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Demolition, division, and displacement:
Examining the preservation of whiteness in Rotterdam municipal housing policy

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Demolition in Tweebosbuurt, Rotterdam
(Schot, 2021)

Abstract

Recent aggressive gentrification policies from the municipality of Rotterdam involving the demolition of social housing and resulting displacement of migrant communities have been criticized by several United Nations Special Rapporteurs as violating the human right to adequate housing. Through qualitative content analysis of municipal policy documents, and expert interviews, this study examines how whiteness is preserved in Rotterdam municipal housing policies between the years 2006 and 2022. By analysing using decoloniality, critical race theory, and the understanding of "whiteness as property," this study identifies alternative possibilities for the future of housing, and three key stages through which whiteness is preserved: in the conceptualisation of theories underpinning policies; the language codified in the document, and the implementation of the policy. This research offers a clear example of the current iteration of systemic racism today; how it operates through anaemic policies that villainize low-income migrants, and justifies the maintenance of the status quo of racial hierarchy in the "colour-blind" nation of the Netherlands.

Keywords: *gentrification, housing policy, racism, social mixing, whiteness*

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION **4**

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK **8**

DECOLONIAL THEORY 8

CRITICAL RACE THEORY 9

DUTCH WHITENESS AND WHITENESS AS PROPERTY 10

GENTRIFICATION 12

RESEARCH DESIGN **14**

SAMPLE AND DATA COLLECTION 15

ETHICS AND PRIVACY 17

ANALYSIS AND POSITIONALITY 18

POLICY BACKGROUND 19

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS **22**

CONCEPTUALISATION OF POLICY THEORIES 22

LANGUAGE OF THE DOCUMENT 28

POLICY IMPLEMENTATION 34

ALTERNATIVE FUTURES 37

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION **39**

REFERENCES **41**

APPENDICES **48**

Introduction

The Netherlands is celebrated globally for its tolerance and progressiveness, yet the inequalities suffered largely by low-income, non-white migrants in Rotterdam are palliated. This inequity is most palpable in the escalating housing crisis. It is explicitly stated in the Dutch constitution that the provision of "sufficient living accommodation" shall be the concern of the authorities (Rijksoverheid, 2008). Despite this, the municipality of Rotterdam (Gemeente Rotterdam) has a history of discriminatory housing policies, e.g., the passing of a 1971 resolution to limit the number of ethnic minorities in certain neighbourhoods to a maximum of 5%, which was later annulled as it was contrary to Dutch law (Heilbron, 2017). At present, the municipality, together with the social housing corporation Vestia, are demolishing 535 social housing units in the majority migrant neighbourhood of Tweebosbuurt in Rotterdam South. Of these, less than half are being rebuilt as social housing, but will be rented at market value, thereby expelling current residents. These policies have been criticized by several United Nations Special Rapporteurs in a letter to the Dutch government as violating the human right to adequate housing (Rajagopal et al., 2021). Rotterdam contends with complex issues of race and class, relating to its colonial past, historical policies surrounding "Gastarbeiders," and it being a port city (van Meeteren, 2015). Although 50.3% of Rotterdam's inhabitants are of non-Dutch origin, this ethnic diversity is not equally distributed on both sides of the Nieuwe Maas (Rajagopal et al., 2021). This research therefore examines the racism involved in the state-led segregation of certain neighbourhoods in Rotterdam, and the role of housing policy in creating this "crisis".

Rotterdam is the poorest city in the Netherlands with over 15% of its residents living below the poverty line (Rajagopal et al., 2021). In an effort to transform and financialize the housing stock, the Gemeente has attempted to create ethno-territorial homogeneity in the city (Mutsaers & Siebers, 2012), and push low-income people and those of non-Dutch origin to

the outskirts through aggressive gentrification policies. These policies are branded as "urban renewal," and a key element in "re-balancing" the super diverse population of the city. They are offered as a partial solution to the housing crisis by deregulating the market to increase rental investment and, therefore, overall housing supply (Hochstenbach, 2022). This is evident in the controversial "Rotterdam Act" which eroded tenants' rights and empowered the municipality to refuse housing on the basis of one's socioeconomic status and origin (van Gent et al., 2018; Gemeente Rotterdam, 2006), and later in the 2016 multi-year housing policy *Woonvisie 2030*. Even more outwardly benevolent government initiatives such as the National Programme for Rotterdam South (NPRZ) that seek to improve labour participation, education, and overall quality of life in the South, also have the contradictory aim of decreasing the availability of affordable homes in lieu of more expensive housing (Rajagopal et al., 2021, NPRZ, 2011). The narrative of this urgent housing "crisis" is presented opportunistically so as to enforce housing reforms that ultimately benefit those in power, veil the fact that this crisis has become the norm for decades, and most significantly, absolve the municipality of responsibility in bringing this "regime-made disaster" about (Hochstenbach, 2022; Azoulay, 2012). Consequently, this study examines the institutional racism at play in policy and how it operates to fashion an image of Rotterdam that aligns with whiteness and upholds the current status quo of racial segregation.

The state-led racism of these policies in turn supports individual discrimination at citizen level. Due to the concerted deficit in the availability of social housing and the lengthy waiting periods (averaging 39 months in 2019), those most vulnerable are forced to resort to the highly selective and xenophobic, (majority white-controlled) private rental market (Rajagopal et al., 2021; Fang & Liempt, 2021). Integration and housing allocation issues associated with Rotterdam's segregated, low-income neighbourhoods to date have been problematized from a certain perspective. This present research, by contrast, shifts the critical gaze and onus on to

white, native Dutch rather than on to the racialized 'Other' i.e. the "*allochthonen"* (Essed & Trienekens, 2007). By investigating the language used and ideas espoused by the municipality in policy and examining the views of actors in the Rotterdam housing space, I addressed the following research question: *How is whiteness perpetuated in Rotterdam municipal housing policy between the years 2006 and 2022?*

Much has been researched about gentrification and landlordism in the Netherlands to date (Doucet et al., 2011; Doucet & Koenders, 2018; Hochstenbach, 2022; Kleinhans et al., 2007), as well as issues of ethnic discrimination within the Dutch housing market and in segregation or social mixing policies (Bolt et al., 2010; Fang & Liempt, 2021; Bolt et al., 2008; Lees, 2008). Previous research on racism and whiteness has covered the willful ignorance and "innocence" involved in colour-blind, neoliberal racism today (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Wekker, 2016; Weiner, 2014), the transformation from biological to cultural racism in the Netherlands (Essed, 1991; Essed & Trienekens, 2007), and the relationship between whiteness and having rights and property legitimated and protected by law (Harris, 1993; Bhandar, 2018). In terms of academic relevance, this research builds upon already existing literature on issues with Rotterdam gentrification and housing policy, and the growing body of literature contextualising race and discrimination in the Netherlands in light of its colonial history. This work sits at the intersection of these two genres of research, departing from literature to date in that it gives a particular focus to the preservation, and privileging of whiteness in Dutch housing policy and situates the tangible effects it has on the marginalized communities in the unique setting of Rotterdam. The city is an example of "superdiversity," what Scholten et al. (2018) define as "when diversity itself has become so 'diverse' that one can no longer speak of clear majorities or minorities" (p. 2). Examining whiteness in this setting where the neoliberal marketable ideal of "diversity" has been reached further contextualizes issues of race and racism in the modern world. As evictions and the demolition of affordable housing

continue, the awareness of the severity and urgency of the ‘crisis’ in Rotterdam has gained increasing attention both locally with community groups such as ‘Recht op de Stad’ (Right to the City), and internationally. Moreover, this thesis seeks to understand and contextualize the policy decisions of the municipality during this particular choice point in their actions.

Theoretical framework

This research is oriented around the theoretical discourses of decolonial theory, critical race theory (CRT). It also specifically engages with the seminal article of Harris (1993) “Whiteness as property,” and the work of Wekker (2016) and Essed (2007) in examining and problematizing “whiteness” in the Netherlands. Lastly, I include a brief introduction to gentrification in urban theory in order to ground my analysis and track the evolution of these strategies in housing policy. This multi-faceted framework enables an interrogation of different dimensions of housing inequality in Rotterdam through segregation and gentrification, and problematizes what it means to be Dutch, and furthermore, to be affirmed of this identity and the inherent right to housing by the white, Dutch body politic.

Decolonial Theory

Decolonial theorist Aníbal Quijano popularised the concept of “*colonialidad y modernidad-racionalidad/ coloniality and modernity-rationality”* i.e., that whilst the idealistic, “modern” European identity continues to be created through a process of “differentiation from other cultures,” this identity is inextricable from Europe’s violent history of colonization (Bhambra, 2014; Quijano, 2007; Quijano, 2008). Decoloniality builds on the postcolonial discourse cultivated by writers such as Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, and Edward Said, who focused on the history of colonialism in India and Palestine respectively, and critiqued the subsequent ubiquitous cultural archive (Hoffmann, 2017). Decoloniality is distinct in that it stretches the timeline of coloniality beyond the 19th and 20th centuries, and gives new geographical focus to the South Americas (Bhambra, 2014). It is important to highlight the difference between “decolonization,” which came to the fore during the Cold War, and the decoloniality movement that followed which is discussed here. One of the founders of the decoloniality movement Walter Mignolo, posits that the “physical” decolonization of Africa

and Asia failed partly as a result of the absence of decoloniality in terms of questioning the structures of knowledge that were “implanted in the colonies by the former colonisers” (Hoffmann, 2017, p. 2). It is this epistemic reconstitution and the acknowledgement of the “colonial matrix of power” that drives the decolonial movement. The movement’s critique of eurocentrism and the coloniality of power brings into focus today’s racial social classification.

These main themes of decolonial theory position the social policies of the Gemeente within the wider context of settler colonialism i.e., where white Europeans have the advantage and power to move and settle anywhere, oftentimes through violent means, and still be considered valuable additions, or indeed replacements to a neighbourhood (Bier, 2021). In contrast, ethnic minorities’ movements are continually policed and under surveillance by the state. Decolonial theory compliments CRT as an approach in this research in that it emphasizes global connections and similarities, but takes a broader historical view of colonialism, enabling a delineation of how these histories are enacted in present day policies and actions in Rotterdam.

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

The CRT movement first gained momentum in the legal sector in the mid 1970s following the consensus that much of the progress made in racial equity after the Civil Rights Movement was being “rolled back” (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993). CRT is influenced largely by the movements of critical legal studies and radical feminism, but departs from similarly academic disciplines in that its aims are strongly rooted in activism. CRT questions the presumed neutrality of society’s legal structures and racial hierarchies with a view to radically transform (Delgado et al., 2017). The movement is shaped by several central tenets including (but not limited to): the perpetrator perspective, structural determinism, differential

racialization, and the understanding that racism is normal and not "aberrational" (Bell, 1980; Freeman, 1978). The "perpetrator perspective", a term coined by Devon Carbado, is a way of approaching racial discrimination in antidiscrimination legislation that ignores the experiences and conditions of the victim class, and focuses instead on the actions of a malicious racial perpetrator (Carbado as cited in Richardson, 2015). This approach illustrates how those in power can be indifferent to the condition of the victim and to existent larger structural racisms in the absence of a clear perpetrator at fault (Freeman, 1978). The theory of structural determinism i.e., how culture can influence legal thought and thereby work to maintain the status quo (Delgado et al., 2017), and the movement's critique of the equally homeostatic nature of neoliberalism are key to the framing of my research question. Utilizing CRT here allows for an examination of the various infrastructures that work in tandem with legislature in the pervasive replication of racial inequality across the allocation of housing and the preservation of the white, native-Dutch neighbourhood and group identity. This research analyses the epistemological basis of the language of power that becomes codified in policy by the Rotterdam municipality. The concept of "different racialization," whereby the hegemonic society shifts in its racialization of different minority groups at different times, is particularly applicable in the context of Netherlands, as I will detail in the next section (Delgado et al., 2017).

Dutch Whiteness and Whiteness as Property

The definition(s) of race throughout history have been nebulous, particularly between countries, and the Netherlands is no exception. M'Charek (2013) described race as not necessarily materializing "*in* a person's body, but also in the relations established *between* different bodies" (p. 427). It is this liminal "between" space that policy can manipulate in order to maintain the status quo. The Netherlands has historically taken great pride in the

notion that racism, as it appears in the USA, does not exist in the Netherlands; as such, research on Dutch racism and whiteness is a relatively recent phenomenon and has often been controversially received (Wekker, 2016). “Race” by extension is similarly elusive, with policymakers and Dutch natives alike preferring some variation of “ethnicity,” or migration background as a formal identity marker (Weiner, 2014; Essed & Trienekens, 2007). The history of colonialism has played a central role in the migration and diversity of the Dutch population, yet despite this diversity, the claim to membership in the national Dutch community is (among white native Dutch) only applicable to “White Europeans born in the Netherlands” (Weiner, 2014, p. 733). This colour-blindness erases the reality of institutional racism that migrant communities experience and ignores the racialization of those outside the white Dutch-native cohort who are able to enjoy the protection and privilege that comes with the status of “*autochtoon*.” Essed (1991) traces a line from the biologically determinist definition of racism of the last centuries to the more recent culturalization of racism: “a set of real and attributed ethnic differences representing the dominant culture as the norm and other cultures as 'different', 'problematic' and usually also as 'backward'” (p. 203). This definition, coupled with Gloria Wekker’s (2016) concept of “white innocence,” which she describes as “strongly connected to privilege, entitlement, and violence that are deeply disavowed,” are foundational in understanding the complexity and hegemony of whiteness in the Netherlands (p. 18).

This research also utilizes Harris’ (1993) pioneering work “Whiteness as Property” to trace the history of black enslavement to the financialization of the housing market and racialization of property. This focus offers a view that whiteness itself is a form of property and by extension, permits the right to own and control property. Harris notes that a key commonality between the concepts of whiteness and property throughout history has been the “right to exclude”. The use of Harris’ theory facilitates parallels to be drawn between the

dispossession of Native Americans and the displacement of low-income, migrant communities in the neighbourhoods of Rotterdam South and how the protection of whiteness is vital when enacting both scenarios. Harris' thesis gives gentrification's principles of social mixing and "urban renewal" a new historical grounding, drawing similarities between them and President Thomas Jefferson's Indian policy, which had the named goal of "'civilising the Indians," which involved their land being stolen by whites for "development" (Harris, 1993).

Gentrification

Gentrification and the various theories that underpin its implementation have been widely used in urban policy in Rotterdam to attract workers in the knowledge and service industries and create a thriving post-industrial city (Doucet et al., 2011). Its implementation can be seen as a modern iteration of Harris' "whiteness as property," in that as gentrification strategies increasingly influence the price point and population composition of certain neighbourhoods, they in turn determine who can live where, whose housing needs are met, and who is excluded.

The term "gentrification" was first coined by sociologist Ruth Glass to describe the changing composition of city districts to make room for upper-class landowners i.e., the "gentry" (van Hoek, 2022). The term has developed since then, with Hackworth's (2002) definition of "the production of urban space for progressively more affluent users" more commonly used today (p. 815). Two key elements of modern gentrification have been the "creative city" theory, and the paternalistic concept of "social mixing". The former was developed by Florida (2005), who posited that cities should be flexible, and focus on "technology, talent and, tolerance," in order to attract the "creative class" and have an economically thriving city. He defines members of this class as highly educated, creative professionals working in knowledge industries, as well as poets, artists, and writers. Though

this theory has become foundational to urban gentrification projects globally, it has been widely criticized, even by Florida himself who later acknowledged that creatives had "colonised the best spaces in cities, pushing the service workers out to the periphery" (Wainwright, 2017). The neoliberal strategy of "social mixing" has similarly been reified as a successful tool in "trickle-down gentrification" to promote social cohesion and combat segregation in housing restructuring. An integral part of this is the introduction of middle and higher income households to lower-income neighbourhoods as "role models in behaviours and aspirations" for the latter group (Kleinhans et al., 2007, p. 1072). Despite its lofty claims, there is little evidence that mixing policies make the life-chances of the lower-income group any better (Lees, 2008). The tokenistic manner in which these policies manipulate demographics to fashion an outward image of diversity and progressiveness constructs a rigid dichotomy of the successful, "natural" middle class, versus the demonised "Other", the migrant, working class. This results in deepening social divisions and a disregard of the complexity of the social, economic and cultural issues in these neighbourhoods (Kleinhans et al., 2007; Lees, 2008).

Research Design

The study consisted of a qualitative content analysis of Rotterdam housing policy documents from 2006 – 2022 and 6 semi-structured expert interviews with various high-profile actors in the Rotterdam housing space. I adopted this qualitative approach as its associated epistemological and ontological positions (constructivism and interpretivism) were best suited to gather data in support of my research topic. The year 2006 was the chosen starting point as this was when the more hostile housing policy was introduced following the successful election of anti-immigrant right-wing party Leefbaar Rotterdam (Scholten, 2018; Bolt et al., 2008). The participants in the interview portion included one policymaker, one municipal employee, two social housing executives, one architect/researcher and one cultural worker/housing activist. These experts consisted of both those with extensive “professional knowledge” in their field (20+ years), as well as individuals who are “active participants” in their community and have acquired special knowledge and privileged access to information through this activity, rather than through training (Meuser & Nagel, 2009). It is in this understanding of the transdisciplinarity of expert knowledge production that I consider these interviewees experts (Meuser & Nagel, 2009). I selected the mode of “theory-generating” expert interviews in order to gain insight and specialised knowledge from the different actors involved in the implementation, realisation, and protestation of housing policies in Rotterdam (Littig & Pöchhacker, 2014). This enabled a better understanding of the harmful structure of whiteness in Rotterdam housing policy and practices. The iterative process of comparing the policy analysis and the interviews, and later comparing both to my review of literature strengthened the overall quality of my findings.

Sample and Data Collection

I implemented theoretical sampling in line with grounded theory for my content analysis and collected data until I reached theoretical saturation (Clark et al., 2021). I determined the most important policy documents to include by first reviewing relevant literature from academic journals, documents mentioned during interviews, and other commonly cited policy documents that were referenced in more recent municipal implementation plans. The iterative nature of theoretical sampling whereby data collection, coding, and analysis takes place simultaneously allowed for themes to emerge naturally throughout, rather than constrain the process from the outset.

Policy documents

The data collection process included a search for those Rotterdam municipal policy documents with specific reference to housing, gentrification, or neighbourhood "mixing". This search was conducted across a variety of online media, through government databases such as Gemeente Rotterdam (Rotterdam.nl), the Dutch senate website (eerstekamer.nl), and academic journals. When an official English translation of the original documents was not available through the municipal website, the documents were translated using "Deepl" online translation service, and the meaning of their implementation later corroborated with interviewees. The analysis consisted of over 300 pages of policy documents from the municipality and the National Programme for Rotterdam South (NPRZ), spanning five separate documents (see Table 1 for full list). I included policy from NPRZ as this programme works in tandem with the Gemeente in managing housing in neighbourhoods in Rotterdam South. The span of these policies facilitated a rigorous examination of the development of gentrification and preservation of whiteness over the last 16 years.

Table 1

	Year	Title	Author
1	2006	Wet bijzondere maatregelen grootstedelijke problematiek *(Act on Extraordinary Measures for Urban Problems* or "*Rotterdamwet*")	Gemeente Rotterdam
2	2007	Stadsvisie Rotterdam 2030 ("*City Vision*")	Gemeente Rotterdam
3	2011	Zuid Werkt! Nationaal Programma Kwaliteitssprong Zuid (*South Works! National Program Quality Leap South)*	NPRZ
4	2016	Woonvisie Rotterdam 2030 (*Housing Vision*)	Gemeente Rotterdam
5	2019 – '22	Uitvoeringsplan 2019 – 2022 (*Implementation plan for Rotterdam Zuid 2019 – 2022*)	NPRZ

Interviews

I used two forms of non-probability sampling to recruit participants for interviews; firstly, convenience sampling using my own personal contacts, followed by snowball sampling to establish contacts with other experts and housing executives in Rotterdam. This resulted in a total of 6 interviews (see Table 2). As I aimed to generalize to theory, rather than to population, I was less concerned with the external validity of this purposive sampling method, however, the limitations of this are considered in the "Discussion" section of this thesis. The policy analysis portion of my research informed the structure and style of the later interviews. Here, I gained more contextual data from those most familiar with the proposed intent of municipal housing policy and the lived experiences of those navigating housing in this system that privileges whiteness. The research participants had between 2 and 20 years of experience in various housing-adjacent sectors. The majority of participants were white, native-Dutch men (4), two participants were women, only one of whom identified as non-white. The interviews were between 45 – 60 minutes in length, with three taking place online via Teams, and three conducted in-person in Rotterdam.

Table 2

	Name	Role	Organisation	Yrs' exp.
1	Marcel Dela Haije	Stadsmarinier, Racism and Discrimination	Gemeente Rotterdam	15
2	Gerben in 't Hout	Program Manager	Woonstad	18
3	Marco Pastors	Director	Nationaal Programma Rotterdam Zuid (NPRZ)	20
4	Lila Athnasiadou	Cultural worker/activist	Cultural Workers United (CWU), Bond Precaire Woonvormen (BPW)	2
5	Bart Kesselaar	Director of Strategy	Havensteder	20+
6	Setareh Noorani	Architect/researcher	Het Nieuwe Instituut	6

Each interview addressed various topics depending on the role and experience of the participant, although some example common themes across interviews included: gentrification, segregation, city branding and tension between policy makers and housing corporations (see Appendix C for list of example questions asked). All interviews, bar one, were audio-recorded with participant consent to ensure accurate notes of the content of the interview thereafter. The audio files of each interview will be deleted following the grading of this thesis. The interviews were transcribed and coded using thematic analysis as formulated by Braun and Clarke (as cited in Clark et al., 2021) using an iterative and inductive approach to allow general themes to emerge from participants' reflections rather than relying on existing literature.

Ethics and Privacy

Participants were each provided with information on the research and signed a participant consent form (see Appendix A). They were made aware that they could withdraw their consent at any point during the course of the study, and their data would be deleted or

anonymised according to their wishes. As all interview participants agreed to be named, all quotes included in this study have been individually approved by each respective participant.

Analysis and Positionality

This dynamic process of continuous data review and conceptualization allowed for flexibility in understanding the links between emergent themes, and enabled me to be responsive to any new information that emerged from the interviews as I carried out the research (Clark et al., 2021). I chose this mode of analysis as it involved an examination of both the blatant and latent content of the documents and the discussions in the interviews. I adopted a more interpretive rather than traditional approach to analysing the policy documents in order to understand the assumptions that underpin the framing of the housing problem, and not merely how the problem can be solved (Browne et al., 2019). Throughout the course of this research I kept a comprehensive audit trail of my interview transcripts, and content analysis decisions in line with the quality criterium of “dependability” set out by Lincoln and Guba (as cited in Clark et al., 2021) in order to mitigate the lack of transparency that is so often a critique of qualitative studies.

In terms of my own positionality as a researcher of this topic, I am reminded of the advice Walter Mignolo gave to decoloniality scholars in a 2017 interview: “First, know your place in the colonial matrix of power, where you have been located and classified. Second, remember that the colonial matrix of power cannot be “observed” from the outside because there is no outside” (Hoffmann, 2017, p. 5). I therefore think it important to note my own potential biases whilst I carry out this study as a white, western-European woman, new to Rotterdam, examining this topic in the Netherlands. I was particularly aware of my own subjectivity during the coding and interview portions of this research, where my own biases may have directed my analysis a certain route. I used this reflexivity throughout my work to

better understand how my positionality could potentially affect my interrogation of this subject.

Policy background

Before the discussion of my findings, it is appropriate to provide some contextual information on the aforementioned analysed policy documents. This section will serve to explain the origin and trajectory of the various Gemeente Rotterdam housing policies over the last 16 years.

1. ***Act on Extraordinary Measures for Urban Problems/Rotterdamwet***

   This national act was developed in Rotterdam in 2006 following the election of Leefbaar Rotterdam, intending to address the influx of low-income groups in neighbourhoods of Rotterdam South. It allows municipal governments to deny housing permits to those who have lived in Rotterdam for less than six years and who do not receive an income from employment, a student loan, disability grant, or pension (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2006, Art. 8). Moreover, it enables municipalities to deny someone a housing permit if there is a "well-founded suspicion that [a person's] accommodation will lead to an increase in nuisance or crime in that complex, street, or area" (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2006, Art. 5). Rotterdam required the Dutch government to grant partial dispensation in order to introduce this Act, as it was otherwise illegal to exclude households on the basis of income (Ouwehand & Doff, 2013). Since its enactment, evaluations have found that the Act restricts the rights of excluded groups with little evidence for improving safety or liveability (van Gent et al., 2018).

2. ***Stadsvisie Rotterdam 2030***

Stadsvisie was introduced in 2007 and proposed detailed gentrification and restructuring plans for the city with the goal of achieving the following three objectives by 2030: "attracting more middle and high-income groups to the city; attracting more highly educated people to the city; and improving the living environment for all Rotterdammers" (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2007, p. 61).

3. ***South Works! The National Programme's Quality Leap for the South, NPRZ***

In 2010 Eberhard Van der Laan (the Minister for Housing, Neighbourhoods and Integration) commissioned the report "Kwaliteitssprong Zuid, ontwikkeling vanuit Kracht" from former Dutch politicians Wim Deetman and Jan Mans on how to tackle the variety of social problems in the South of Rotterdam (NPRZ, n.d.). Following the recommendations in this report, the National Programme of Rotterdam South (NPRZ) was launched in 2011 in partnership with local government, housing associations, schools, and employers to improve the quality of life for residents in the South through the areas of employment, education, and housing from 2011 – 2031 (Rijksoverheid, 2021). *South Works* was the first policy paper published by NPRZ and details the plans to continue reducing affordable housing in order to diversify housing stock and attract more affluent residents to the South (NPRZ, 2011). The 7 "focus" neighbourhoods where this housing restructuring will be taking place are also named here: Oud-Charlois, Carnisse, Tarwewijk, Afrikaanderwijk, Feijenoord, Bloemhof and Hillesluis.

4. ***Woonvisie Rotterdam 2030***

The municipality launched Woonvisie in 2016, building on the aims of Stadsvisie to set goals for housing and living conditions in Rotterdam to achieve by 2030. The priorities regarding housing were as follows: "accommodating the increasing housing demand of middle-income and higher income households, social climbers and young potentials; ensuring a more differentiated housing stock in areas that are currently one-sided and quality of living is under pressure; and strengthening of residential environments" (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2016, p. 13). Woonvisie focused on the removal of "low-cost" housing stock i.e. social housing properties below the rental cap of €629/month, or private rental and owner-occupied houses with a WOZ value below €122,000 (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2016, p. 70) in the 7 "focus neighbourhoods" in Rotterdam South as designated by NPRZ. Although residents were given relocation assistance if their homes were affected by this "restructuring", they were not granted a "right to return" to their neighbourhood (Rajagopal, 2021).

5. ***Implementation plan for Rotterdam South 2019 – 2022***

The most recent implementation plan for NPRZ details the progress of the programme so far and any plans for re-direction for the next 4 years. Therein, they make clear that the "desired target groups" they wish to attract to Rotterdam South are "social climbers and people from outside the area" (NPRZ, 2019, p. 62). They also plan for one third of the housing stock in the South to be renewed either through renovation, merging, or demolition-new construction during the period of the programme (NPRZ, 2019, p. 56).

Findings and Analysis

From my policy analysis and coding of interviews, I identified three different stages through which the preservation of whiteness takes place in Rotterdam municipal housing policy, and a fourth finding regarding alternative paths forward. For clarity, quotes gathered from policy are presented in the tables, and quotes from interviews are included in-text; words I have added to improve the readability of quotes appear in brackets. The phases and resulting themes are as follows:

1. Preserving the ideals of whiteness in the **conceptualisation of policy theories**: e.g. in "future-proofing" neighbourhoods via gentrification, social mixing and creative class arguments, and neoliberal ideals of participation.
2. Enshrining whiteness in the **language of the policy document**: through the erasure of race and the privileging of class, and the erasure of people in lieu of "objective" criteria.
3. Maintaining whiteness in the **implementation of the policy**: through state-led segregation in the North, and the violent displacement of low-income, migrant communities in the South.

Conceptualisation of policy theories

"Future proofing"

Woonvisie, 2016	*"Future value is always central: how does innovation or experimentation contribute to the living and housing needs of tomorrow's Rotterdammer?"* (p. 24)

Zuid Werkt, 2011	*"The new homes and residential environments will suit the future residents of the South. The residents are developing and the composition of the population will change."* (p. 17) *"It is desirable to temporarily withdraw the South from the housing distribution system in order to give priority to housing people who make a meaningful contribution to the South"* (p. 20)

The concept of "future-proofing" neighbourhoods, and the emphasis on the future value of homes was present throughout policy. Very little was mentioned about the needs of current residents. Future-proofing is connected to the notion that improving the housing stock would attract affluent, higher-educated, and middle-income residents to certain neighbourhoods with an "unbalanced" housing composition. Residents are appraised similarly to prospective property in terms of their intrinsic value and what "contribution" they could make. By this logic, current residents of the South are as seen as incapable of making a "meaningful contribution" to the area, which is why newcomers are moved in in their place. In her interview, Setareh (architect/researcher) noted that Rotterdam only became "polished" in the early 2000's following gentrification policy and that, *"how from that point onwards in different policy documents it's spoken about which areas need improvement, and also which people would contribute to that improvement."* This aspect of "future-proofing" was largely opposed by interview participants. Gerben (social housing manager) lamented the exclusion of current residents in social housing: *"Why can't you invest in a neighbourhood when there's poor social housing? You can still regenerate neighbourhoods with the same people living there,"* Bart (social housing director) echoed this sentiment saying: "*You also have to*

look at the qualities of the people who are already there [in a neighbourhood] and how you can make them more prosperous."

Despite this emphasis on future residents in policy documents, both Setareh, and Lila (cultural worker/activist) mentioned the appropriation of the working poor in city branding. The following quote from Setareh regarding the city slogan "Rotterdam: Make it Happen" demonstrates this:

> *"Since Rotterdam is bent on marketing itself as a city of people doing things, a city of entrepreneurs, it also tries to relate back to a working class that's actually now being transplanted out of the city more and more."*

In Woonvisie it is argued that housing stock must be flexible, and "offer space for temporariness" in order to be "future-proof" and respond to changing needs (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2016, p. 24). In this same document this transience of housing is termed negatively as a "high-turnover rate" in poorer migrant neighbourhoods, but is celebrated as innovative and creative when used as a method to attract wealthier residents. This language of "future-proofing" the city reveals a municipal sentiment that is anti-poor, and one that aspires to attract and affiliate with middle and upper-class whiteness. Here, diversity and the rose-tinted image of the gritty, resilient, working-class residents are weaponized in city branding in order to set Rotterdam apart and compete with other cities - both nationally against Amsterdam, and on the global stage – for talent and investment. The disregard for the needs and desires of *current* residents of neighbourhoods in the South shows the value, or lack thereof, that the municipality places in their economic contribution. Here, the "reputational value" of whiteness is prioritized (Harris, 1993).

Social mixing and the "Creative class"

Stadsvisie, 2007	*"One of the main goals of our development strategy is to achieve a balanced population"* (p. 63) *"Residents who are rising on the social ladder are the most important target group for housing construction. […] They set an example"* (p. 127) *"The creative sector is important as a catalyst for the gentrification of existing city districts, the revitalisation of former port areas and the enlivenment of the city centre"* (p. 51)
Woonvisie, 2016	*"Investing in private ownership leads to broader social benefits at the neighbourhood level, since the differentiation in home ownership makes it more likely that socially advantaged people will continue to live in the neighbourhoods." (p. 18)*

The paternalistic principle of the "*wijkonbalans"* (neighbourhood imbalance) is key to the policy of social mixing that the Gemeente and NPRZ have enforced in recent years. Central to this principle is the idea of middle and higher-income residents setting an example for their lower-income peers. Marcel, Gerben, and Bart said they agreed in general with "mixed" or more balanced neighbourhoods, but did not agree with the way in which the municipality set out to achieve it, i.e. through displacement. Marco (Director of NPRZ) was one of the sole participants who wholly agreed with social mixing, stating:

> *If you do not have a good mix of lower, middle, and higher income, then the lower income class in particular becomes the 'victim' if they are concentrated in*

> *neighbourhoods. So, in order to give people with lower income, lower education the possibility to lead a good life, it is absolutely necessary to also have room for the middle-class incomes in that same area.*

In contrast, Gerben argued that, "*the wijkonbalans*" was based on a principle from 10 years ago: *"The policy of the city hasn't adapted fast enough, nowadays we need a totally different solution".* He concluded this from his own research studying the effect of social mixing in a gentrification project in Spangen, Rotterdam where he found that, *"the mixing didn't work at the neighbourhood level […] because [the gentrifiers] were in different groups [to those that originally lived there], used different schools, different shops etc."* Lila also criticized social mixing and its targeted implementation in communities of colour in Rotterdam South, as opposed to wealthier, whiter neighbourhoods in the North, stating:

> *The way it's been used is not referring to neighbourhoods that are already for example, a monoculture of middle class or upper-class white people. [The policy] is only being pushed to neighbourhoods that have migrants or people of colour, or in general people from the lower economic class.*

The lack of application of this social mixing rhetoric in the white, homogenous neighbourhoods in the North of Rotterdam speaks volumes about the intent of the Gemeente and undermines the credibility of its implementation. The paternalism evoked in social mixing and neighbourhood restructuring policies shares ties to the colonial notion that "land requires improvement because its inhabitants are also in need of civilization up-lift" (Bhandar, 2018, p. 7). The emphasis on the "creative sector" in Stadsvisie, and Florida's (2005) utilisation of "creatives" in gentrification also came up in interviews. Lila, Setareh and

Bart were critical of this concept, with Lila stating: *"[creatives] willingly or unwillingly buy into a buy into a nomadic lifestyle.. because of that, they get instrumentalised in these kind of gentrification schemes."* The transience of creatives is countered by the stability of home-ownership (in Woonvisie), which is offered as an important element of gentrification to prevent the selective migration of "social climbers" in the neighbourhood. The supremacy of private home-ownership, and the superiority of white, middle-class owner-occupiers in neighbourhoods experiencing gentrification aligns with Harris' (1993) "Whiteness as Property" thesis; how being included in, or "owning" whiteness has more to do with the right to exclude others from the benefits of this belonging. The concept of ownership, moreover, has been an integral part of liberal individualism since the seventeenth century where in Lockean rationale an individual was free inasmuch as he was the "proprietor of his person and capacities" (Macpherson, 1962, p. 4). Today, whiteness and its historical relationship to property still holds vestiges of this "possessive individualism" and the capacity to appropriate, a literal version of Harris' imagined belonging (Bhandar, 2018).

Neoliberalism and participation

Zuid Werkt, 2011	*"In Rotterdam South, not participating is not an option. The South is strict with those who fail to develop their talents sufficiently"* (p. 7)

This paternalism towards the migrant population of the South evident in the views espoused by NPRZ illustrate the settler-native power dynamic felt by the white, "autochtoons". The concept of citizen "participation" naturally came up in every interview and each participant had a different view. Marco, Gerben, and Bart gave particular focus to the importance of allowing everyone equal opportunity to 'participate' in Dutch society. Setareh offered an interesting counter to this notion:

> *Active citizenship is the core of neoliberal citizenship and it's also the fundament of how we see people with a migration background settling in the Netherlands and adopting the culture. […] Active participation is something that inherently cannot be measured. It can only be measured up to [policymakers] subjective standards which ultimately means that people need to be displaced because they are not valuable contributors to the neighbourhoods where they have lived for decades.*

This signals the value placed in whiteness and wealthy gentrifiers over current non-white residents and the unattainable standards the latter are held to in order to "participate" in a society that excludes them. A major topic in interviews with Bart and Gerben was the tension between municipality and social housing providers in the former's requirement to reduce the number of affordable housing units, despite the latter witnessing the demand grow, and lack of consultation on the matter. Gerben illustrated the partnership between social housing corporations and the municipality as follows:

> *It is a difficult relationship because the Alderman has a lot of influence, and when you don't cooperate with the city, you're out of the system. So the whole system is designed in such a way that you work with them, because there is no other way.*

This brings to mind the following quote from Bowker and Starr (1999): "There are enduring lessons to be drawn about moral accountability in the face of modern bureaucracy" (p. 196). This stalemate between arguably the most powerful actors in this issue subordinates the experiences of the "victim," privileges the bureaucracy and hierarchy of the municipal housing system and absolves both parties of responsibility in finding a resolution.

Language of the document

The erasure of race/privileging of class

Stadsvisie, 2007	*[Ambition for 2030]: "The almost natural diversity of the population can also be recognized at lunchtime, when a colourful business crowd strolls along the quays"* (p. 14)
Zuid Werkt, 2011	*"Rotterdam South is struggling with problems that are un-Dutch"* (p. 1)
Woonvisie, 2016	*"By realising housing for students, expats, small households […] and for urban families, a larger and more varied supply of housing is created in the centre"* (p. 20)

What struck me, both in the analysis of policy and during interviews, was the absence of race from the discussion. There was never a mention of how race figured in the residents of the "focus" neighbourhoods targeted by gentrification policy, despite them having 10 – 35% more of a share of residents of "non-western migrant background" than the city's average (39%) (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2022). Tracing the language use, the Gemeente favoured proxy language such as "expats," and "un-Dutch," and only in NPRZ's case explicitly mentioning ethnicity via the currently preferred term "non-Western migrants," meaning those from Africa, Latin America, or Asia (excluding Japan and Indonesia) (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2022). The topic of race was also not immediately brought up by most interviewees, and if the topic of exclusion or discrimination came up, class issues were prioritized over racial ones. For example, Bart claimed that social mixing policies *"excluded lower income people, people who are dependent on social housing and also the lower-middle income families."* Gerben too agreed that the gentrification policies are discriminatory, but in "fallibility," stating it was an issue of losing highly educated people because, "*the city does not have*

affordable homes for them." Lila acknowledged there was a "racial aspect" to housing policy in Rotterdam, but said that in her own experience in searching for housing as a white, Greek woman, *"it's mainly economic discrimination and xenophobia."* She further clarifies:

> *what the municipality care about is whether you are "productive" which comes from a very colonial line of thought which has embedded racial elements. But ultimately, if you are rich, therefore not on benefits, with a university degree, then you won't face as many structural obstacles when it comes to housing.*

In her interview, Setareh explained the phenomenon of avoiding the topic of race saying, *"in the Netherlands, white Dutch citizens are afraid to be called racists despite forwarding the same racialised structures."* Marcel (Stadsmarinier) was the only male participant who openly discussed race in the interview – most likely due to his current role tackling racism and discrimination. Although he did not think ill of the intention of policymakers, he questioned the possibility of success given the difference in demographics between citizens and those in city hall: *"How can you service a superdiverse city when the make-up of your own organisation (Gemeente Rotterdam) is to a large extent (and especially in the higher ranks) homogenous?"*

This absence of explicit mention of race is emblematic of the "wilful ignorance" of Dutch racism (Wekker, 2016). The "invisibility" of this racialized structure to the white population is intrinsic to its success and proliferation of racial inequality. Proxy language about class and income are wielded instead, with the assumption that "ethnic segregation is merely a reflection of socioeconomic segregation" and that by controlling for, or indeed eliminating one, the other will follow suit (Bolt et al., 2008, p. 1360). This simplistic logic of "rich people in, poor people out," shows the bidirectional thought of policymakers where

concentrations of affordable housing associated with (non-Western) migrants are thus considered synonymous with unsafety, societal regression, and contagion of a neighbourhood. This absence of race in policy is also demonstrative of CRT's "perpetrator perspective," in that it ignores the objective conditions of the lack of housing for low-income communities of colour in Rotterdam South. Simultaneously however, policymakers view this group as the "perpetrator", blaming them for their own exclusion, a swapping of cause and effect (Richardson, 2015; Freeman, 1978; Bolt et al., 2010). By associating "un-Dutch problems" such as unemployment, homelessness, unsafety etc. with the migrant population of Rotterdam South, NPRZ simultaneously links Dutch whiteness to safety, purity, and "naturalness". According to Hartman (1997), such rhetoric endorses a politics of contagion that, "eventually serves to justify segregation and license the racist strategies of the state in securing the health of the social body" (p. 159). The erasure of race is also apparent in the Dutch government's response to UN criticism, and their refusal to acknowledge the inherent racism involved in the displacing of Tweebosbuurt residents, stating, "the fact that residents of Tweebosbuurt of immigrant background are having to be rehoused is simply because the Afrikaanderwijk district [..] has a diverse population drawn from all kinds of cultures and backgrounds" (Rijksoverheid, 2021). This theme of erasure also applies to the next finding.

The erasure of people

Woonvisie, 2016	*The ideas [for solving housing issues] must reinforce the desired development of the living environment and can focus on the 'what' (the product) or the 'how' (the living, the development, the organisation)"* (p. 24) *"This excess of cheap houses attracts households in the primary target group from elsewhere. Supply creates demand"* (p. 14)

Stadsvisie, 2007	*"In the South, the neighbourhoods are not sufficiently distinctive: they lack identity"* (p. 126)

Separate to the erasure of race, is the absence of people, from the policy documents i.e., the erasure of the residents, their experiences, and their humanity in lieu of statistical data. This too was highlighted as a flaw by several interview participants particularly with regard to the Rotterdamwet. I asked participants why (in their opinion) these specific neighbourhoods were selected for this policy implementation. Gerben responded:

> *They were selected on the basis of statistics about the amount of social housing per neighbourhood, but there were also statistics about safety in neighbourhoods, or people who haven't got a job. In the statistics you see a clear relationship between social housing and unsafety. […] You can't solve all the problems by moving demographics in the city, because people still live, so you change the statistics, you don't change the people.*

Here, supposedly "neutral" econometrics is the more valued epistemology. Bart shared a similar view regarding the erasure of the people in the argument, claiming:

> *[The Rotterdamwet] focuses on people and not on the problem. It gives the council an excuse not to invest in education or all the other kinds of things that could help. It tells people 'we [the municipality] aren't the problem, you're the problem'.*

Despite this word choice of "focussing on people," Bart illustrates the same sentiment – that the poor "un-Dutch" migrants are villainised as a "problem," rather than people, disregarding

the complexity of their humanity. Marco, on the other hand was a proponent of the Rotterdamwet and said Article 8 of the Act (regarding the income requirement) was introduced to control private landlords and limit their choice of tenants, *"and for that we had to find objective criteria, and that was, 'how do they get their money?'"*. Setareh shared an example from her work in the form of an architectural online interface tool that is informed by national statistics data and used by many architectural firms to determine a neighbourhood as either a 'green' area, or *"red area in need of change."* She elaborates:

> *Often areas like Tweebosbuurt are red areas by default [...] the data sets that [the tool] uses includes a data set 'how many people with a migration background live [in the area]?' Architects look at this tool, constitute that a neighbourhood is in need of change because it's a red area. Then they propose new plans, bringing in new people - usually middle class or upper-class citizens or young professionals or whatever - definitely not the people who live there already. And then the process of gentrification ensues.*

Sociologist Saskia Sassen in a recent documentary about the increasing financialization of housing, described finance as an "extractive" sector similar to mining in that "once it has extracted what it needs it doesn't care what happens with the rest (Gerrten, 2020). The neoliberal policies, and architectural redlining tools that support this financialization and facilitate the displacement of people of colour is similarly violent and extractive. The erasure of people and the tokenistic focus on demographics and data is again an example of neoliberal bureaucracy, where residents are categorised, classified, and their contribution to society quantified. The neutrality of the supposed "objective" criteria of one's employment and length of residence in the exclusionary policy of the Rotterdamwet as echoed by Marco,

is an example of Wekker's "white innocence" and Bonilla-Silva's colourblind frame, the "minimization of racism". This neutrality is an artifice of white supremacy that seeks to create whiteness as the referential, "natural" baseline, to which all else is subordinate. The privileged white, Dutch body politic are largely unaffected by the demolition planned by these gentrification policies, yet the experience of the immigrant, low-income population is one of great housing precarity, scarcity, and displacement.

Policy Implementation

State-led segregation

Woonvisie, 2016	*"In Rotterdam North there are many old districts where the value of homes is rising. This development is positive and is taking place autonomously; we will not actively intervene here. The market is doing its job, we are mainly facilitating"* (p. 24)

The differential treatment of neighbourhoods on the North versus the South of Rotterdam was equally evident in interviews. Marcel recalled an enlightening conversation he had about this with Tweebosbuurt resident and prominent activist Mustapha Eaisaouiyen, where Mustapha posed the following: *"I can agree with diversifying the housing stock in principle, but do you think they diversify housing in the same way in the North or East Rotterdam?"* Bart and Gerben offered a unique insight into the deals between social housing corporations and municipality, whereby the former were promised new locations in the North in return for reducing their housing stock in the South. Gerben illustrates this dilemma thusly: *"At the moment we are in a struggle with the city because we did what we promised [...] but we didn't get the new locations."* This further affects the segregation in the city whereby the

North is primarily white native-Dutch, and the South more non-white, migrant groups. Bart mentioned the conundrum of this state-led segregation in his own sector:

> *Not only the local policy, but the wider policy in the Netherlands regarding social housing and the distribution of houses has a strong influence on segregation because we have to house low-income people in the cheapest housing, and those houses are concentrated in certain areas.*

Whiteness in neighbourhoods in the North of Rotterdam is protected by the Gemeente, both in their inaction in the creation of new social housing locations in the area, and in the lack of intervention applying the same "re-balancing" theory to the majority white, middle-class neighbourhoods. Though policy tackles ethnic segregation by targeting communities of colour in the South, it conveniently does not address, and cannot compensate for, the demonstrated self-segregation of the native population (Bolt et al., 2010; Bolt et al., 2008). This is an interesting paradox in the case of the Netherlands Wekker (2016) asserts, in that "the Dutch do not wish to be identified with migrants, although one in every six Dutch people has migrant ancestry" (p. 6). The concentrations of ethnic populations are created in part by policy (in the case of social housing allocation as Bart said) but also by the restriction of choice opportunities for low-income groups due to the reduction of affordable housing and the lack of investment in majority migrant neighbourhoods leading to decay (Doucet & Koenders, 2018). Similar to the desegregation aims of Brown vs. Board of Education in the United States, the policies in Rotterdam enforce social engineering but fail to remedy the inequities in power, resources and education that continue to be the by-product of the current segregation (Harris, 1993).

Displacement

NPRZ Implementation plan 2019-2022	*"Now that the housing market is good, there are opportunities for the South. It is precisely in this period that the focus neighbourhoods must be sped up as much as possible."* (p. 60)

I chose the above quote from NPRZ to illustrate the disparity in views between municipality, NPRZ and those experts to whom I spoke. Gerben specifically mentioned the "aggressive" ask of Woonvisie to reduce social housing to the "*55% max threshold by 2030"* and how *"that forced change damages people's pride and happiness*". All participants bar Marco mentioned the negative effects of these housing policies including displacement, exclusion, and stigmatization. The following quote from Setareh provides a concise example:

> *You could also see this in the Tweebosbuurt but also in Charlois, Feyenoord and so on: when people with a bi-cultural background, for instance Moroccan-Dutch or Antillean-Dutch etc. really directly ask 'are we not allowed to live here?' because they are made to feel that way. There's a lot of circumventing this question. But even the fact that this question appears shows me that structures are still in place in terms of city planning and architecture that make people feel unwelcome.*

The exclusionary nature of the Rotterdamwet and the expulsive effects of Woonvisie and Stadsvisie align with a commonality between whiteness and property: the right to exclude. One can also apply Harris' analysis to the recent example of the forced evictions of Tweebosbuurt residents. In the same way that white possession of land was privileged as a basis for property rights in the expulsion of Native Americans from their land, Vestia's ownership of properties and Gemeente Rotterdam's ambitions for more affluent residents,

trumps the lives and decades-long residencies of the poor "Un-Dutch". Bhandar (2018) posited, "if the possession of land was (and remains) the ultimate objective of colonial power, then property law is the primary means of realizing this desire" (p. 2). Housing policy by association is equally ensconced in colonialism and white supremacy, and as such, should be wielded with a decolonial purpose of wealth redistribution as opposed to wealth creation. It is evident from Setareh's above quote that this exclusion and racial discrimination is felt by the migrant population of the South despite the "colour blindness" professed in policy. This reflects what Wekker (2016) describes as the juxtaposition between the four hundred years of Dutch imperial presence in the world, and its absence from Dutch self-image and identity discourse.

Alternative futures

Along with the above three major findings, a fourth emerged from the interviews: alternative solutions for the future and discontent at the stagnancy of current progress against the urgency of the issue. The inclusion of these in my findings enables critique on the current policy orientation. Both Marcel and Setareh alluded to the main obstacle of the tendency for the status quo to prevail in policy with little room for solutions. The doctrine invoked in Gemeente policy serves to both reflect dominant societal moral positions, and crystallize these positions in legal thought, resulting in policy that largely maintains the racialized status quo (Freeman, 1978). Possible solutions were raised by Bart, Setareh, Marcel and Lila who discussed novel ideas for reform, as well as highlighting options that already exist. These included: a call for further municipal investment in housing co-operatives (Setareh, Bart, Lila); the redistribution of commercial real estate to become part of the housing stock, or a tax on vacant properties (Marcel); the removal of the "Verhuurdersheffing", a landlord levy tax for social housing corporations (Bart); and the extension of legal supports for squatters.

Setareh also raised the issue of "institutional amnesia" of government with regard to solutions to this 'crisis':

> *We are also forgetting stories of resistance and stories of struggle, and creative solutions to problems that we have been facing for decades on end. So that's also why it's important to capture legacies such as squatting culture, solutions such as co-ops etc. and to capture them not only in public programs or disseminating knowledge but also in archives, making them part of that which constitutes our common history.*

In the same way that the decolonization movement in Africa and Asia failed (in Mignolo's view) during the Cold War as a result of the lack of interrogation of the norms and institutions of colonialism, the municipality will continue to fail its migrant and low-income population until it reflects on its imperial history and archive, and its stark homogeneity in opposition to its superdiverse residents (Hoffmann, 2017).

Discussion and Conclusion

This research has highlighted how whiteness is preserved in a three stage manner in Rotterdam municipal neoliberal housing policy: in the paternalistic conception of gentrification theories such as social mixing; in the erasure of race, and the absence of current residents from the language of the document; and in the implementation of the policy resulting in state-led segregation, social division, and displacement of communities of colour. These findings highlight the myriad 'invisible barriers' that work to separate immigrants in Rotterdam from the natives, and how policy legitimates this separation (Schinkel, 2017). By using the grand theories of CRT, decolonial theory and "whiteness as property", this research offers a clear example of the current iteration of systemic racism today; how it operates through anaemic policies that villainize low-income migrants, and justifies the maintenance of the status quo of racial hierarchy in the "colour-blind" nation of the Netherlands. Housing, property and ownership are intrinsically linked to whiteness and as such, an interrogation of housing policy with this decolonial framing is crucial in making visible systems that thwart justice, and prompting consideration of "how the built environment is always shaping the conditions through which race is made material" (Brown in van Hoek, 2022).

A limitation of this study was the lack of non-white interview participants. Although I intended my analysis to be steered by CRT's "voice-of-colour" thesis, understanding that people of colour have a singular competence to speak about race and oppression that should be valued by policymakers, I was unable to translate this to my data collection process (Delgado et al., 2017; Matsuda, 1987). This is a reflection of both the whiteness of my own personal networks, and the hegemonic whiteness of highly-educated executives in housing and policy in Rotterdam, to whom I had much easier access. I am also aware that as the severity and urgency of the city's housing crisis grows, those activists/residents of colour who are typically called to respond to such research and media requests experience

significant participatory fatigue. The expert knowledge I was seeking through my interviews is characterised by the opportunity to become hegemonial within a field of practice and furthermore to be "influential in structuring the conditions of action for other actors" (Bogner and Menz, 2002 as cited in Meuser & Nagel, 2009). This limitation is a significant, albeit frustrating finding: that those experts with the most influence and decision-making power in this space are white, native-Dutch men. However, this limits my findings in that there are certain topics of discussion that did not emerge in my interviews simply because those I interviewed (all highly educated, majority white, and male) are not representative of the group who are most affected by these policies i.e. low-income, "non-Western," non-white migrants. As such, I think it important to note that though I reference the violent displacement these policies sanction, as a result of my interview base one can assume that effects may be even more damaging than what is stated here. Urban sociological theory greatly bolstered my analysis of policy and while a further examination of racialized gentrification strategies in Rotterdam in the 20th century was beyond the scope of this thesis, contextualizing the change in policy and demographics of this time and comparing it to the current policy trajectory would prove fertile ground for future research and counter the "institutional amnesia" of policy recommendations today. Similar housing "crises" that privilege financial investors and affluent "creatives" over current residents are happening all over Europe (Cities for Rent, 2022). Gemeente Rotterdam now has the unique choice point of reckoning international criticism of the crisis with a change in policy direction, one that reifies the human right to housing and acknowledges the influence of Dutch colonial past. Not doing so risks clinging on to a semblance of white, Dutch, colonial identity in the hopes of constructing a palatable albeit superficial national past, one that is incongruous to the vibrant superdiversity of the current population.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Participant Informed Consent Form

MSc Thesis: Rotterdam Municipal Housing Policy

- I _________________ voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw my consent at any time and the interview material will be deleted
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research
- I understand that participation involves a 60 minute interview about my experiences with- and perspective on housing in Rotterdam
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from my participation and there are no known risks to participating.
- I understand that in any write-up on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous unless otherwise stated - this will be done by changing my name and anonymizing any identifiable information about myself and the details of my interview.
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- I understand that extracts from my interview may be quoted in the master's dissertation
- I understand that signed consent forms will be retained in a password protected location on Madeline's personal laptop that only she has access to until 31st August 2022.

Student: Madeline Arkins,

Social Inequalities (Sociology) MSc Student, Erasmus University Rotterdam

620719ma@eur.nl

+353 87 318 1577

Supervisor: Dr. Bonnie French

Assistant Professor of Sociology, Erasmus University Rotterdam

Signature of research participant

--   ----------------

Signature of participant   Date

Signature of researcher

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study

Madeline Arkins

---   ---------------------

Signature of researcher   Date

Appendix B
Example Participant Recruitment Email

Dear [PARTICIPANT]

My name is Madeline Arkins, MSc Social Inequalities student at Erasmus (originally from Ireland). I am analysing Rotterdam municipal housing policy of the last 15 years and interviewing people who have significant experience in housing in various sectors in Rotterdam (architects, social housing providers, policymakers, activists etc.). I am looking for interview participants over this next week and wondered if you might be interested/available?

This would be approximately 60 minutes, semi-structured interview either online or in-person. Your responses can be anonymized should you prefer. Questions would range between:

- your own experience in your work as it relates to housing
- your perspective/familiarity with policies such as Stadsvisie, Woonvisie, and the Rotterdamwet
- and your own insight on the current situation of housing in the city.

Let me know if there is an hour over the next week when you may be available, I would really appreciate your insight. I'm attaching the participant consent form to this email. If you have any further questions about the project please don't hesitate to ask - I can certainly provide more info.

Appendix C
Open-ended Interview Questions

1. How long have you been working in [housing/policymaking/architecture/activism] and how did you begin to get involved?

2. How would you describe the housing situation in Rotterdam to someone unfamiliar with it?

3. Tell me about your involvement in/understanding of Rotterdam housing policy?

4. What did the policy implementation of [Woonvisie/Rotterdamwet etc.] mean for /signal to you?

5. What are your thoughts on the underlying arguments of gentrification e.g. the "wijk imbalance" and attracting the "creative class"?

6. How has the image/identity of Rotterdam developed over your years living in the city?

7. Why in your mind were these certain neighbourhoods highlighted in the Rotterdamwet and how do you feel it has/has not been successful?

8. What is the most challenging aspect of housing in Rotterdam/ what's the most important issue for you?

9. How do you see race/discrimination figuring in the topic of housing and housing policy in Rotterdam, if at all?

10. What would success/a solution forward look like to you?

Appendix D

Table D1: Policy Documents Analysed

	Year	Title	Author
1	2006	Wet bijzondere maatregelen grootstedelijke problematiek *(Act on Extraordinary Measures for Urban Problems* or "*Rotterdamwet*")	Gemeente Rotterdam
2	2007	Stadsvisie Rotterdam 2030 (*City Vision*)	Gemeente Rotterdam
3	2011	Zuid Werkt! Nationaal Programma Kwaliteitssprong Zuid (*South Works! National Program Quality Leap South)*	NPRZ
4	2016	Woonvisie Rotterdam 2030 (*Housing Vision*)	Gemeente Rotterdam
5	2019 – '22	Uitvoeringsplan 2019 – 2022 (*Implementation plan for Rotterdam Zuid 2019 – 2022*)	NPRZ

Table D2: Interviewees

	Name	Role	Organisation	Yrs' exp.
1	Marcel Dela Haije	Stadsmarinier against Racism and Discrimination	Gemeente Rotterdam	15
2	Gerben in 't Hout	Program Manager	Woonstad	18
3	Marco Pastors	Director	Nationaal Programma Rotterdam Zuid (NPRZ)	20
4	Lila Athnasiadou	Cultural worker/activist	Cultural Workers United (CWU), Bond Precaire Woonvormen (BPW)	2
5	Bart Kesselaar	Director of Strategy	Havensteder	20+
6	Setareh Noorani	Architect/researcher	Het Nieuwe Instituut	6

Appendix E

"Notes on Downtown" Exhibition by Désirée van Hoek, Het Nieuwe Instituut, April 28th 2022

(photos from the interview portions of exhibition with Adrienne Brown and Cody Hochstenbach)

RACE

In her book *The Black Skyscraper: Architecture and the Perception of Race* (2019), **Adrienne Brown** examines works produced by writers, painters, architects, and laborers grappling with the early skyscraper's outsized and disorienting dimensions. Brown explores this architecture's effects on how race was seen, read and sensed at the turn of the twentieth century. In our own time, America is still struggling with the same problems, she says.

How did you get interested in the skyscraper?

AB: "I am a literature professor. That is my primary field of study. But I've always been interested in architecture. I wrote my undergraduate thesis about the literary representation of race in the suburbs. Then when I got to graduate school, I studied both twentieth-century American literature and architectural history. As I read between these two fields, I noted the skyscraper's prominence in American architectural history. You can't really tell a story about American architecture without talking about the emergence of the skyscraper, because it is so central to the understanding of an American tradition. But remarkably enough, the novels I studied written during the skyscraper's rise to prominence seemed to be disinterested in the skyscraper. In my dissertation, I wanted to find out why."

And?

"What I learned is that it depends on where you are looking for representations of these structures. You won't find the skyscraper prominently featured in the most well-known novels of American modernism. But when I started to look more at popular genres and newspaper writing, the skyscraper was everywhere."

How did the question of race turn up?

"Very often when the skyscraper was being discussed, described, and made into a narrative in the materials I was finding, race haunted the scene of how things were expressed. The question I found continually emerging in this literature was how the skyscraper was changing the way people could see and make sense of the racial issue in cities that were changing scale in such intensity due to these new architectures. In my book, I focus on Chicago and New York, where the skyscrapers were invented and articulated in their earliest stages. New York and Chicago were incredibly diverse cities at that time because of mass migration and immigration. This caused real concerns about racial differences and racial admixing. In race science, there was a lot of controversy about how many races there were, what the differentiation might be between racial and ethnic difference, and so on. The skyscraper made it difficult to understand racial differences, causing certain Americans a great deal of anxiety. From the top of a skyscraper, for instance, everyone looks the same."

How did writers address this race issue?

"Take the Black writer W.E.B. Du Bois. He's well-known as an activist and a writer of essays, but most people don't know that he also wrote fiction. A few of his early stories, *The Comet* and *The Princess Steel*, feature skyscrapers prominently. Du Bois tried to imagine the liberatory potential of the skyscraper as disrupters of racial perception and the norms of racialized sight. In *The Comet*, a comet hits New York and destroys everybody apart from a Black man and a white woman. This duo must figure out how to get around the city and overcome their preconceptions about one another to envision a new world built together. At the story's conclusion, the two end up together at the top of the MetLife building overlooking the city. But at the very moment they are about to embrace and imagine inaugurating a new world, it turns out that not everyone has died – only those in Manhattan. A crowd of largely white people rush back into the scene to lynch the Black man. In the end this crowd is talked down, leaving behind the man to reunite with his Black wife and their dead son. The story ends with their private moment of mourning and reflection at the top of one of the tallest buildings in the city. I'm interested in how Du Bois wields the skyscraper in this story as both a tool for remaking racial perception but also a stage for displaying Black life and death in the wake of the failure of a liberatory project."

And white writers?

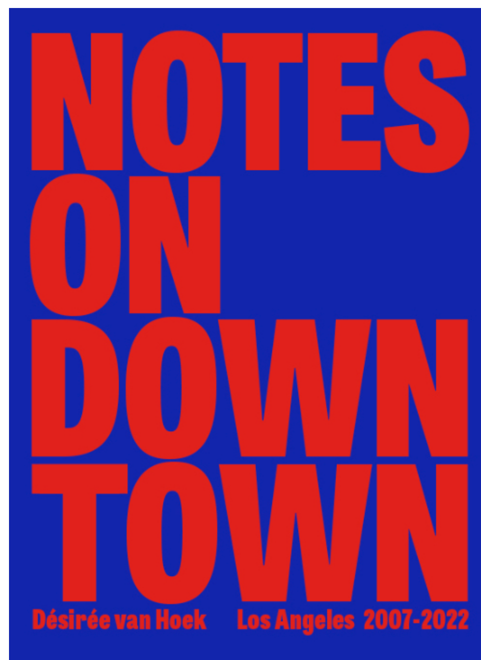
"The romance writer Faith Baldwin, who was one of the best-selling writers during the Great Depression, wrote stories about young white women working in offices. Her stories largely focused on what were known as 'office girls' and the entanglement of their romantic and professional lives. For Baldwin, the skyscraper was a place of intense energy that proved very seductive to young women enamored with its buzzing, modern world. Her stories engaged the social intensity of the skyscraper, a world treated by Baldwin as a threat in its ability to draw women away from the home and their roles as caretakers. Working women became yoked in the period to the notion of 'race suicide': the idea that whites were not reproducing fast enough and that immigrant minorities were reproducing faster, threatening to turn the white majority in America into an ever slimmer minority. There's this paranoia in the book that young women may be so seduced by the life of the office that they turn away from their duties as wives and mothers. Baldwin's novels address this tension."

The question of race is also a question of space?

"Yes. I call in the book for architects and architectural historians to think more about race, but also for people who study race to think more about how the built environment is always shaping the conditions through which race is made material."

You wrote about suburbs. Do they, more than skyscrapers, cause segregation?

"I don't think that any one architectural form alone is more or less responsible for segregation. In my book, I cite the architectural theorists Jacob Moore and Susanne Schindler, who wrote, 'No building type or architectural style creates inequality as such.' Assuming so, they said, would be to grossly overestimate architecture's power. You see, it's not just architects who reinforce the racial boundaries. It is infrastructure, it is the bureaucracy, it's real estate. All these things are working together to ratify inequality through the built environment. For example, in the mid-twentieth century, the Federal Housing Administration subsidized low-cost mortgages for Americans who appeared white enough to move to the suburbs. On top of that, the government created highway systems prioritizing the suburbs and deprioritizing urban neighborhoods of minorities whose movement to the suburbs had not been subsidized. So you faced a system making key decisions impacting who can



GENTRIFICATION

The sociologist Ruth Glass coined the term 'gentrification' in the 1960s. She used that term in her book *London: Aspects of Change* to describe how, in various London neighborhoods such as Islington, Paddington, Kensington, and Battersea, the working class was having to make room for more prosperous residents, the new middle class. The composition of the districts was changing in favor of the 'gentry', an old-fashioned term for the country landowners. That term has been thrown around pretty indiscriminately since the sixties, sometimes with positive associations and sometimes more negatively. **Cody Hochstenbach** is an expert on gentrification in the Netherlands.

What do you understand 'gentrification' to mean?

CH: "That's a good question, as well as an awkward one. I think that the general image of gentrification isn't that far removed from the one described by Ruth Glass: a downtown neighborhood where, after years of disinvestment and poverty, capital is reinvested driven by changing economic structures. The composition of the neighborhood mutates as a result. The original working-class residents are being displaced by new, wealthier residents from the middle class. One of the fundamental questions is whether that displacement aspect should be part of the definition, or whether displacement is the result of the gentrification process. It is a relevant question because the definition given by Glass brings together several elements that do not always apply to the neighborhoods where we now see gentrification: central locations, downtown, and the working class. The American geographer Elvin Wyly argues that Glass would define gentrification differently if she was still alive today. I agree with him. I think that gentrification is a much larger-scale process today, no longer limited to downtown areas or to the middle class who invest in a neighborhood and come to live there."

How has gentrification evolved from a marginal phenomenon to a large-scale process? Or sometimes even a conscious urban planning strategy?

"The American geographers Jason Hackworth and Neil Smith distinguish three phases. The first began in the fifties and sixties, at a time when middle-class people in New York, for example, began buying homes in old and mostly run-down urban neighborhoods. They invested in the district, giving their own homes a face-lift. That increased the value of those homes and the neighborhood – and its property values more broadly – slowly changed as a result. The government backed these initiatives on a small scale. The second wave was in the eighties. The process of change was picked up by speculators, real estate investors who recognized a business model that was appealing because it could be scaled up. From the nineties onward, city administrators and policymakers began to see gentrification as an attractive strategy for making impoverished neighborhoods – with all their attendant social problems – attractive to the middle class. Hackworth and Smith have shown that various interests have come into play during this final wave, in which gentrification has become an urban planning strategy. Having wealthier people residing there is very attractive for city administrations: they contribute more in taxes, they bring in more jobs, and they're one less thing to worry about. Moreover, government interventions reduced the risk for real estate investors: after all, the authorities were guaranteeing the gentrification and the concomitant increases in value. Some academics are now distinguishing a fourth wave, centering on new forms of speculation: big investors buying up properties to refurbish and resell, rent out expensively, or rent out temporarily through Airbnb. The speculators in the second wave were still locally based investors, but in the fourth wave they operate globally. There are vast amounts of capital throughout the world that are, so to speak, looking for a place to make big returns. That cash will land somewhere, get invested somewhere, and it will have huge social and material consequences there."

So the roles for big business and government are much greater today than in the definition given by Glass?

"Yes. That's why the definition that is commonly used now, which is also applicable to such large-scale and radical transformations, is the one given by the same Jason Hackworth who I mentioned earlier: 'The production of urban space for progressively more affluent users.' That's a very broad definition. Even developing a new neighborhood for affluent city folk on a piece of previously undeveloped land can cause gentrification, even though no one who is less affluent is actually being displaced."

That's a long way from the original definition.

"Yes. You might question whether the concept of gentrification as such can be used outside the Anglo-American context. It's a concept that has gained meaning through research in London and New York in particular. The fact that we use the term throughout the world is a prime example of Anglo-American dominance in academic discourse. In France, where academics traditionally publish largely in the French language, the equivalent term hardly occurs, not even to describe the changes in Paris. When we talk about 'gentrification' in Asian cities, we mean the demolition of old districts en masse to erect gigantic new residential tower blocks in their place. Can you really characterize developments like those using the same terms that Glass used for describing the transformation of Islington? On the other hand, though, what's happening there is an example of transformation, displacing the original residents, with prices being driven up."

Today, it is pretty clear that cities are popular places to live, but that was by no means the case in the fifties and sixties.

"True enough. A lot more people study now than back then, which means that a lot more young people move to the cities. At the same time, we're also seeing that young people are now taking much longer to go through the transitional phase in their lives. The step between leaving home and settling down – that intermediate stage when you're still flexible and don't yet have a permanent contract, permanent partner or permanent home – has become much longer. And that phase is mostly spent in the cities, because that's where you work and where you may meet your future partner. Young and well-educated people are, of course, the gentrifiers *par excellence*. At the turn of the century, we saw the ideas of Richard Florida taking hold: the market belief that the city is the place for winners and that it's where you should invest. As long as you bet on the urban areas, the whole country – society as a whole – will benefit."

Appendix F

Ethics and Privacy Statement

CHECKLIST ETHICAL AND PRIVACY ASPECTS OF RESEARCH

INSTRUCTION

This checklist should be completed for every research study that is conducted at the Department of Public Administration and Sociology (DPAS). This checklist should be completed *before* commencing with data collection or approaching participants. Students can complete this checklist with help of their supervisor.

This checklist is a mandatory part of the empirical master's thesis and has to be uploaded along with the research proposal.

The guideline for ethical aspects of research of the Dutch Sociological Association (NSV) can be found on their website (http://www.nsv-sociologie.nl/?page_id=17). If you have doubts about ethical or privacy aspects of your research study, discuss and resolve the matter with your EUR supervisor. If needed and if advised to do so by your supervisor, you can also consult Dr. Jennifer A. Holland, coordinator of the Sociology Master's Thesis program.

PART I: GENERAL INFORMATION

Project title: Division, demolition, and displacement: Examining the preservation of whiteness in Rotterdam municipal housing policy

Name, email of student: Madeline Arkins, 620719ma@eur.nl

Name, email of supervisor: Bonnie French, french@essb.eur.nl

Start date and duration: April 4, 2022 through June 20, 2022

Is the research study conducted within DPAS YES - NO

If 'NO': at or for what institute or organization will the study be conducted?
(e.g. internship organization)

PART II: HUMAN SUBJECTS

1. Does your research involve human participants. YES - NO

   If 'NO': skip to part V.

   If 'YES': does the study involve medical or physical research? YES - NO
   Research that falls under the Medical Research Involving Human Subjects Act (WMO) must first be submitted to an accredited medical research ethics committee or the Central Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (CCMO).

2. Does your research involve field observations without manipulations that will not involve identification of participants. YES - NO

   If 'YES': skip to part IV.

3. Research involving completely anonymous data files (secondary data that has been anonymized by someone else). YES - NO

   If 'YES': skip to part IV.

PART III: PARTICIPANTS

1. Will information about the nature of the study and about what participants can expect during the study be withheld from them? YES - NO
2. Will any of the participants not be asked for verbal or written 'informed consent,' whereby they agree to participate in the study? YES - NO

3. Will information about the possibility to discontinue the participation at any time be withheld from participants? YES - NO

4. Will the study involve actively deceiving the participants? YES - NO
Note: almost all research studies involve some kind of deception of participants. Try to think about what types of deception are ethical or non-ethical (e.g. purpose of the study is not told, coercion is exerted on participants, giving participants the feeling that they harm other people by making certain decisions, etc.).

5. Does the study involve the risk of causing psychological stress or negative emotions beyond those normally encountered by participants? ` YES - NO

6. Will information be collected about special categories of data, as defined by the GDPR (e.g. racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, genetic data, biometric data for the purpose of uniquely identifying a person, data concerning mental or physical health, data concerning a person's sex life or sexual orientation)? YES - NO

7. Will the study involve the participation of minors (<18 years old) or other groups that cannot give consent? YES - NO

8. Is the health and/or safety of participants at risk during the study? YES - NO

9. Can participants be identified by the study results or can the confidentiality of the participants' identity not be ensured? YES - NO

10. Are there any other possible ethical issues with regard to this study? YES - NO

If you have answered 'YES' to any of the previous questions, please indicate below why this issue is unavoidable in this study.

____
____
____
____
____

What safeguards are taken to relieve possible adverse consequences of these issues (e.g., informing participants about the study afterwards, extra safety regulations, etc.).

____
____
____
____
____

Are there any unintended circumstances in the study that can cause harm or have negative (emotional) consequences to the participants? Indicate what possible circumstances this could be.
N/A_

Please attach your informed consent form in Appendix I, if applicable.

Continue to part IV.

PART IV: SAMPLE

Where will you collect or obtain your data?

Experts in the housing space in Rotterdam, including: architects, activists, policymakers, social housing providers and municipal employees. I begin to use convenient sampling from my own personal networks of those I know working in these sectors in Rotterdam. From there I plan on using snowball sampling to obtain 6 interviews. Data collection will consist of semi-structured interviews (45 - 60 minutes long) online or in-person.

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

What is the (anticipated) size of your sample?

6

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

What is the size of the population from which you will sample?

100s approx.

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

Continue to part V.

Part V: Data storage and backup

Where and when will you store your data in the short term, after acquisition?

Immediately following data collection I will store the data on a password protected file on my laptop that only I will have access to.

Note: indicate for separate data sources, for instance for paper-and pencil test data, and for digital data files.

Who is responsible for the immediate day-to-day management, storage and backup of the data arising from your research?

I am responsible for the all the above.

How (frequently) will you back-up your research data for short-term data security?

Once a week

In case of collecting personal data how will you anonymize the data?
During coding (following data collection) I will transition to numerical identification. I will then keep the "metadata" a secure place, and separate from the anonymised coding*.
*Given that all participants requested to be named, the above anonymisation was not necessary.

Note: It is advisable to keep directly identifying personal details separated from the rest of the data. Personal details are then replaced by a key/ code. Only the code is part of the database with data and the list of respondents/research subjects is kept separate.

PART VI: SIGNATURE

Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the ethical guidelines in the conduct of your study. This includes providing information to participants about the study and ensuring confidentiality in storage and use of personal data. Treat participants respectfully, be on time at appointments, call participants when they have signed up for your study and fulfil promises made to participants.

Furthermore, it is your responsibility that data are authentic, of high quality and properly stored. The principle is always that the supervisor (or strictly speaking the Erasmus University Rotterdam) remains owner of the data, and that the student should therefore hand over all data to the supervisor.

Hereby I declare that the study will be conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Department of Public Administration and Sociology at Erasmus University Rotterdam. I have answered the questions truthfully.

Name student: Madeline Arkins Name (EUR) supervisor: *Bonnie French*

Date: March 20, 2022 Date: March 20, 2022