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‘Activating’ those that ‘lag behind’: space-time politics in Dutch parenting training for migrants

MARGUERITE VAN DEN BERG

ABSTRACT Space and time (or rather *space-time*) are crucial concepts in the legitimation of policy interventions into citizens’ private lives. Across Europe, social policy measures to promote ‘activation’ among migrant communities—employment guidance, parenting training, youth work and so on—have proliferated, aiming to ‘move’ the Other into the *here-and-now* of European modernity. Van den Berg brings together theories of space-time, alterity and ‘cultural lag logics’ in an analysis of a contemporary case of such a policy: parenting training in the Netherlands. Based on ethnographic research, her study shows how certain societal problems are translated into problems of difference, and how that difference is in turn conceptualized as distance in space and time to be overcome through professional intervention.

KEYWORDS activation, cultural lag, migrant integration, The Netherlands, parenting training, policy practice, Rotterdam, space-time politics

‘Activation’ as space-time intervention

In an elementary school in Rotterdam (the second largest city in the Netherlands), a group of five mothers is gathered for a course on parenting given by a professional teacher and organized by the local government. Four of the mothers are of Turkish descent and do not understand the Dutch language very well. During the two hours of this afternoon meeting, we spend most of the time waiting for translations from Dutch to Turkish and the other way around. Anne, the teacher, says she does not mind this but soon she yawns and, ten minutes before the class is meant to be finished, she proposes to end it. Afterwards, she tells me how she really doesn’t like teaching this class. She confesses that she finds it very difficult to ‘move’ the women.

This is an excerpt from field notes taken during my ethnographic research on parenting training policies in the Netherlands. One of the explicit goals of the policy practices that I studied was ‘to activate’ (*activeren*) certain groups of citizens, typically depicted as ‘lagging behind’ (*in achterstand*, literally ‘standing behind’).¹ In this excerpt, the one who is implementing

1 Unless otherwise stated, all translations are by the author.

policy—Anne—indeed talks of ‘moving’ the women. I encountered this discourse time and again: social workers aiming ‘to activate’ and ‘to move’. For categories of citizens considered ‘inactive’, politicians and policymakers have launched ‘activation campaigns’, ranging from subsidized swimming lessons to labour market orientations.² ‘Activity’, it seems, has quite particular meanings in this context. Raising five children without professional guidance, for example, is *not* ‘active’, while volunteering in the neighbourhood is.

This article analyses the rationale behind ‘activation’ strategies for mothers as a case study of the politics of space-time: a way in which Othering is based on conceptions of space and time.³ The dimensions of space and time are omnipresent in contemporary policy discourse on the Other, but they are less often systematically analysed. This article brings together both theories of space and time and of their inseparability, and theories of ‘cultural lag’ and time-logics in Othering, to offer an in-depth analysis of ‘activation’ strategies in parenting policy. It shows how parenting policy operates on a logic of cultural difference between ‘parenting cultures’ that is then translated into a space-time difference: mothers in need of parenting training are seen as being in the *there-and-then*, needing to be brought to the *here-and-now* in order for their children to become part of modern Europe.⁴

This article also sets out to answer several questions about ‘activation’ and space-time using ethnographic material collected during fourteen months of participation in policy practice (accessible, non-mandatory parenting training, see below for details), and analyses of policy texts and documents outlining these policy programmes. The research questions are: What constructions of space-time are used to legitimate parenting training policies? What role do conceptions of ‘activity’ play in the policies studied here? How does this translate into actual parenting training programmes?

Understanding space-time politics

Much has been written about the importance of the dimensions of space and time for the social sciences.⁵ And many have stressed that time and space should not be considered separate spheres, but viewed integrally.⁶ Doreen Massey has been especially influential in her essays with regard to what she

2 Marguerite van den Berg, ‘Mothering in the Post-Industrial City: Family and Gender in Urban Re-generation’, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Amsterdam, 2013.

3 Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press 2014).

4 Ibid.

5 For an overview, see Jon May and Nigel Thrift (eds), *TimeSpace: Geographies of Temporality* (London and New York: Routledge 2001).

6 Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Cambridge: Polity Press 1994); David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers 1990); May and Thrift (eds), *TimeSpace*.

calls 'space-time'.⁷ From her perspective, space and time are connected (hence the concept 'space-time'), inherently dynamic and 'imbued with power and meaning and symbolism'.⁸ This assertion was a response to several theorists who argued the lack of a politics of 'space' as opposed to the more obvious political dimension of time. In Massey's view, however, space is not an independent dimension but rather 'social relations "stretched out"'.⁹ Consequently, space-time is inherently political. This relates to Johannes Fabian's view of 'geopolitics' and 'chronopolitics'.¹⁰ Fabian analyses how the discipline of anthropology constructs its object (the Other) in terms of time. In his view, anthropology is a 'science of other men in another Time'.¹¹ Cultural difference is then expressed in terms of *spatial and temporal distance*. Besides the spatial distance of the Other (in the non-West), there is a distance in time. The Other, then, is not viewed as contemporaneous, but living outside of progress, and somehow left behind in the *there-and-then*.

Such conceptions of space-time are, in Fabian's words, 'a scandal'.¹² They position the West as the space of progress, modernity and development, and the non-West as traditional, stagnant and under-developed. These legitimizing colonial constructs are 'ideologically construed instruments of power'.¹³ Similar logics conceptualizing difference as distance in both a temporal and a spatial sense are at work in Europe now. The 'politics of time' that Fabian identifies has been noted by several contemporary scholars in the context of European discourses on the cultural assimilation of migrants.¹⁴ These discourses and their impact on particular policies in the Netherlands are the objects under scrutiny here. Indeed, European time is often presented as modern and secular, and migrants' time as traditional, religious and backwards. Policies are then designed to bring certain subjects (traditional, migrant, Muslim) into 'our' (modern, European) space-time. In such representations, migrants' space-time is presented as static, while European space-time appears as dynamic, and Europeans as the truly 'compressed'.¹⁵ As Judith Butler has noted, 'hegemonic conceptions of progress define themselves

7 Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, *passim*.

8 *Ibid.*, 3.

9 *Ibid.*, 2.

10 Fabian, *Time and the Other*, 144.

11 *Ibid.*, 143.

12 *Ibid.*, 143.

13 *Ibid.*, 144.

14 Judith Butler, 'Sexual politics, torture, and secular time', *British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 59, no. 1, 2008, 1–23; Willem Schinkel, *Denken in een tijd van sociale hypochondrie: Aanzet tot een theorie voorbij de maatschappij* (Kampen: Klement 2007); Willem Schinkel, 'The imagination of "society" in measurements of immigrant integration', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 36, no. 7, 2013, 1142–61.

15 For David Harvey, a time-space *compression* is a new situation of condensation of spatial and temporal distances, as a result of technological innovations or a new phase in the development of capitalism. The year 1973 marked a new time-space compression when the West entered post-Fordism (Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*).

over and against a pre-modern temporality that they produce for the purposes of their own self-legitimation'.¹⁶ Distinctions between 'who has arrived in modernity and who has not' legitimate quite far-reaching policy interventions,¹⁷ ranging from ever more stringent migration laws to courses teaching 'modern', 'active citizenship'.¹⁸

Social science is often deeply involved in such space-time politics. Studies of migrant integration, for example, often presupposes the space-time logics outlined above. Society is then (often implicitly) presented by scholars as a cohesive 'whole' into which others have to 'integrate'.¹⁹ This entails a latent space-time logic, as this 'whole' is where 'progress' takes place. C. Wright Mills's critical evaluation of the 'social pathologists' of his time is an especially acute reflection on the implication of social science in space-time politics.²⁰ Such pathologists (for example, scholars of the Chicago School), he argued, interpret *deviance* as somehow *outside of progress*, as 'cultural lag'. It is instructive for the argument in this article to quote C. Wright Mills here at some length:

'Cultural lag' is considered by many pathologists to be the concept with which many scattered problems may be detected and systematized. . . . We must analyze the use made by pathologists of 'lag' rather than abstract formulations of it. Even though all the situations called 'lags' *exist* in the present, their functional realities are referred back, away from the present. Evaluations are thus translated into a time sequence; cultural lag is an assertion of unequal 'progress'. It tells us what changes are 'called for', what changes 'ought' to have come about and didn't.²¹

'Cultural lag' reasoning thus points in particular directions for solving social problems that are deemed 'pathologies', and posits that certain populations should be brought into the realm of 'progress'. In contemporary Europe, it is especially in the context of migrant integration that modern European space-time is envisioned as progressive, and immigrants' space-time is positioned as traditional and backward. Again (as in the analyses of Mills, Fabian and Schinkel), social scientists are important agents in the construction

16 Butler, 'Sexual politics, torture, and secular time', 1.

17 Ibid.

18 Van den Berg, 'Mothering the Post-Industrial City'; Willem Schinkel, 'The virtualization of citizenship', *Critical Sociology*, vol. 36, no. 2, 2010, 265–83; Willem Schinkel and Friso van Houdt, 'The double helix of cultural assimilationism and neo-liberalism: citizenship in contemporary governmentality', *British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 61, no. 4, 2010, 696–715.

19 Schinkel, *Denken in een tijd van sociale hypochondrie*; Schinkel, 'The imagination of "society" in measurements of immigrant integration'.

20 C. Wright Mills, 'The professional ideology of social pathologists', in C. Wright Mills, *Power, Politics and People: The Collected Essays of C. Wright Mills* [1943], ed. Irving Louis Horowitz (New York: Oxford University Press 1969), 525–52.

21 Ibid., 544–5, emphasis in original.

of this logic. It is not the main aim of this article to analyse in depth the role of these scientists,²² but it is important to give one very explicit example of the space-time logic in which 'European modernization' is placed against migrants' 'tradition'. Gabriël van den Brink is one of the Dutch sociologists to voice this logic most clearly. He explicitly looked for hypotheses on the 'pace' (*tempo*) by which ethnic groups find a connection to 'modern society'.²³ Not connecting to Dutch 'modern society', according to Van den Brink, can lead (in Mill's terms) to the 'scattered problems' of 'criminality', 'problems in educational careers' or 'lack of employment'.²⁴ He aims to answer the questions 'how did the process of modernization in Western Europe take place?' and 'to what extent are there differences between non-western cultures and Dutch society?'²⁵ And he does so, eventually, by presenting something of a taxonomy of cultures (in this case Caribbean, Chinese and Islamic), their distance to Dutch modernity, and their 'pace of integration', concluding that 'Islamic culture' is most distanced and most 'slow to adapt'.²⁶ In the concluding paragraphs, Van den Brink points to possible ways to overcome the 'cultural distance'. Education is in his view a most crucial 'variable when it comes to finding a connection to modern culture', an indication of the 'progress' of the 'process of modernization'.²⁷ Van den Brink's analysis may seem extreme, but Willem Schinkel has shown how widespread are notions of a 'whole' Dutch society and the need for immigrant 'integration'.²⁸ This short recounting of Van den Brink's argument is important because it precisely outlines a 'cultural lag' logic,²⁹ as well as a 'politics of time',³⁰ positioning migrants left in the *there-and-then* as outside the progress, education and the modernity of the *here-and-now* of Europe. Following Mills's statement, it is important to analyse the uses of such judgements.

'Activation' of the static Other

Immigrants are not only 'left behind' in the premodern, traditional *there-and-then*. Ideas about 'lagging behind' and 'cultural lag' are accompanied by the notion that these same groups are 'inactive', in stasis and not catching up. Spatial and temporal metaphors are thus linked up in policy texts that conflate

22 For such an analysis, see Schinkel, 'The imagination of "society" in measurements of immigrant integration'.

23 Gabriël van den Brink, *Culturele contrasten: Het verhaal van de migranten in Rotterdam* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker 2004), 303.

24 *Ibid.*, 303.

25 *Ibid.*, 304–5.

26 *Ibid.*, 326.

27 *Ibid.*, 328.

28 Schinkel, *Denken in een tijd van sociale hypochondrie*; Schinkel, 'The imagination of "society" in measurements of immigrant integration'.

29 Mills, 'The professional ideology of social pathologists'.

30 Fabian, *Time and the Other*.

conceptions of movement and temporality. Consequently, ‘activation’, the bringing into movement of those ‘lagging behind’, is an important policy strategy in contemporary European social policy in general. ‘Activation’ often refers to labour market interventions aimed at combatting unemployment levels (for example, in EU policies), but the term travels and is now used to describe a range of other phenomena. In the Netherlands, ‘activation’ is frequently used to describe what social workers do in the broadest of terms. Strategies of social work agencies, policy advisors, politicians, social workers and pedagogues focus on the ‘activation’ of ‘inactive’ groups. In this talk of ‘activity’, certain groups of citizens—the unemployed, migrants, inhabitants of poor neighbourhoods and mothers—show themselves to be static and passive.³¹ ‘Activation’ in this broad sense is thus geared towards moving citizens into ‘modern’ European space-time, but is not limited to ‘moving’ migrants or their descendants alone. This ‘moving’ of those ‘lagging behind’ is to come from outside these ‘inactive’ subjects, setting them in motion. But it is also meant to accelerate the pace of citizens, to speed them up or influence their consumption of time and stimulate certain legitimate forms of ‘activity’, by, for example, mandating participation in volunteering work.³² ‘Activation’ is thus a form of space-time politics.

Context: the Netherlands, Rotterdam and parenting training

In the Netherlands, as in many other European contexts, concerns over immigration and national identity have resulted in many government interventions to influence migrants’ identifications and their integration.³³ In many instances, citizenship has come to be ever more interpreted in moral and cultural terms.³⁴ In this context, parenting (and mothering in particular) has become an important site of policy intervention and nation-building.³⁵ Time and again, a ‘lack’ of parenting has been identified as a cause of social problems, and measures have been proposed for ‘parenting training courses’,

31 Cf. Schinkel and Van Houdt, ‘The double helix of cultural assimilationism and neo-liberalism’.

32 Thomas Kampen, *Verplicht vrijwilligerswerk: De ervaringen van bijstandsccliënten met een tegenprestatie voor hun uitkering* (Amsterdam: Van Gennep 2014).

33 Rogier van Reekum, ‘Out of Character: Debating Dutchness, Narrating Citizenship’, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Amsterdam, 2014; Schinkel, *Denken in een tijd van sociale hypochondrie*.

34 Schinkel, ‘The virtualization of citizenship’; Van Reekum, ‘Out of Character’; Jan Willem Duyvendak, *The Politics of Home: Belonging and Nostalgia in Western Europe and the United States* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2011).

35 Rogier van Reekum and Marguerite van den Berg, ‘Performing dialogical Dutchness: negotiating a national imaginary in parenting guidance’, *Nations and Nationalism*, vol. 21, no. 4, 2015, 741–60.

'early intervention programmes' and mandatory 'family tutors'.³⁶ Of course the Dutch debate on national identity and migrant integration was not the first to produce calls for parenting interventions and, more particularly, to focus on the centrality of the mothers' role. Historically, mothers (as producers of the next generations of citizens) have been made responsible for the reproduction of the nation in social, biological and demographic terms.³⁷

In the Netherlands, parenting training is part of a continuous history of social engineering.³⁸ Such policies are, however, presently popular forms of government intervention throughout Europe.³⁹ In the Dutch context, they are organized by social work and other agencies within the municipality in cooperation with schools and community centres. The practices I observed were initiated and financed by local government. In Rotterdam, concerns about (parts of) the city's safety, economy and liveability, as well as its population's poverty, educational advancements and ethnic diversity, coalesced in parenting training practices. Parenting training is one strategy for urban regeneration in Rotterdam.⁴⁰ In the international marketplace of urban areas, in which cities behave like 'entrepreneurs',⁴¹ investing in youth through mothers and mothering practices is an important urban enhancement strategy.⁴² The next generation of urbanites is one entry point for entrepreneurial urban strategies aimed at regenerating the city.⁴³

Case and methods: an ethnography of parenting training

I participated in parenting training programmes in Rotterdam for fourteen months in 2009 and 2010. Most of these were courses for parents that consisted of one or more meetings spanning a period from three weeks to six months. I also participated in long-term one-on-one training arrangements

36 Van den Berg, 'Mothering the Post-Industrial City'.

37 Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation* (London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi: Sage 1997); Van Reekum and Van den Berg, 'Performing dialogical Dutchness'.

38 I have analysed this in more detail in Van den Berg, 'Mothering the Post-Industrial City', and Marguerite van den Berg and Jan Willem Duyvendak, 'Paternalizing mothers: feminist repertoires in contemporary Dutch civilizing offensives', *Critical Social Policy*, vol. 32, no. 4, 2012, 556–76.

39 Georgiana Ivan, Barbara Da Roit and Trudie Knijn, 'Children first? Changing attitudes toward the primacy of children in five European countries', *Family Issues*, vol. 36, no. 14, 2015, 1982–2001.

40 Van den Berg, 'Mothering the Post-Industrial City'.

41 David Harvey, 'From managerialism to entrepreneurialism: the transformation in urban governance in late capitalism', *Geografiska Annaler B*, vol. 71, no. 1, 1989, 3–17.

42 See Sarah L. Holloway and Helena Pimlott-Wilson "'Any advice is welcome isn't it?'" Neoliberal parenting education, local mothering cultures, and social class', *Environment and Planning A*, vol. 46, no. 1, 2014, 94–111.

43 I have developed this point in more details in Van den Berg, 'Mothering the Post-Industrial City'.

in which social workers or students in social work helped parents manage their everyday lives and childrearing practices, sometimes in the families' homes. The participants were almost exclusively mothers and the programme was voluntary. I went along with social workers, pedagogues and interns on house visits, participated in a series of courses and dropped in on organized debates for mothers and themed meetings. Typically, parent courses are provided in what is called the 'parent room' of elementary schools. Many elementary schools in Rotterdam have a special room for parents as part of their efforts to increase parent involvement in the proceedings of the school.

For the purposes of my study, ethnography was the most suitable methodological approach. Following the views of Paul Willis and Mats Trondman, I had come to understand ethnography quite broadly as a collection of research methods involving 'the disciplined and deliberate witness-cum-recording of human events'.⁴⁴ The object of my observation was to be *transactions* in parenting training sessions, and I consistently looked at what happened *between* mothers and teachers.⁴⁵ In other words, unlike many ethnographers, I was not primarily interested in the lived experiences of those participating in the practice, nor was I looking for their perspectives on the transactions or on their everyday lives. Rather, I wanted to study a range of moments, or situations, in which professionals implementing social policy and individual mothers consuming the policies would meet and encounter each other. Accordingly, it was not those individuals participating in the practices themselves that were of primary concern to me but the *transactions* that occurred during the sessions. In addition to these observations, I interviewed ten teachers and seven managers of the organizations providing parenting training, and twelve mothers that participated in the programmes. These interviews were largely conducted to expand my knowledge of the practice and to reflect on them with agents in the field, but the extensive ethnographic research forms the core of the data on which this paper is based.

The practices that I studied are policy practices. The language that accompanied them in policy documents and plans are included in my analysis here in order to contextualize the ethnographic findings. I have included only policy documents that I found to be salient in the fieldwork. In addition, I have included analyses of teaching materials used by those providing parenting training. These typically consist of a binder of readings and assignments and sometimes also props for the teacher to use with the mothers in a class. I analysed the content of this material and focused on the definitions of social problems and categorizations of the target groups.

44 Paul Willis and Mats Trondman, 'Manifesto for ethnography', *Ethnography*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2000, 5–16 (5).

45 Cf. Mustafa Emirbayer, 'Manifesto for a relational sociology', *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 103, no. 2, 1997, 281–317; John Dewey and Arthur Bentley, *Knowing and the Known* (Boston: Beacon Press 1949).

'Lagging behind'

The phrase 'lagging behind' (literally 'standing behind', from the Dutch '*achterstand*') is a term commonly used in policy and public discourse to describe certain populations that are deemed problematic for various reasons. One of the parenting guidance programmes I participated in aimed to develop the social and cultural skills of those groups that 'lag behind'. The philosophy underpinning interventions of this kind and working with these groups is provided in the handbook *Meegroeien met Achterstandsgroepen* (Growing with Groups that Lag Behind): 'Groups that lag behind (*achterstandsgroepen*) are drowning in Rotterdam. The space between them and the middle class is growing and growing. . . . Often there is no/little connection to the process of modernization.'⁴⁶ Indeed, the programme was explicitly designed to combat 'lagging behind' and to 'push' (*schuiven*) poor urban populations into modern European space-time.⁴⁷ Interestingly, conceptions of space and time are conflated here: inhabitants of certain urban areas need *movement* and *time updates* in order to connect to those who live in other areas and in modernity. Space and time here are not separate categories.⁴⁸ The local Rotterdam administration at the time shared this analysis and spoke, too, of a gap between society and those that 'stay back', and of the importance of targeting parents in order to eliminate these gaps. The city's administrative plans for 2006–10, for instance, state:

Too many children are left behind from too early an age. We have to change this. Rotterdam needs all its talents. The city will work on this together with all parents [*opvoeders*, literally 'those raising children']. Together, we will motivate the new generation to connect to society and to stay connected.⁴⁹

The practices I studied often made reference to 'modernity' (and, on the other side, 'tradition'), as did the policy texts accompanying them. In emic terms, this was often seen as the theoretical opposition between two parenting models, 'authoritative' and 'authoritarian', used in policy texts, course materials and by teachers in practice. The terms come from the contemporary pedagogical sciences. In the Netherlands, the interpretation of these terms in the work of Dutch social scientist Micha de Winter has been influential with policymakers and practitioners in the pedagogical field. Authoritative parenting, according to De Winter, is based more on authority than on power:

46 Bureau Frontlijn, *Meegroeien met Achterstandsgroepen: Methodiebeschrijving* (Rotterdam: Gemeente Rotterdam 2009), 7.

47 *Ibid.*, 5.

48 Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*.

49 Rotterdam Administration, *De Stad van Aanpakken: Voor een Rotterdams resultaat* (Rotterdam: Gemeente Rotterdam 2006), 3.

Parents . . . act according to an open, democratic leadership style. This way, the family is the first learning situation for a moral democracy. Authoritative child-rearing thus represents the common good and this justifies, I think, that parents should at least be properly educated about this through parenting training. . . ⁵⁰

This model of ‘authoritative parenting’ was quite actively promoted in the courses that I studied, and it featured prominently in the course methodology and texts that the teachers used. In [Table 1](#), I summarize and synthesize the oppositional discursive system of ‘authoritarian’ versus ‘authoritative’ parenting. The table is based on my findings in the professional literature concerning the models or ‘ideal types’ of parenting methods. ⁵¹

Table 1: Parenting models: authoritative versus authoritarian

Authoritarian		Authoritative
	<i>Values in upbringing</i>	
Tradition		Modernity
Community		Individuality
	<i>Goal in upbringing</i>	
Obedient child		Development of autonomous self
	<i>Focus</i>	
Goal		Form
	<i>Legitimacy</i>	
Power		Authority
Force		Persuasion
Tradition		Science
	<i>Form</i>	
Formal		Informal
Rigidity		Flexible rules
Hierarchy		Equality
Command		Negotiation
Punishment		Communication
Parents control children		Parents control themselves

50 Micha de Winter, ‘Democratieopvoeding versus de code van de straat’, professorial inaugural lecture, Utrecht University, 20 June 2005, 11, available on the *Utrecht University* website at <http://dspace.library.uu.nl/handle/1874/33107> (viewed 24 November 2015).

51 *Ibid.*; Trees Pels and Mariëtte de Haan, *Continuity and Change in Moroccan Socialisation: A Review of the Literature on Socialisation in Morocco and among Moroccan Families in the Netherlands* (Utrecht: Verwey Jonker 2004); Manuela Du Bois-Reymond, Yolanda te Poel and Janita Ravesloot, *Jongeren en hun keuzes* (Bussum: Coutinho 1998). For an overview of literature on authoritative parenting, see Rein Westerduin, ‘Autoritatieve opvoeding: van tweeën één’, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Amsterdam, 2006; and Van den Berg, ‘Mothering the Post-Industrial City’.

The 'authoritarian' model is considered a 'traditional' way of raising children, geared towards hierarchical relationships in the home, in the community and in society at large. The obedience of children to those in positions of power (parents, grandparents, community leaders) is the perceived goal of such a parenting model and the system is based on the legitimacy of those in power. Parenting strategies consist of a certain rigid obedience to rules, and punishments if the rules are broken.⁵² Parents order children to do things and are thus focused to control the behaviour of children. On the other side of the opposition, 'authoritative' parenting is considered a 'modern' model of childrearing, geared towards equality and democracy.⁵³ The individuality of the child is a central value here and, to this end, parents apply themselves to the development of a child's healthy self. Rules are not as strict and rigid as they are in an 'authoritarian' upbringing; parents use persuasion and communication as techniques and build their ideas about parenting on scientific insights. The relationships in families are rather informal and open, and parents use rules that are based on the children's behaviour and development. Parents control themselves rather than the children, and they make sure that their emotional response is effective.⁵⁴

Importantly, in both the discourse of professionals and in the professional literature, the two parental strategies are said to be adopted by specific categories of people. Depending on the particular goal of the texts, the authoritarian strategies are attributed to either the 'allochthonous' Dutch (a term used in the Netherlands to refer to those not born on Dutch soil),⁵⁵ or working-class parents.⁵⁶ These attributions are placed in opposition to the 'autochthonous Dutch' and middle-class parents. Accordingly, the meanings of 'modern', 'Dutch' and 'middle class' become intertwined. The Other therefore is sometimes defined by a different class position, and sometimes by a different geographical or ethnic background: the meanings of these categories are constantly conflated and used interchangeably.⁵⁷ Using 'authoritative' parental strategies, then, becomes a move towards modernity, middle-classness and Dutch (western) society: movement in *both time and space*, movement into the *here-and-now*.

Those that 'lag behind', in the authoritarian *there-and-then*, are thus 'working class', 'poor' or allochthonous and, in the Rotterdam-specific logics of the above-mentioned policy programmes, they are located in particular urban areas. In [Figure 1](#), to further elaborate on this issue of 'lagging behind', I locate constructions of 'authoritarian' and 'authoritative' parenting on a timeline. My point here is not to accept or reject this logic or narrative. It is rather

52 Cf. De Winter, 'Democratieopvoeding versus de code van de straat'; and Pels and De Haan, *Continuity and Change in Moroccan Socialisation*.

53 De Winter, 'Democratieopvoeding versus de code van de straat'.

54 Ibid.; Westerduin, 'Autoritatieve opvoeding'.

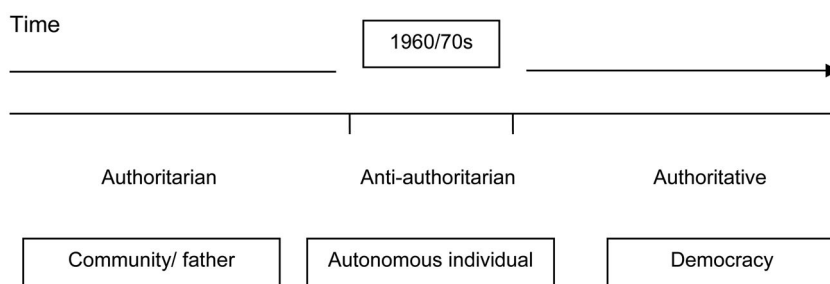
55 See, for example, Pels and De Haan, *Continuity and Change in Moroccan Socialisation*.

56 Westerduin, 'Autoritatieve opvoeding'.

57 Cf. Van Reekum and Van den Berg, 'Performing dialogical Dutchness'.

that history is told in this particular way, and the narrative helps to produce the opposition 'authoritarian' versus 'authoritative'. The logic in the course materials and the pedagogical literature that I analysed, which emphasizes the opposition between 'authoritarian' and 'authoritative' parenting, is that, before the 1960s and 1970s, authoritarian parenting was the norm in the Netherlands and elsewhere. 'Authoritarian' parenting belongs to tradition and to strong-knit communities. In response to 'authoritarian' parenting, the narrative goes, the 1960s and 1970s were characterized by a vehement anti-authoritarianism in which experimental forms of parenting were developed, utilizing notions of radical equality and far-reaching freedoms for children.⁵⁸ The limits of this radicalization were soon reached and, out of the critique on the extreme permissiveness of the 1970s, there emerged a new and modern model: 'authoritative parenting'.⁵⁹ In this representation of history, the period before the 1960s is characterized by a focus on community and the authority of the father. In the short period of experiments and 'anti-authoritarianism', the autonomy of the child was put front and centre and, in the period after the 1970s, the two became more balanced and focused on a democratic paradigm.

Figure 1 The development of parental strategies in history



'Inactivity'

'Lagging behind' populations are targeted by a variety of 'activation' policies. The very term 'lagging behind' indicates both stasis and insufficient progress. It suggests a 'traditional' set of values and practices but also inactivity: these populations are not moving at a modern *pace*. In the plans of Rotterdam's local administration for the years 2006–10, for example, accessible parental support (like the practices I have observed) is defined as a form of 'activating care', geared at enhancing citizens' 'participation in society'.⁶⁰ This

58 Cf. Abram de Swaan, *De mens is de mens een zorg: opstellen 1971–1981* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2009); Jan Willem Duyvendak, *De planning van ontplooiing: Wetenschap, politiek en de maakbare samenleving* (The Hague: Sdu 1999); and De Winter, 'Democratieopvoeding versus de code van de straat'.

59 De Winter, 'Democratieopvoeding versus de code van de straat'.

60 Rotterdam Administration, *De Stad van Aanpakken*, 11.

participation ('participation' and 'activity' are often used interchangeably) is to 'move' the problematic populations out of stasis: 'Non-participation leads to lagging behind. *That goes for the city as a whole, and for every human being as well. Our help is . . . always geared towards activation.*'⁶¹

Interestingly, the rhetoric of space-time that was analysed above—*vis-à-vis* populations seen to be 'lagging behind' in 'tradition'—is thus accompanied by a logic that sees 'inactive' subjects in need of government intervention geared towards their 'activation'. In other words, those in the *there-and-then* are to be *moved* into the *here-and-now* by external means. To further investigate this logic of 'inactivity' and 'activation', it is instructive to look at the following piece of fieldwork. In 2007 I attended the public launch of a policy advisory report to the Rotterdam administration. The advisory report was called *Sociale activering allochtone vrouwen* (Social Activation of Allochthonous Women) and was written by the Sociaal Platform Rotterdam, a social policy advisory board. It was based on an earlier pilot project called *Allochtone vrouwen doen mee!* (Allochthonous Women Participate!).⁶² I described the event in my field notes:

The researchers present their findings to approximately 100 people in the small community theatre in Pendrecht. Both the Rotterdam Alderman Orhan Kaya and the borough administrator (Deelgemeentebestuurder) Lionel Martijn are present to respond to the advisory report. Martijn responds by pointing to the problem that the research demonstrated, namely that 75 per cent of allochthonous women were not interested in taking up volunteering work. He concludes from these findings that most women are not interested in 'becoming active'.

Martijn advocated and was in favour of encouraging very particular kinds of activity, and even went so far as to assert that other activities were forms of passivity. In the advisory report, a more precise picture of 'activation' surfaced:

*[We] support a robust activation programme. . . There are many projects already taking place in Rotterdam, ranging from cycling and swimming lessons, language courses, parenting courses to activation programmes directed at paid employment. . . It is crucial to form a policy programme that matches the interests and needs of women themselves. . . For women who are more distant from the labour market, accessible activities are needed.*⁶³

61 Ibid., 6 (emphasis added).

62 Marjan de Gruijter, Nanne Boonstra, Trees Pels and Marjolijn Distelbrink, *Allochtone vrouwen doen mee! Eerste generatie allochtone vrouwen in Rotterdam en hun perspectief op activering* (Utrecht: Verwey Jonker 2007).

63 Sociaal Platform Rotterdam (SPR), *Sociale activering allochtone vrouwen* (Rotterdam: Sociaal Platform Rotterdam 2007), 1–2 (introductory letter to the Rotterdam administration from Pieter Winsemius, chair of SPR).

What is important for my analysis here is that ‘activation’ in this context does *not* necessarily mean paid employment. On the contrary, as paid employment is thought to be unattainable for many women, ‘activation’ is located in those spaces where mothers are already involved, such as parenting and volunteering. ‘Activation’ is often directed at mothers ‘being active’ in their role as mother. The idea is that, through policy interventions, the Rotterdam administration can prevent children from becoming ‘inactive’ citizens of the future. By activating mothers, children will be raised with the expectation of ‘activity’ and, consequently, will not grow up to become the unemployed, ‘inactive’ citizens that the city worries about. What that precisely entails became clearer in my study of the policy practices.

Translation into practice

The above analysis of space-time logics was frequently invoked in the practices in which I participated. First, the conceptual pair of ‘authoritative’ and ‘authoritarian’ parenting guided many teachers since these concepts structured most of their teaching material. This material would, for instance, include videos meant to provoke debate and discussion among parents about parenting styles by first observing demonstrations of them on screen. Here is an excerpt from my field notes:

We watch a DVD with three short examples of parent-child interactions in which the child asks the parent for money. In the first example, the (native Dutch) mother is permissive and gives in; the child takes the money, and the mother says, ‘What can I do?’ In the second clip, the (Moroccan) mother says ‘no’ immediately without listening to the child. In the third clip, the (Turkish) parents don’t immediately give in, but listen to the child and then say ‘maybe’.

Simone (the teacher) asks us what we think of the different clips, of the possibilities of dealing with such a situation. The mothers agree that the first clip is a bad idea: far too permissive. They prefer the third clip, even though the mothers explain that, in real life, you react in different ways to different situations at different times. Concluding, Ellen, one of the mothers says: ‘you know that second example, that kind of parenting is why we’re dealing with criminal youth!’

For Simone, activating mothers means facilitating a reflection on parenting and daily life through an observation of video material. The clips are caricatures of parenting styles, priming the mothers to prefer the ‘authoritative’ style of the third clip. Moreover, the ‘authoritarian’ style of the second clip is rejected, and one of the mothers explicitly connects this clip to ‘criminal youth’. Important here is how professional guidance is used to bring about a preference for an ‘authoritative’ parenting style through reflection and debate, which are themselves techniques of ‘the authoritative style’. By actually practising reflexivity and debate, professionals hope that mothers will

make reflexive and deliberative techniques their own, and practise them in their everyday parenting at home.

A second notion that was frequently invoked in the practices I attended was that the 1960s and 1970s constituted a turning-point in Dutch history, that the Dutch had moved past 'authoritarianism' and 'tradition' in this period, and that the 'non-Dutch' were 'lagging behind' in a pre-1960s time. This was especially the case when it came to 'modern' ideas about sexuality and gender inequality. The following is an example from my field notes:

This is a morning when a group of parents, a teacher and I are together to discuss the sex education of children (part of a particular parenting training programme designed to discuss sex education with parents). The teacher Anne asks the participants how we were educated about sex when we were children. The only self-identified Dutch father (and possibly categorized as 'autochthonous' in policy) present and I (also always identified as 'autochthonous') talk of the way in which our parents discussed sex with us. Anne then suggests (to the participating parents with an immigrant background) that this has to do with the Dutch sexual revolution: 'You know we had a sexual revolution and, at that point, young people in the Netherlands said to older people that the old ways of doing things had to go.'

Because Anne refers to this 'we' in relation to a 'Dutch sexual revolution', she excludes the parents with an immigrant background and introduces a particular temporality: one in which 'the Dutch' includes those who have moved beyond the 'old ways' since the sexual revolution. This logic is congruent with the above representation of history distilled from the course materials, in which the post-1970s period is characterized by a post-traditional, modern and democratic way of being. In a different course and setting, Marlies invoked a similar logic when she urged (largely immigrant) mothers to stand their ground and defend their autonomy *vis-à-vis* their husbands in the raising of their children:

This has a lot to do with emancipation as well of course. You know, that you really stand in your own position, in your own power as a mother. . . . We dealt with this in the 1950s and 1960s as well, that we, you know, had to fight against inequality. . . . Maybe still. . . well, you know more in the higher echelons. . . you know on executive boards and such. You still see a lot of men there and not enough women.

Marlies here offers a slightly different timeline, but nonetheless presents a 'we' that has largely moved beyond gender inequality and addresses women who are not part of this 'we' and who have yet to make this move.

In this temporal logic, and based on the idea that the women she and other professionals are addressing are 'inactive', *professional intervention* is necessary to 'move' the women into an emancipated and democratic Europe modernity. This is an important point because the conceptual pair of 'active' and 'not active' has, it turned out in my research, everything to do with the acceptance

of professional guidance. Mothers are activated in their role as mothers, to raise the 'active' citizens of the future.⁶⁴ 'Activity' in the practices that I studied was about raising children 'authoritatively' in European modernity, and since many mothers are construed to be 'lagging behind' in the *there-and-then* of 'tradition' and 'authoritarianism', they are only considered 'active' when they accept professional parenting training. This is reflected, for example, in the following comment by a teacher in a parenting training session:

You ladies have a lot of power, you are so important! Really, really important. You provide an example for your sons. That is really the whole purpose of this course, isn't it? That you understand that you are really the example for your child from a very early age. . . . We have a lot of work to do, we will do it together (emphasis added).

This teacher emphasizes, first, that the mothers' parenting practices, as they are, are not sufficient and, then, that they need professional guidance to catch up. While she, like Marlies above, points to women's 'power', she also identifies a lack, or a gap, that she, as an expert, is able to fill.

Conclusions: difference as distance in space-time

The space-time discourse studied here in which certain groups of urban inhabitants surface as 'lagging behind' and 'culturally lagging' reflects social relations in which some appear as situated in the *there-and-then* and some in the *here-and-now*.⁶⁵ As in C. Wright Mills's analysis cited above, deviance from the norm is quite explicitly conceptualized as 'outside of progress'. Not behaving in a desired way is a sign of insufficient development and of not living in 'Western European' space-time. This legitimates policy interventions, because the Other in the *there-and-then* is to be brought into the *here-and-now* of progress, democracy and European modernity. This European modernity is placed quite explicitly—though not exclusively, as the Other is also often thought of as differently classed—alongside and against the migrants' traditionalism: a space-time of passivity and authoritarianism. Migrant mothers are thought to behave according to a different parenting culture that is at a *distance* in space-time from European and modern parenting cultures. Cultural lag logics often thus take the shape of a politics of space-time that point in particular directions for policy interventions.⁶⁶ To paraphrase Mills once more: these politics tell us who needs 'moving', what changes are called for and what changes ought to have come about but did not.

64 Van den Berg, 'Mothering the Post-Industrial City'.

65 Cf. Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, 2.

66 Mills, 'The professional ideology of social pathologists'.

In the case studied here, becoming 'active', it seems, is the responsibility of both those 'lagging behind' in the *there-and-then* of 'authoritarian parenting' and professionals capable of bridging this space-time distance. In fact, 'being active' is seen as making an effort to enter the *here-and-now* through the acceptance of professional parenting training. Where the term 'activation' was thus once reserved for entrance into paid employment, it can now also signify a willingness to be the object of social policies aiming to 'move'. What is considered 'active' and what is not is thus always in flux, and quite opaque to those citizens targeted by 'activation' policies. In the cases studied here, the objective is for the mothers to be moved (by professional guidance) away from their traditional and cultural habits and to internalize modern European reflexive and 'authoritative' habits. Mothers are thereby to become the competent trainers of a self-regulating, modern and 'active' new generation in the *here-and-now*.

Many authors have noted the shift in discourse about migrant 'integration', unemployment and parenting from a focus on structural factors (unemployment, inequality and crime rates) to issues of culture (gender relations, authoritarianism and parenting cultures).⁶⁷ The practices I studied here fit into this shift, even though they are caught in the 'activation' language that is often associated with employment policies. Cultural assimilation is quite explicitly and deliberately conflated with modernization. Parenting cultures are, in fact, *not* just difference; they are conceptualized as *distance in space and time* that needs to be bridged. This article attempts to demonstrate how much a perspective on space-time politics can contribute to our understanding of 'cultural lag' logics and cultural assimilation discourses.

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67 Butler, 'Sexual politics, torture and secular time'; Duyvendak, *The Politics of Home*; Schinkel, *Denken in een tijd van sociale hypochondrie*; Schinkel, 'The virtualization of citizenship'; Van den Berg, 'Mothering the Post-Industrial City'.