Dutch do not feel at home and feel discriminated. The Surinamese can be seen as the established.

Summing up

In Noord, a classic established-outsider figuration can be found. Exclusion practices are not so much targeted at migrants, but also at native Dutch. Exclusion techniques as gossiping and backbiting are still practiced. For outsiders it is challenging to build up a social network in the neighborhood. In Delfshaven, we hypothesize that an ethnic hierarchy is developing. Tensions do not arise out of 'black versus white', but some pointers exist that different migrant fractions have strained relations. In the Bijlmer, the old 'white against black' dichotomy is reversed. The neighborhood offers an ethnic enclave and the indigenous Dutch feel as if they are the outsiders. In the three neighborhoods, the power relations shift and deal with a constant flux. Ethnicity is the main trait on which differences between residents are constructed –although in Noord, white inhabitants try to exclude white and in the Bijlmer, a 'white' Surinamese is discriminated.

This research started with the idea that exclusion occurred along differences in life style, taste, and habits. The supposition was that people exclude each other based on life style characteristics. Since all the respondents are poor, it was likely that exclusion practices were based on someone's social economic position and the life style resulting from it. However, the transcriptions offered hardly any evidence that poverty in daily neighborhood interactions is central. Exclusion practices did occur along ethnic lines or because people try to maintain acquired certainties, like their living conditions. Being poor is crucial, but not in the neighborhood interaction. As a result, we have to find explanations why poverty attributes do not, or hardly matter in day-to-day interactions in the neighborhood.

Explanation

Poverty is an immense concern for the respondents, but in the daily interactions in the neighborhood, it hardly does. Because poor people often try to conceal their poverty to avoid humiliation and shame. So too in some more affluent countries feelings of shame and experiences of humiliation are recurrent themes in poverty research (Lister, 2004; p. 118). The significance of shame and humiliation is not to be underestimated. They play an important role in maintaining inequality and social hierarchy. They are painfully injurious to identity, self-respect and self–esteem, in other words how we feel about our selves (cf. Rawls, 1973; Honneth, 1995; cited in Lister, 2004; p. 119). Respondents try to avoid that other people see that they live on welfare. In addition, not able to reciprocate in social relations as a consequence of not having any money causes people to withdraw.

> Although I live on welfare, I try to hide that…as much as possible. I have that in me…. the outer world doesn't have to know how I feel and I supposed to look, just because I live on welfare. Other people don't have to know that I have a hard time. I always try to smile in front of other people, but deep in my hart, I can cry.

> I have a Surinamese neighbor; she's willing to make a conversation, but the rest they all withdraw. There's no love among the people. At a moment, when you don't have any money, how can you invite people?

Goffman (1963) suggests that visibility –of ones stigma- is a crucial factor in attempts at passing. To pass successfully, an individual must make his or her stigma invisible so that it is known only to himself or herself (cf. Roschelle & Kaufman 2004, p. 33). Therefore, the poor adopt sometimes the life style of the non-poor in order to avoid discrimination based on their appearances. However, of course they cannot change their ethnicity. For that reason, the mentioned discrimination and exclusion practices happened along ethnic lines instead of poverty traits. Consequently, we have to ask ourselves if the traditional culture of poverty thesis, with its strong focus on poverty attributes, is an adequate point of departure for neighborhood studies.

Conclusion

In this paper, we argued that contemporary figurations could be found in the history of the neighborhood. These figurations are a result of macro structural and transnational changes, like the vanishing of the old economy and decolonizing processes in de mid 1970's, dismantling the old working class neighborhoods and giving rise to multi-ethnic neighborhoods. Within the neighborhood, the city dwellers experienced these changes; labor is replaced by welfare, a sense of community is swapped with anonymity and newcomers gave rise to tensions. These changes grounds that the power equilibrium is out of balance and constantly shifting. Migrants settle, indigenous Dutch move out, and those who stay withdraw and are not able to cope with these new circumstances. This gives rise to unconventional urban figurations; in Noord remainders of the old working class try to exclude newcomers, in multi-ethnic Delfshaven power balances are vague and form hard to observe configurations and in the Bijlmer, the Surinamese can be seen as the established and the 'white' Dutch as the outsiders. In all three neighborhoods strategies of exclusion take place, although it can be questioned whether this affects the persistence of poverty. Discrimination or stigmatization barely occurs because an urban dweller is poor, but because he or she belongs to a minority. Hiding poverty attributes is one argument why interactions and thus discrimination based on these traits hardly comes about. Along these lines, concluding, it is very hard to build up a non-middle class culture in which the urban poor are trapped.

Critical remarks

Especially on the work of Elias, we make some critical remarks. Although he cautiously writes that his model of an established-outsider figuration which results from an inquiry into a little community like Winston Parva serves as a kind of 'empirical paradigm' (Elias & Scotson, 1994; p. xvii). [1] First, it is remarkable that Elias departs from two groups (the established and the outsiders) that are definitely attached to their position. Someone belongs to either two groups, from the cradle to the grave. This determinism gives rise to the question what the effects of the exclusion strategies of the established are. Today, residential mobility is possible, even for low-income groups and many different ethnicities, socio economic statuses and life styles breathe among each other. Consequently, we question if the old established-outsider figuration with its strong dichotomous perspective can be appropriate for present-day analysis of social inequality. [2] Second, Elias is emphasizing strong bonds, densely knit networks and a sense of community among the established. Current research shows that neighborhoods at present do not confirm such communities (cf. Blokland, 2003b). [3] At last, Elias is probably too much emphasizing the function of the neighborhood in his social reproduction theory, writing…some children growing up in Winston Parva's rat alley (as it was called by the established group) probably suffered from a similarly tainted we-image and became deviants as a result [sic!] (Elias & Scotson, 1994; p. l). Thus, we conclude that Elias theory is somewhat deterministic. Belonging to a group decides much of what people do. More important, life style is probably less significant then e.g. ethnicity. This is also one of the main critics on the work of both Elias and Bourdieu (cf. Jenkins, 1992; p. 92). These authors hardly elaborate ethnic differences, and, if Bourdieu does, he emphasizes that someone's position in social space is of more significance (for an example see Bourdieu, 1999; p. 63).

As a result, what are the outcomes for the culture of poverty notion? It can be questioned if an enduring sub-culture is giving birth in the contemporary neighborhoods, because first [1] figurations within a neighborhood shift and thus for the inhabitants it is difficult to develop endurable social ties within the neighborhood. Second, [2] exclusion strategies between residents do take place and are therefore markers for culture demolishing instead of building.

However, without a doubt, we cannot neglect that the informal economy and social support to get by or ahead are substantial in the life world of the poor (cf. Mingione 1994; Roberts 1994; Edin & Lein 1997; Kesteloot & Meert 1999; Kloosterman et al. 1999; Engbersen & Staring 2001; Williams & Windebank 2002). These life strategies can be an obstacle to work, because it can offer more security then low wage unsteady work. To practice these strategies, the poor need other people, possibly living in their surrounding. This gives rise to the next question. If the life strategies of the poor are substantial, how do we operationalize the neighborhood? The answer is that we have to focus on the social networks of the poor and whether [1] these contribute to life strategies and [2] if these networks coincide with the neighborhood. Elaborating on the work of e.g. Wellman (1979), this question is central in our further research. So far, we can conclude that the neighborhood is partly a breading ground for social tensions and therefore scarcely contribute to the social capital of the urban poor.

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