

Final Master Thesis

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Family Ideals on Trial: A 1980s Rotterdam Communal Experiment

Abstract

This thesis examines the family abolition project of a Rotterdam commune from 1980 – 1987, and its subsequent criminalization, and the influence it had on state actions and societal norms. The project aimed to dismantle the traditional nuclear family model, suggesting that collective living and child-rearing may help challenge capitalist structures. In this research, an interdisciplinary approach is used, drawing from critical theory, feminist and queer theory, media studies as well. The study found four key areas: tensions between traditional family practices and communal life; criminalization and sensationalism of the group; discourse on morality and moralism; resistance against marginalization. It became apparent that media upheld traditional family values by labeling the communal living activities' as deviant or immoral. This resulted in intense criminalization involving raids by police as well as removal of children. The findings emphasize the significant state and societal aversion to non-traditional family structures and the influence of mass media in molding public opinion. The communal group's ideology and practices challenged both existing norms and exposed limitations and biases within the capitalist framework regarding family and sexuality. In addition, this research paper contributes to the ongoing discourse on family dynamics, sexuality and at communal living, emphasizing the need for a critical evaluation of societal values and power structures.

Keywords

Communal Living, Family Structures, Ideology, Societal Norms, Power Dynamics

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Introduction

“Modern society is a mass composed solely of individual families as its molecules” (Engels, 1884). Engels uses this comparison to highlight the idea that families are more than individual or separate units; they are essential components of society serving as foundational elements in the broader social framework. Capitalist society relies on and perpetuates the nuclear family model (Engels, 1884; Fraser, 2013; Cooper, 2017). This thesis seeks to explore the radical 'family abolition project' undertaken by a communal living group in Rotterdam from 1980 to 1987 and its repercussions on societal norms and state policies.

The project sought to promote and put into practice ways of living as a community with the goal of breaking down the constraints of the typical nuclear family unit. This was intended to challenge the structure of society as outlined above. It was more than a lifestyle preference; it was a conscious political effort to dismantle the economic and social hierarchies that are reinforced by the traditional family model. When we consider the family as a reflection of society perpetuating its beliefs and systems, the communal living group's effort to eliminate this establishment can be viewed as a bold stance against capitalism. This initiative prompts reflections on methods of structuring social and economic aspects outside the conventional family model suggesting new ways of understanding relationships, community and resource allocation.

In the mid 1980s the communal living group in Rotterdam faced severe criminalization when seven adults were arrested on accusations of inappropriate behavior with young children. The children were taken away from them and put in children's homes. The group had to deal with a lot of media attention and police interventions. Despite evidence and public resistance by the group, the investigation persisted. Following two years of disputes, the High Court ruled in favor of the communal living group, clearing them of all charges and criticizing the governments aggressive tactics. This case highlights the tensions between alternative family structures and prevailing social norms.

This research will examine how the commune's ideology and practice interrogated and resisted the prevailing narratives of family and sexuality within the broader capitalist framework. By applying Foucauldian theory, as well as drawing upon Marx and Engels on the policing of family, media theory on how it shapes, reflects and influences society, and (contemporary) feminist and queer critiques, this analysis will dissect the power relations and ideological constructs that shaped the communal living group's narrative and led to its criminalization, and thereafter the counter discourses.

This thesis is socially and academically relevant, as it delves into the Rotterdam living groups 'family abolition project,' which challenged family frameworks and societal standards. It sheds light on how the media influences perceptions and societal responses. By providing context and addressing implications, the research contributes to ongoing discussions surrounding family dynamics, sexuality and communal living, where dominant values still prevail today. It takes a multidisciplinary approach, by incorporating critical theory, feminist and queer theory and media theory. This study enhances our comprehension of how nontraditional family arrangements can disrupt established gender roles and sexual norms.

This led to the following research question: *How does the 'family abolition project' by the communal living group of Rotterdam (1980-1987), and its subsequent criminalization, reflect and challenge prevailing ideologies and power structures regarding community and, sexuality within capitalist society?*

Theoretical framework

Challenging traditional family dynamics and gender roles

When we explore family dynamics and gender roles, different theoretical perspectives offer a comprehensive approach to grasping the complexities of these social constructs.

According to Parsons (1951) structural functionalism posits that the family serves as a social institution that contributes to maintaining societal stability and shaping individuals through socialization. Building upon this idea Smelser (1991) delves into how various social institutions, including the family work together to uphold order and adapt to changes. She argues that institutions like the family play a crucial role in upholding order by instilling norms, values and behaviors essential for societies' cohesion and stability. As primary socialization agent, the family teaches individuals the expectations and rules necessary for smooth interactions within their community. Through this process of socialization societal norms are reinforced while also minimizing chances of 'deviant behavior' (Smelser, 1991).

Feminist theorists critique the expectations placed on individuals within families and society highlighting the systemic disparities ingrained in these systems. For instance, Friedan, Chodorow and Butler have all played large roles in contributing to this discourse. Friedan (1963) argued against the idealization of gender roles that confine women to duties as wives and mothers emphasizing that such limitations hinder womens' potential and contribute to widespread unhappiness. She pointed out how societal norms and media portrayals reinforce the notion that a woman's fulfillment is solely tied to responsibilities and child rearing. Chodorow (1978) explains how gender identities form during childhood experiences within the traditional family structure. The traditional family structure, where women predominantly undertake caregiving roles, perpetuates gendered personalities. Butler (1990) revolutionized feminist theory by challenging fixed categories of gender and identity. She introduced the concept of gender performativity proposing that gender is not an innate trait but rather a societal construct shaped by recurrent social performances.

The family, as an institution, is not a natural organism but a state apparatus, based on ideas of blood and lineage and ownership regulating private property and labor (Barrett & McIntosh 1991). The nuclear family structure, which is deeply rooted in our society, shapes individuals within a private, patriarchal and capitalist framework. The notion of 'family' privatizes care and operates as the basic unit of capitalism, which promotes competition and individualism to that of a nation or a factory producing labor for the economy (McClintock, 1995). Despite being portrayed as a personal 'free' choice, the family model effectively perpetuates the cycle of labor reproduction and economic dependence (Mieli, 2018). While

many people do not conform to nuclear family models, society often sidelines those who deviate from this norm rendering them socially invisible (Lewis, 2022). This serves to accumulate capital, even though it often falls short in providing promised support and care. Tillmon's activism in the 1970s shed light on the nature of welfare systems, by comparing them to a 'super-sexist marriage'.

"You trade the man for *the* man. But you can't divorce him if he treats you bad. He can divorce you, of course, cut you off anytime he wants. But in that case, *he* keeps the kids, not you. *The* man runs everything ... In ordinary marriage, sex is supposed to be for your husband. On AFCD (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) you're not supposed to have any sex at all. You give up control over your own body. It's a condition of aid. You may even have to agree to get your tubes tied so you can never have more children just to avoid being cut off welfare" (Tillmon, 1972).

The nuclear family perpetuates poverty, as Olufemi notes, and new models of solidarity are needed for true social and economic liberation (Olufemi, 2021).

According to Fraser (2013), for feminist movements to effectively further their goals, they must acknowledge the connection between gender, capitalism and social justice. She emphasizes the importance of understanding how gender inequality is shaped within the context of the capitalist system. Fraser points out the evolution of feminist movements in response to shifts from state controlled capitalism to neoliberalism underscoring how economic structures and policies impact gender dynamics. The move towards neoliberalism characterized by market deregulation and austerity measures has exacerbated gender disparities by weakening support systems (Fraser, 2013). These neoliberal policies have increased insecurity especially affecting women in low paying jobs. Fraser (2013) draws attention to how reducing social safety nets and commodifying care work disproportionately burden women who already balance paid work with household responsibilities. This additional workload perpetuates gender inequality by limiting women's opportunities, for advancement.

Cooper (2017) links together neoliberalism and social conservatism and researches how they converge around the institution of the family, even though they seem contradictory. Their mutual support for self reliance and individual responsibility plays a big role in both ideologies. Social conservatives emphasize the importance of the family in instilling these principles nurturing individuals of self-governing and independence. Neoliberalism shares this view by promoting self reliance on oneself and your family rather than on relying on

government assistance, which is in line with its belief in market efficiency and individual entrepreneurship (Cooper, 2017). Traditional values associated with family are connected to notions of economic stability as social conservatives argue that nuclear families promote responsibility, order and discipline. Neoliberals suggest that stable family units contribute to stability, minimizing the need for government involvement in welfare. This alignment seeks to minimize spending on services by promoting economic independence within families.

Furthermore, Cooper (2017) points out how these values reinforce gender roles with men as providers and women as caregivers at home. This division of labor aligns with the labor market dynamics benefiting from the housework historically carried out by women. Policies that support marriage and traditional nuclear families often overlook single parent families, LGBTQ+ families and other non-traditional family structures. This results in increased inequality and social exclusion. Shifting care responsibilities from the government to families can worsen social pressures for low income households, widening the gap between the wealthy and less privileged.

Social conservatives also impact education by advocating for curricula that uphold values such as abstinence-only sex education and teachings on “family values”, marginalizing those from diverse backgrounds and fail to provide good education on topics like sexual health and diversity (Cooper, 2017).

The idea of abolishing the family originates from the resistance of displaced and enslaved people who resisted these institutions (Marx & Engels 1848). Pre colonial and Indigenous communities traditionally did not adopt the nuclear family; it was enforced through colonial and capitalist pressures. Weeks suggests that getting rid of the family is crucial in dismantling the patriarchal state (Weeks, 2021). Similarly, Parker argues that achieving revolution is only possible by breaking from the nuclear family structure (Parker, 1981). Throughout history, the nuclear family has acted as a defensive structure for marginalized communities against oppression from society and the state. Nonetheless, it remains a patriarchal, white dominated institution imposed on these marginalized groups (Weeks, 2021).

Kollontai and Hardt advocate for a love that aims to bring about transformation and revolution, and challenges the notion of possessive 'property love' (Kollontai 1973; Hardt, 2017). Firestone and Gordon discuss freeing women and children from the grasp of capitalist patriarchy through technological control and communal living setups (Firestone, 1970; Gordon, 1969). Additionally, modern thinkers, such as Sophie Lewis and Ruth Wilson Gilmore, advocate for solidarity models that extend beyond traditional family bonds,

advocating for a shared sense of humanity based on friendship and shared purposes (Lewis, 2022; Gilmore, 2020).

Power dynamics

When we examine how power dynamics impact how society reacts to non-traditional groups, various theories provide insights. Marx' conflict theory offers an explanation of how social issues stems from conflicts between different groups fueled by power dynamics and economic interests (Marx, 1876). Harvey expands on Marx' theory by illustrating how the accumulation of capital and economic downturns worsen disparities and conflicts (Harvey, 2011). He highlights that the cyclical nature of downturns in capitalism not only disrupts markets, but intensifies social inequalities. These downturns are not anomalies. They are essential aspects of the capitalistic system resulting from its contradictions and the relentless quest for accumulation.

Alternative lifestyles, for example including collective ownership, resource sharing, and non-traditional economic practices, challenge the dominant capitalist norms of individual ownership and competitive accumulation. These alternative practices serve as a form of resistance against the capitalist system, for a lifestyle that prioritizes community well-being over individual profit. Traditional societal structures, deeply ingrained in capitalist economic norms, often view such alternative lifestyles as disruptions to the existing order. This perception often leads to conflict, on both social and legal fronts, as these structures react defensively to preserve the status quo (Marx, 1876; Harvey, 2011)

Gramsci's idea of cultural hegemony goes deeper into this by explaining how dominant groups maintain control through shaping cultural norms and values (Gramsci, 1971). According to Mouffe (2018) cultural hegemony operates by establishing an prevailing ideology that marginalizes differing perspectives. It involves upholding and strengthening the existing status quo. This ideology is spread through institutions like the media, education and political systems which work together to normalize and validate the beliefs and interests of the ruling class (Gramsci, 1971). This perspective is crucial in seeing how unconventional behaviors are labeled as deviant and dangerous, reinforcing dominant norms and justifying heavily exaggerated reactions from both society and government. Mouffe (2018) delves into how cultural hegemony influences political movements that challenge the existing order. She asserts that movements advocating for equality, social justice and alternative forms of governance often face obstacles because they challenge the prevailing ideologies. These

movements are frequently portrayed negatively making it tough for them to garner backing or momentum in society at large.

Governmentality (Foucault, 1979) offers a look at how the state asserts its control over populations using a variety of methods and tactics. Schools and workplaces are highlighted as establishments in shaping societal norms, establishing standard of behavior and fostering conformity. Professionals, such as psychologists, educators and medical experts play a role in further defining what is considered abnormal behavior and guiding individuals towards self regulation. The media and popular culture also impact shaping public perceptions of acceptable behavior while also impacting how individuals perceive themselves and their actions.

In the context of sexuality, Foucault's theories illuminate the ways in which power dynamics influence the formation of sexual norms and identities. He argues that sexuality is not 'naturally given', but rather a multifaceted construct shaped by historical, social and political forces. For instance, during the 19th century, the medicalization of sexuality led to viewing practices through a scientific lens and regulating them based on societal norms of normality versus abnormality. This transition was accompanied by the emergence of fields like sexology and psychoanalysis which categorized sexual behaviors as pathologies. Moreover, Foucault explores how both family structures and educational institutions contribute to instilling norms regarding sex from a young age (Foucault, 1979).

By engaging in practices such as confession and self monitoring, people internalize these norms. They adapt their actions to meet societal expectations (Foucault, 1979). Despite the regulation of sexuality, Foucault suggests that there are always opportunities for resistance as both individuals and communities can contest the dominant narratives and behaviors surrounding sexuality.

According to Foucault, "where there is power, there is resistance" (Foucault, 1978), suggesting they are intertwined rather than entities. He posits that resistance influences and is influenced by structures of power. According to him, resistance can manifest in forms from smaller acts of defiance to larger social movements. It may be individual or collective, overt or subtle. Foucault stresses that resistance does not always entail revolution, but can arise from individuals and groups challenging established norms and expectations. By opposing dominant practices, people can shape new identities and perspectives for themselves. Examples of resistance can be observed in institutions like prisons, schools and hospitals where individuals defy institutional regulations as a form of protest. (Foucault, 1978).

Social reactions and media influence

When looking at societal reactions and how the media influences perceptions of a communal living group different theories offer insights into underlying reasons. Cohen's theory on moral panic (Cohen, 1972) provides a foundation for understanding how societal fears can be exaggerated by media and public responses, leading to inflated reactions. Expanding on Cohen's theory, Garland (2008) further explains how certain behaviors and groups are depicted as threats to societal norms, sparking moral panics that influence public opinion and government actions (Cohen, 1972; Garland, 2008). Garland emphasized that moral panics are societal reactions to perceived danger, often sensationalized by the media. These reactions are characterized by emotions, fear and hostility towards the group or behavior considered as deviant. The media contributes to escalating these fears creating a cycle that intensifies the panic (Garland, 2008). Additionally, he talks about the consequences of panics which reinforce prevailing boundaries and norms. In this case emphasizing the traditional family by marginalizing and stigmatizing the supposed threat posed by an alternative living arrangement.

These responses to certain groups or behaviors can be linked to Becker's labeling theory (1963) which explores the societal responses that label certain behaviors or groups as deviant, leading to their stigmatization and marginalization. Goode and Ben Yehuda (2009) build upon this concept by illustrating the role of panics in shaping the social construction of deviance. Similar to Cohen (1972) Goode & Ben Yehuda introduce the term "folk devils" to portray how certain groups or individuals are singled out as symbols of perceived threats. They are portrayed negatively, with their behaviors and characteristics exaggerated to fit the narrative of the panic. Moral panics often involve exaggerations, where the media, public and authorities react excessively to the alleged threat thereby reinforcing the stigma associated with the behavior or group (Goode & Ben Yehuda, 2009).

In order for a moral panic to hold, it requires agreement from the public, media and authorities that the perceived threat is real and is directly tied to the labeled deviant group. This consensus establishes shared beliefs about the nature and seriousness of the threat, providing a rationale for taking action. Moral panics are known for their unpredictability. They emerge swiftly, gain momentum and then fade away over time (Goode & Ben Yehuda, 2009). Nonetheless, the lasting effects on perceptions of deviance can be substantial as the stigmas and stereotypes formed during the panic may persist long after initial reactions have waned. Ultimately, moral panics breed hostility towards the labeled deviant group in how they're portrayed in media representations and often leading to societal and legal responses.

This hostility reinforces negative views of the group, rationalizes harsh measures against them and ultimately further cementing societal norms and values that were intended to be protected during the panic (Goode & Ben Yehuda 2009).

Berger and Luckmann's theory of social constructionism (1966) delves deeper into this by exploring how societal realities take shape through language, media and interactions. Burr's work on social constructionism emphasizes how negative perceptions are formed and sustained through consistent portrayal in the media and public discourse influencing the overall perception of specific groups and behaviors (Burr, 2015). By highlighting deviance and danger in a continuous way, these negative views become ingrained in the public consciousness (Burr, 2015). Public discourse, particularly as portrayed in news articles, but also in television broadcasts and statements from authorities, repeatedly emphasize certain practices and behaviors as problematic and divergent from societal norms. This plays a role in shaping a collective understanding of groups and actions as threatening to societal values.

Framing theory (Goffman, 1975) proves valuable for examining how media and communication influence the way information is presented and perceived. It shows how the media can shape perceptions and strengthen certain storylines by selectively emphasizing certain aspects of a narrative. According to Entman, framing encompasses four functions; defining problems, identifying causes, making judgments and proposing solutions. This framing plays a role in shaping public opinion and policy responses, while reinforcing moral panic (Entman, 2007).

The concept of trial by media as discussed by Reinier et al. (1978) and further explored by Jermyn (2016) refers to the scenario where media coverage shapes a narrative surrounding a case often leading to a judgment that occurs outside the realm of legal proceedings. This media driven narrative can significantly impact the reputation of the accused and the judicial process sometimes even before the case goes to trial. As previously mentioned, Jermyn also affirms that through reporting, attention grabbing headlines and engaging storytelling, the media has the ability to craft a storyline that influences perceptions of the guilt or innocence of those involved (Jermyn, 2016).

Linking this specifically to the communal living group, sociologists, Barker (1986, 1990) and Richardson (1991), as well as religious studies scholars, Miller (1995) and Wessinger (2000), have argued that the term "cult" carries heavy negative connotations in public and media discourse. They assert that the term is often used pejoratively to describe groups that are disliked or misunderstood by the user, leading to preconceived negative and stereotypical images about these groups before any factual information is provided. Lewis

(2003) notes that minority religions are deprived of a fair assessment once they are labeled as "cults." Wessinger (2000) argues that the term "cult" dehumanizes the members and their children, implying they are deviants, brainwashed, or manipulated by a leader.

Methods

Discourse analysis (DA) is the most appropriate method given the research question, which tries to understand how the actions of the communal living group, and its criminalization, reflect and challenge prevalent ideologies and power systems. DA is a qualitative research methodology that looks at the ways in which language contributes to shaping reality. This approach looks at how narratives are formed, how power dynamics are upheld or challenged, and how society norms and values are expressed (Gee, 2005; Fairclough, 1995). This viewpoint makes it possible to examine how media narratives about the living group were developed to represent larger society issues and power structures.

The research question aims to delve into the complexities of media representation and societal response to the communal living group's practices. Because DA makes it possible to thoroughly examine how media narratives are created and how they both reflect and develop larger societal values and power dynamics, it is especially well-suited for this purpose. This approach fits in nicely with the theoretical frameworks of Antonio Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony, Judith Butler's critique of gender and sexuality norms, and Michel Foucault's examination of power and discourse.

The primary data analyzed for the analysis consists of 177 newspaper articles, conducted from Delpher.nl, between years 1980 and 1987. Mostly, these newspapers consisted information on the specific communal living group in Rotterdam and their criminalization. Secondary data, to gather information on the communal living group and their ideologies, were 23 documents published in their magazine *Rode Tribune* by the communal living group from the years 1974 until 1981 primarily concerning topics such as family, sexuality and community/communal living, which were conducted from Stadsarchief Rotterdam and Koninklijke Bibliotheek Den Haag.

Conducting the DA, language, metaphors, and framing techniques have been analyzed used in the articles. Following, recurring themes, narratives and representations of the communal living group have been identified and examined how the narratives reinforce or challenge existing power structures and ideologies, drawing on Foucault's concepts of power and discourse (Foucault, 1979). In practice, this involved systematically coding the data to identify patterns and themes. For example, coding where the communal living group is labeled as 'deviant' or 'cult-like' and analyzed how these labels served to marginalize and criminalize their practices. Comparing these findings with theoretical frameworks helped to draw connections between the media discourse and broader societal ideologies.

Ideology of the communal living group in Rotterdam

The communal living community in Rotterdam had a unique ideology focused on challenging and reshaping family dynamics and societal norms. At the core of their beliefs was the concept of breaking bonds between men and women by prioritizing group connections over individual relationships. Their goal was to dismantle possessive ties between genders starting from the perspective of valuing the collective over clinging to one person. This collective mindset aimed to disrupt existing power hierarchies within the community through communication and constructive criticism of both negative behaviors observed among members (“Bezitsrelaties Doorbroken?”, 1980)

The group promoted a non-authoritarian, non-traditional approach to raising children. They advocated for a collective child rearing model rather than the isolated structure of nuclear families arguing that conventional family setups restricted children to dependency on a single caregiver, typically the mother, which they considered unhealthy. They noted that many mothers often experienced guilt; despite choosing to have children they frequently felt overwhelmed by them once they arrived. This isolation caused mothers to perceive the first years as struggles, having to handle everything alone with minimal time for personal pursuits (“Vraagstuk Kinderopvoeding Betrekken in de Vrouwenstrijd”, 1979; “Kritiek op Heersende Verhouding Kinderopvoeding”, 1979; “Strijd Voor Goede Kinderopvang Wezenlijk Voor Bevrijding van Vrouwen en Kinderen”, 1979; “Taakverzwaring en Terugkeer Naar het Gezin”, 1981)

The group placed importance on collective child rearing methods, such as utilizing daycare facilities and distributing caregiving duties among members. They stressed the significance of children being raised within a setting where they can engage with peers on an equal level, to nurture their development as independent individuals capable of social interaction and collective living. They believed “the core point of education is to develop children into social beings, into people who do not just conform but rather become independent individuals” (“Vraagstuk Kinderopvoeding Betrekken in de Vrouwenstrijd”, 1979; “Strijd Voor Goede Kinderopvang Wezenlijk Voor Bevrijding van Vrouwen en Kinderen”, 1979; “Wij Willen Dat Kinderen Voor Zichzelf Leren Beslissen”, 1980; “Taakverzwaring en Terugkeer Naar het Gezin”, 1981)

Their worldview encompassed a broader societal critique, emphasizing how the current privatized family system serves capitalist interests by privatizing care and depending on women's unpaid labor. They contended that the entire capitalist exploitation is based on the

fact that reproduction is organized privately rather than socially. This criticism was based on their idea that only societal changes, particularly in beliefs, could remedy the difficulties caused by capitalism forces on individuals (“Bundeling Anti-kapitalistische Vrouwenstrijd Absolute Noodzaak”, 1978; “Kinderdagverblijf Stap Voorruit in de Opvoeding, 1979).

They also critiqued the conventional family for imposing roles and behaviors on children that were consistent with bourgeois ideals and standards, claiming that parents frequently unintentionally instilled oppressive beliefs about gender roles and sexuality. They observed that most parents, who themselves do not grasp societal oppression, instill bourgeois oppressive views about role patterns and sexuality in their children, raising them in conformity with the dominant bourgeois morality. They advocated for a societal effort to socialize education, eliminate the breadwinner model, and combat bourgeois society's gender roles and family ideas (“Kinderdagverblijf Stap Voorruit in de Opvoeding, 1979; “Vormende Moraal Onderdrukkend?”, 1980).

Core of their ideologies summarized in the following quote: "Due to numerous causes, including the structural lack of attention, the dependent position on parents (individual parents, no matter how much they want to, can never meet the diverse needs of children for development and their need for free contact with different people), the dependent position on parents (which leads to forced adaptation and the suppression of children's own inner motivation), the inadequate opportunity to live, interact, and learn to cooperate with other children (which leads to individualism), and the constraints of role patterns as preparation for later positions as breadwinners or caregivers (which hinder proper contact and cause alienation from one's own sex) – due to a series of such causes, compounded by the current education system, children develop in a limited, one-sided, and in many respects, stunted manner." (“Zijn Mensen Die Strijd Voor Socialisme en Andere Menselijke Verhoudingen Voeren Knettergek?”, 1981)

Analysis

1. Tradition versus alternative: tensions between traditional family norms and communal living groups

1.1 Traditional family structures: the established norm

The traditional family structure, consisting of a father, mother, and their children is seen as the cornerstone of a healthy and stable society (Parson, 1951). Newspaper articles from 1983 repeatedly emphasize the benefits of this structure and the drawbacks of alternative living arrangements. For example, an article from that year states, "The divorce virus seems to especially affect young parents who do not feel bound by the traditional norms and values of marriage. ... After the divorce, the single-parent family lives under the heavy burden of household and financial pressures. Without government assistance, it barely survives." ("Kinderen Opvoeden in een Woongroep", 1983). This passage illustrates how the media viewed divorce and alternative family forms as inherently unstable and problematic, calling it a virus. Media views this as 'deviant behavior' and sees traditional family as key contributor to societal stability (Parsons 1951; Smelser, 1991).

The focus is on the economic burdens a single-parent family would face without the support of traditional structures and government assistance, confirming the idea that the concept of 'family' privatizes care and functions as the basic unit of capitalism (McClintock, 1995), eventually equating single-parents to a 'super-sexist marriage' with the government (Tillmon, 1972). This also supports Cooper's (2017) argument that the alignment between social conservative and neoliberal policies makes social pressures and economic disparity on families worse, especially for single-parent homes. Moreover, another article highlights, "The divorce virus gives many young children a neurosis" ("Kinderen Opvoeden in een Woongroep", 1983), reinforcing the notion that deviations from traditional norms were seen as harmful, likened to a virus that disrupts societal health.

1.2 Criticism of communal living groups

The newspaper articles from this period highlight the disadvantages of larger communal living groups with traditional families. "The first groups that tried to raise children together have already fallen apart" ("Kinderen Opvoeden in een Woongroep", 1983) suggesting that communal arrangements were perceived as unstable and unsustainable, confirming the labeling theory (Becker, 1963) being portrayed in negative light, amplifying the deviant label (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2009) and the framing theory (Goffman, 1975) reinforcing a certain

narrative by selectively highlighting a specific aspect, since traditional families also split on a regular basis. Further criticisms include practical concerns: 'Two years ago, the eight parents decided to 'collectively' divorce and then raise their children together in one house.

("Kinderen Opvoeden in een Woongroep", 1983)' The use of quotes around 'collectively' could imply a suspicion of coercion, potentially creating a negative image around communal living groups. The articles furthermore point out several disadvantages, such as: the lack of privacy and increased household unrest. Moreover, "many believe that a child needs one central figure – usually the mother – for the first few years" ("Kinderen Opvoeden in een Woongroep", 1983) confirming that society still seeks fixed categories (women) and the gender performativity existing in society (Butler, 1990).

1.3 Collective child-rearing: communal living

The communal living group in Rotterdam introduced a system of collective child-rearing, where multiple adults shared responsibility for the children. Reflections from the group members highlight the benefits and personal relief found in communal living. One female member noted, "Every weekend we got together with the children. The children loved it. I could better distance myself from my own child when there were other children around." (Algemeen Dagblad, 1983). This communal approach provided emotional and logistical support, as another female member mentioned, "If we all took care of the children together, you wouldn't have to fear being left alone with the care for your child." (Algemeen Dagblad, 1983). These quotes are in line with liberating women from the sole burden of raising a child (Friedan, 1963) and capitalist patriarchy (Firestone 1970; Gordon, 1969). The latter source also clarifies how, in practice, care is privatized by the concept of 'family' (McClintock, 1995).

A female member further elaborates, "When I got married and wanted a child, we moved to a single-family house. However, I couldn't handle the 'demanding' nature of a child. Even when I was at work, I couldn't get her out of my mind. I was constantly thinking about her." ("Collectieve Opvoeding in Rotterdam", 1983). This passage provides insight into the motivation of parents to participate in the communal living group, namely the pressures and demands of parenthood in a traditional family, especially for women/mothers. 'I was constantly thinking about her' can also be read as 'I was forced to constantly think about her' (Friedan, 1963). Furthermore, the same member quotes "The divorce, which actually threatened in each of our families, became less frightening" ("Collectieve Opvoeding in

Rotterdam”, 1983) limiting chances for perpetuating poverty more present in the nuclear family (Olufemi, 2021).

2. Criminalization and sensationalization of the communal living group in Rotterdam

2.1 Criminalization by the State: accusations of sexual abuse

In late April 1985, reports emerged that seven adults from a communal living group in Rotterdam were suspected of having sexual relations with their children (“Gevecht Om Kinderen te Zien”, 1985). On April 27, two caregivers from the communal living group were arrested on charges of indecency with minors, and six of their children on Schiebroekselaan in Rotterdam were placed under the supervision of the Child Protection Council (“Pleegden Communeleden Ontucht met Kinderen?”, 1985; “Inval in Commune: Man en Vrouw in Cel Voor Ontucht”, “Commune-ouders Eisen Kinderen Terug”, 1985). These actions were based on multiple witness statements that led the judiciary to suspect that children had become victims of sexual exploitation within the communal living group (“Pleegden Communeleden Ontucht met Kinderen?”, 1985; “Commune-ouders Eisen Kinderen Terug”, 1985).

The situation escalated on May 1, when the Rotterdam Youth and Vice Police arrested two more parents from the communal living group on charges of indecency with minors. They were released later that day. (“Opnieuw Twee Arrestaties in Zaak Ontucht”, 1985; “Opnieuw Arrestaties Voor Ontucht”, “Nieuwe Arrestaties Woongroep Wegens Ontucht Kinderen”, 1985). Deprived of their familiar environment and subjected to intense interrogations, the children’s trust in adults was severely damaged. They were taken from school and placed in a children's home without being fully informed of the reasons, leading to distress and confusion (“De Overval op de Woongroep Voorheen KEN”, 1985). Despite this, the Child Protection Council decided to return the children home, albeit under formal guardianship, acknowledging that the ongoing situation was detrimental to both the children and their parents. Spokesperson Schellenberg stated, “We take the complaint of the judiciary seriously, but what materialized over the week was not of such a nature that we could justify keeping the children away from home longer. The situation escalated, and that was not good for the children” (“Kinderbescherming Ontkent Instemming”, 1985).

Further complications arose when it was revealed that the Child Protection Council had not been formally informed about the planned raid, contradicting earlier claims by the Minister of Justice (“Kinderbescherming Ontkent Instemming”, 1985; “Inval Woongroep Pure Verrassing”, 1985; “Raad Ontkent Verklaring Korthals Altes”, 1985). The Minister later

offered apologies, stating that only informal contact had occurred between the prosecutor and a staff member of the Child Protection Council (“Minister Biedt Excuus Aan Voor Antwoorden Over Zaak-woongroep”, 1985). The judiciary ignored expert reports that contradicted the prosecution’s narrative, underscoring the biases at play (“Bezwaarschrift Tegen Vervolging Leden Woongroep Afgewezen”, 1986). Despite the lack of substantial evidence, the aggressive stance taken by the state highlighted the societal resistance to non-traditional family structures and emphasized the power dynamics in maintaining conventional norms regarding family and sexuality norms.

2.2 The raid and arrests

On April 27, 1985, six children from a communal living group in Schiebroekselaan in Rotterdam were taken into custody by the Child Protection Council following the arrest of two caregivers on suspicion of indecency (27/4/1985 HVV; 29/4/1985 LD). The children were placed in a children’s home on the orders of the public prosecutor (“Arrestatie in Commune Wegens Ontucht”, “Leden Commune Verdacht van Ontucht met Kinderen”, 1985; “Woongroepen Naar Rechter Na Aanhouding Twee Leden”, 1985; “Woongroep: ‘Geen Ontucht’”, 1985; “Communeleden Wegens Ontucht Aangehouden”, “Commune-ouders Eisen Kinderen Terug”, 1985; “Gevecht Om Kinderen te Zien”, 1985; “KEN Weer in Opspraak”, 1985; “Voorarrest Verlengd van Communeleden in Rotterdam”, 1985; “Voorarrest van Leden Commune Wordt Verlengd”, 1985; “Ouders Woongroep Eisen in Kort Geding Bezoekrecht Kinderen”, 1985; “Woongroepen: Politie Kan Ontucht Toch Nooit Bewijzen”, 1985; (“Opnieuw Arrestaties Voor Ontucht”, 1985).

The children were taken without the parents' knowledge (“‘Iedereen Voelt Zich Hier Voor Elkaar Verantwoordelijk’”, 1985). This act of separating children from their parents, without notification, reflects a paternalistic approach by the state, asserting control over the perceived welfare of the children. They were taken from school and placed in a children's home without being fully informed of the reasons (“De Overval op de Woongroep Voorheen KEN”, 1985). This immediate and drastic action underscores, for suspicion, shows the existing moral panic (Cohen 1972; Garland, 2008) especially when children are involved.

Police raids targeted three-quarters of the communal living groups, involving 25 detectives from the Rotterdam youth and vice police (“Woongroepen Naar Rechter Na Aanhouding Twee Leden”, (“Commune-ouders Eisen Kinderen Terug”, 1985). Detectives forced open four doors with crowbars, followed by about thirty uniformed officers storming

inside (“‘Iedereen Voelt Zich Hier Voor Elkaar Verantwoordelijk’”, 1985). Two parents were commanded out of bed and made to wear police overalls (“‘Iedereen Voelt Zich Hier Voor Elkaar Verantwoordelijk’”, 1985). This aggressive approach by law enforcement highlights the extent to which the communal living group was perceived as a threat to societal norms and values. The search, based on two witness statements, led to the seizure of a significant amount of administrative documents (“Pleegden Communeleden Ontucht met Kinderen?”, 1985; “Voorarrest van Leden Commune Wordt Verlengd”, 1985). The judiciary stated, "We do not rule out more arrests" (“Pleegden Communeleden Ontucht met Kinderen?”, 1985; “Inval in Commune: Man en Vrouw in Cel Voor Ontucht”, 1985). The anticipation of further arrests indicates the pervasive fear and suspicion surrounding the living group’s activities.

The arrests were the result of a judicial investigation that began two months earlier, following publications in a Dutch weekly and statements from former KEN members (“Inval in Commune: Man en Vrouw in Cel Voor Ontucht”, “KEN Weer in Opspraak”, 1985). During the raid, police also seized videotapes (“Woongroepen Naar Rechter Na Aanhouding Twee Leden”, 1985). Both ordinary films and recordings from the communal groups were taken, along with thirty garbage bags full of personal notes, diaries, and photo albums (“Woongroep Zou Ontucht Plegen met Kinderen”, 1985). This extensive seizure of materials reflects an effort to gather evidence that would support the criminalization of the communal living group, further challenging their legitimacy and practices.

An official from the Child Protection Council emphasized, "I do not want to harm the personal privacy of those involved too much. Besides, it concerns children". The public prosecutor forbade the Child Protection Council from disclosing the children's location (“Leden Commune Verdacht van Ontucht met Kinderen”, 1985). This secrecy reinforces the narrative of protecting children from harmful environments, while also illustrating the power dynamics between state authorities and alternative community structures (Lewis, 2022).

A legal representative commented on the raid's severity: "With great display, the police stormed these people's homes. They confiscated all sorts of items, including books and material for a book my client was writing" (“Leden Commune Verdacht van Ontucht met Kinderen”, 1985). The dramatic nature of the raid and the confiscation of personal items suggest an attempt to dismantle the intellectual and ideological foundations of the communal living group.

2.3 Sensationalization and public perception

The media attention shifted dramatically, with headlines such as "Did commune members commit indecency with children?", "Arrest in commune for indecency", and "Police raid on Communist Unity Movement; Commune members suspected of indecency with children" ("Pleegden Communeleden Ontucht met Kinderen?", 1985, "Arrestatie in Commune Wegens Ontucht", "Leden Commune Verdacht van Ontucht met Kinderen", 1985). These headlines set a sensational and alarming tone. Linking the living group to Communism is already a way to deviate them from the norm (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Burr, 2015) and portrays them as a threat to society (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2009). Additional headlines like "Raid on commune: man and woman in jail for indecency", "Living group allegedly commits indecency with children", and "Commune members arrested for indecency" ("Inval in Commune: Man en Vrouw in Cel Voor Ontucht", 1985, "Woongroep Zou Ontucht Plegen met Kinderen", 1985, "Communeleden Gearresteerd Wegens Ontucht", 1985) further intensified the media's focus on the alleged crimes. The communal living group faced a severe trial by media (Reinier et., al, 1978; Jermyn, 2016), with sensational headlines and biased reporting that assumed their guilt before any legal verdict was reached.

Around a month before the raids, suspicions arose within the Rotterdam police after a female member of a communal living group in Tilburg committed suicide ("Iedereen Voelt Zich Hier Voor Elkaar Verantwoordelijk", 1985; "Commune Dolgelukkig", 1985). Although suicide can occur outside of communal settings, this event was used to cast further suspicion on the communal living group's practices, labeling this behavior as deviant (Becker 1963; Goode & Ben-Yehuda 2009) and causing moral panic (Cohen, 1972). The media repeatedly referred to the group as a "creepy sect," with K. de Boer described as the undisputed leader who, along with his brother Puck, ruled the movement with an iron hand ("Pleegden Communeleden Ontucht met Kinderen?", 1985). This portrayal framed the communal living group as a dangerous and authoritarian cult, intensifying public fear and mistrust, confirming the creation of preconceived negative and stereotypical images about these groups before any factual information is provided (Barker, 1986, 1990; Richardson, 1991; Miller, 1995; Wessinger, 2000)

Headlines consistently used the term "commune" to evoke a negative connotation ("Pleegden Communeleden Ontucht met Kinderen?", 1985; "Arrestatie in Commune Wegens Ontucht", 1985; "Leden Commune Verdacht van Ontucht met Kinderen", 1985; "Inval in Commune: Man en Vrouw in Cel Voor Ontucht", 1985; "Communeleden Gearresteerd Wegens Ontucht", 1985; "Commune-ouders Eisen Kinderen Terug", 1985; "Gevecht Om

Kinderen te Zien”, 1985; “Voorarrest van Twee Communeleden KEN Zes Dagen Verlengd”, 1985; “KEN Weer in Opspraak”, 1985; “Van Ontucht Verdachte Communeleden Nog in Cel”, 1985; “Van Ontucht Verdachte Communeleden Nog in Cel”, 1985; “Voorarrest van Leden Commune Wordt Verlengd”, 1985; “Communeleden Langer in Arrest”, 1985; “Overleg Commune en Kinderbescherming”, 1985), exaggerating and sensationalizing the communal living group (Garland, 2008), and portraying them as ‘folk devils’ (Goode & Yehuda, 2009) and consistently framed by media reinforcing the narrative of “commune”, helping to cement these perceptions in the public mind (Burr, 2015). The members themselves rejected this label, preferring to be seen as a communal living group rather than a "commune," which they viewed as pejorative (“Inval in Commune: Man en Vrouw in Cel Voor Ontucht”, 1985; “KEN Weer in Opspraak”, 1985; “Ouders Woongroep Eisen in Kort Geding Bezoekrecht Kinderen”, 1985). The media decided to neglect this and used this term consistently.

The media linked the communal living group to the Kommunistische Eenheidsbeweging Nederland (KEN), a Marxist-Leninist organization (De Overval op de Woongroep Voorheen KEN”, 1985; “Jeroen (8) Wilde Papa Nadoen”, 1985), criminalizing the group by association. This historical connection painted the group as inherently subversive and dangerous. Headlines like "KEN again in disrepute" and reports of the police raids on "collective communities of the KEN" (“KEN Weer in Opspraak”, 1985; “Woongroep Zou Ontucht Plegen met Kinderen”, 1985; “Woongroepen Naar Rechter Na Aanhouding Twee Leden”, 1985; “Inval in Commune: Man en Vrouw in Cel Voor Ontucht”, 1985; “Ouders Woongroep Eisen in Kort Geding Bezoekrecht Kinderen”, 1985; “Communeleden Gearresteerd Wegens Ontucht”, 1985) reinforced this connection. This narrative painted the communal living group as remnants of a radical political movement, suggesting a subversive and dangerous ideology (Marx, 1867; Harvey, 2011). This widespread suspicion and potential for further arrests (“Nieuwe Arrestaties Woongroep Wegens Ontucht Kinderen”, 1985) added to the perception of the communal living group as a broad and systematic threat.

Sensational articles reported that police feared a mass suicide among the communal living group members following the initial arrests, drawing parallels to notorious cults (“Justitie Vreesde Voor Zelfmoord Binnen Commune”, 1985; “Officier Vreesde Voor Collectieve Zelfdoding Bij Inval Politie”, 1985; “Justitie Vreesde Massale Zelfmoord”, 1985; “Justitie Was Bang Voor Massale Zelfmoord”, 1985; “Woongroep Ontzet Uit Voogdij”, 1985). These fears, whether grounded or not, were used to justify the aggressive police actions and the separation of children from their parents. Confiscated materials,

including videotapes, personal notes, and diaries, were examined for evidence of indecent acts, yet officials admitted that much of the material was innocuous, such as recordings of family celebrations (“Ouders Woongroep Eisen in Kort Geding Bezoekrecht Kinderen”, 1985; “Woongroepen: Politie Kan Ontucht Toch Nooit Bewijzen”, 1985; “Justitie Verdenkt Woongroep Slechts van Vrije Voorlichting”, 1985). Despite this, the ongoing investigation and media coverage maintained a narrative of guilt and deviance, confirming the moral panic around the communal living group, exaggerating perceived threats (Cohen 1972; Garland, 2008), framing the group through a certain presentation and perception of information (Goffman, 1975; Entman, 2007), creating a severe trial by media (Reinier et al., 1978; Jermyn, 2016).

A letter from a ten-year-old girl published in the newspaper illustrates the confusion and division the situation caused within families. She wrote: "At home, my father and mother were talking about a living group. The police took six children because they were all playing naked. My father said: serves them right, they shouldn't live in such a crazy group. But my mother was very angry at the police. Then my father got angry because my mother was angry. He said: there must be something wrong, otherwise they wouldn't raid. But my mother said: they can't just take your child. I agree with her. Because we often played naked too." (“Woongroep”, 1985). This letter underscores the clash between societal norms and the communal living group’s practices, highlighting the intense emotions and moral judgments surrounding the case (Garland, 2008).

Legal proceedings continued, with the parents temporarily losing custody of their children (“Strijd Woongroep Nog Niet Voorbij”, 1985; “Kinderen Woongroep Blijven Onder Gezag Kinderbescherming”, 1985; “Kinderen Woongroep Blijven Onder Toezicht”, 1985; (“Woongroep Ontzet Uit Voogdij”, 1985; “Kinderen Woongroep Blijven Onder Beheer”, 1985). Headlines such as "Struggle of the living group not yet over" (11/5/1985 AD) and "Living group children remain under Child Protection Council supervision" (“Strijd Woongroep Nog Niet Voorbij”, 1985) signaled ongoing public and legal scrutiny (Garland, 2008). The Rotterdam court's family chamber suspended the parents' custody rights, reinforcing the state's interventionist stance (“Kinderen Woongroep Blijven Onder Toezicht”, 1985; “Woongroep Ontzet Uit Voogdij”, 1985; “Kinderen Woongroep Blijven Onder Beheer”, 1985).

Ex-members and critics provided damaging testimonials, further vilifying the group. An article in *Haagse Post* cited a former member who described the group's internal dynamics as volatile and abusive: "Ex-members know that friendliness turns into rage, psychological

terror, and violence when you don't comply sufficiently" ("De Opvoeders van Ontucht", 1985). This portrayal fueled the narrative of the group as a threatening cult (Barker, 1986, 1990; Richardson, 1991; Miller, 1995; Wessinger, 2000).

Legal proceedings continued with significant media attention. Articles reported on the ongoing investigation and the struggle for custody and control over the children. Titles like "Despite prosecution, group still fighting" ("Commune Nog Niet Vrijuit", 1985) and "Justice continues to pursue sex misconduct investigation" ("Commune Nog Niet Vrijuit", 1985) maintained public interest and pressure. The parents eventually regained custody, as noted in headlines like "Living group gets parental authority back" ("Woongroep Krijgt Ouderlijke Macht Over Kinderen Terug", 1985; "Leden Woongroep Hebben Recht op Ouderlijke Macht", 1985; ("Ouderlijke Macht Terug Bij Woongroep", 1985)), but the stigma and legal challenges persisted. The High Court's ruling in favor of the communal living group did little to shift public perception, as negative coverage continued. Articles such as "High Court rejects appeal in Rotterdam living group case" ("Hoge Raad Verwerpt Beroep in Zaak Rotterdams Woongroep", 1985) and "High Court leaves Rotterdam living group alone for now" ("Hoge Raad Laat Rotterdamse Woongroep Voor Nu met Rust", 1985) showed the enduring suspicion and criminalization of the group even though the members were acquitted. This supports Goode and Ben-Yehuda's (2009) point on moral panics tending to rise quickly, gain momentum, and then dissipate. However, the impact they leave on the perception of deviance can be enduring, with the labels and stereotypes generated during the panic persisting long after the immediate reaction has subsided.

3. Discourse of morality and moralism

3.1 The moralism of the established order

From the first accusations in 1985, the media employed a rhetoric that portrayed the communal living group as a threat to the moral and ethical order of society. The police investigation included detailed logs of alleged sexual activities between parents and children, extracted from the children's statements without considering non-verbal cues or the context of the interactions. This meticulous yet contextually flawed documentation further demonized the communal living group's practices ("Seksueel Aanraken Verlengstuk Opvoeding", 1985; "In Dossier Woongroep Geen Bewijs", 1985). The process-verbal contained explicit descriptions of supposed sexual activities, lacking the necessary nuance to understand the nature of these interactions, often led to misinterpretations driven by moral panic ("Seksueel Aanraken Verlengstuk Opvoeding", 1985; "Leden Woongroep Vervolgd Na Ontucht met

Kinderen”, 1986) relating to Cohen and Garland on media-exaggeration (Cohen 1972; Garland, 2008).

The articles repeatedly emphasized the moral deviations of the communal living group compared to prevailing norms. Gerding's assertion that the children were threatened with "physical or moral ruin" provided a legal justification for removing them from their parents, framing the communal living group as a danger to children's wellbeing (“Arrestatie in Commune Wegens Ontucht”, 1985; “Leden Commune Verdacht van Ontucht met Kinderen”, 1985; “Inval in Commune: Man en Vrouw in Cel Voor Ontucht”, 1985; “Communeleden Gearresteerd Wegens Ontucht”, 1985; “Voorarrest Verlengd van Communeleden in Rotterdam”, 1985; “Justitie Was Bang Voor Massale Zelfmoord”, 1985). This sentiment was echoed throughout various reports, reinforcing the narrative of moral peril. Gerding further stated that two months of judicial investigation had only strengthened suspicions, particularly regarding allegations of indecency with minors (“Woongroepen Naar Rechter Na Aanhouding Twee Leden”, 1985; “Woongroep Zou Ontucht Plegen met Kinderen”, 1985; “Woongroep: ‘Geen Ontucht’”, 1985; “De Overval op de Woongroep Voorheen KEN”, 1985).

The media's language consistently highlighted the perceived moral deviance of the group. Terms like "moral manipulation" were used to describe the parents' actions, suggesting an intentional corruption of the children's innocence (“Woongroep Zou Ontucht Plegen met Kinderen”, 1985). Gerding noted that the offenses involved more than just innocuous activities like showering together, implying severe misconduct without providing substantial evidence (“Commune-ouders Eisen Kinderen Terug”, 1985). Gerding's reassurance that the children were now in the care of experts, including a pedagogue, implied that their prior environment had been inadequate (“Van Ontucht Verdachte Communeleden Nog in Cel”, 1985).

Reports detailed accusations of intimate and inappropriate actions, such as touching breasts and genitals, which intensified the moral panic (“Opnieuw Twee Ouders Uit Woongroep van Ontucht met Kinderen Verdacht”, 1985). Even the communal living group's attempts to explain their behavior, like the instance where K. de Boer described a sexual encounter witnessed by children during a vacation, were used to paint them as morally corrupt (“Justitie Verdenkt Woongroep Slechts van Vrije Voorlichting”, 1985), supporting Foucault's (1979) analysis on sexuality; how the family unit and educational systems propagate sexual norms by socializing individuals from a young age. This is also a great example where social conservatives have impacted education by advocating for curricula that uphold values such as

abstinence ce-only sex education, marginalizing those from diverse backgrounds, in this case the children from the communal living group (Cooper, 2017). They also claimed a strict hierarchy within the group, particularly criticizing K. de Boer for his supposedly superior attitude (“‘Iedereen Voelt Zich Hier Voor Elkaar Verantwoordelijk’”, 1985). This narrative suggests that dominant forces arise in communal living groups, criminalizing a dynamic also very often seen in nuclear families. It supports Wessinger’s (2000) argument in dehumanizing the members and their children, as if they were being manipulated by a leader, even when they try multiple times to debunk this issue through the media.

Comparisons to a cult and the suggestion of a "Bolshevik vanguard" mentality further alienated the group from societal norms (“De Overval op de Woongroep Voorheen KEN”, 1985; “Zedemeesteren Aan de Schiebroekselaan?”, 1985). The group was depicted as ideologically extreme, with their collective approach to child-rearing and intimate relationships positioned as threats to societal values. Sarcastic undertones in media reports trivialized their ideals, portraying their efforts at creating a new societal model as delusional and dangerous (Zedemeesteren Aan de Schiebroekselaan?”, 1985). Foucault (1979) provides a critical lens to understand these events. Foucault argued that Western society’s understanding of sexuality is predominantly medicalized, focusing on disease and deviation while reinforcing moral norms. This perspective is evident in the state's handling of the communal living group, where moral judgments overshadowed empirical research suggesting minimal harm from such interactions. The panic induced by these moral judgments led to severe actions against the communal living group, reflecting deeper societal anxieties about sexuality and family.

3.2 Fear of destabilizing traditional norms

The discourse on morality and moralistic views mirrored societal concerns about the destabilization of family values and sexual norms. Inquiries and legal proceedings like those led by prosecutor R. Van der Hoeven focused on the unconventional child rearing methods of the group, which aroused suspicion and were linked to moral corruption. Van der Hoeven remarked that despite the parents’ assertions of following parenting approaches he saw it as a question of impropriety (“Opnieuw Twee Arrestaties in Zaak Ontucht”, 1985). This sentiment was seconded by attorney Mr. Daalder, who underscored that there was an issue with the living community’s way of life (“‘Wij Houden Allemaal van Onze Kinderen’”, 1985). The language of moralism was also evident in reports depicting the communal living group as authoritarian and ‘cult like’ where members were purportedly indoctrinated to sever

individual relationships (“Woongroepen Naar Rechter Na Aanhouding Twee Leden”, 1985) relating to Wessinger’s take on so-called ‘cults’, dehumanized by the largest part of society, implying they are deviant, brainwashed and manipulated (Wessinger, 2000).

The established order perceived the groups’ practices of shared child rearing practices and open sexual education as a protest to traditional family structures. Reports frequently emphasized the groups acceptance of love and collective divorces as signs of their departure from societal standards (“‘We Willen Kinderen Niet met Sexuele Taboes Opvoeden’”, 1985; “Jeroen (8) Wilde Papa Nadoen”, 1985). The community was labeled deviant (Becker, 1963) leading to their marginalization and stigmatization (Garland, 2008). Reports discussed the controversy surrounding sex education in Sweden drawing comparisons to the practices of the communal living group and questioning whether such openness was appropriate for young children (“Justitie Vreesde Voor Zelfmoord Binnen Commune”, 1985). These concerns were part of a debate about educational freedom and protecting children’s innocence.

Members of the living group defended their practices by stating that they aimed to challenge taboos and create a more open and loving environment for their children (“Leden Woongroep Vervolgd Na Ontucht met Kinderen”, 1986). However, the dominant societal view, as portrayed in the media, remained doubtful and critical emphasizing the perceived risks of deviating from traditional norms (“Vraagtekens Bij Aanpak Rotterdamse Woongroep”, 1985). This fear of destabilization highlighted a resistance to the living groups ‘family abolition project’ showing how their alternative lifestyle challenged deeply ingrained ideologies and power structures in capitalist society (Gramsci, 1971; Cooper, 2017; Mouffe, 2018).

4. Resistance against marginalization

4.1 Resistance against the conservative morality of the established order

The communal living group saw their way of raising children and their lifestyle as a challenge to the morals of the established society. They openly believed that their child rearing methods, focused on being open and honest about sexuality, were a break from traditional norms. One member expressed, “We raise our children with freedom and talk openly about sexuality ” indicating their dedication to breaking down taboos (“Woongroep Zou Ontucht Plegen met Kinderen”, 1985). This perspective sharply contrasted with the prevailing norms that the group criticized as outdated and controlling. They advocated for giving straightforward answers to their children’s questions about sexuality aiming to remove

the mystery surrounding the topic and incorporate it into the broader context of love and relationships. This approach was based on the belief that understanding sexuality was crucial for developing loving relationships. The members emphasized their philosophy; "We all deeply care for our children. We usually answer their questions on sexuality openly. Our approach is guided by their need for information. This doesn't mean we promote sexuality among them or with parents. But we intentionally avoid keeping it a secret. Any psychologist would affirm that our kids comprehend that expressing love involves showing kindness to one another" ("Wij Houden Allemaal van Onze Kinderen", 1985).

One mother articulated the group's principles, stating, "For us, sexuality is a way to express feelings of love and involvement with each other, and this is how we talk about it with our children" ("Woongroepen: Politie Kan Ontucht Toch Nooit Bewijzen", 1985). She further explained that they discuss all aspects of their relationships openly with their children, ensuring that conversations about sexuality are age-appropriate and driven by the children's curiosity ("Woongroepen: Politie Kan Ontucht Toch Nooit Bewijzen", 1985). "We want our children to learn that sexuality is about being kind and loving to each other, that it is something very intimate between two people. We don't want to saddle them with a double standard. Boys should also be able to be affectionate and tender, and girls should not be raised with sexual taboos" ("We Willen Kinderen Niet met Sexuele Taboes Opvoeden", 1985). This radical transparency about sexuality was seen by the group as a necessary counter to societal taboos and misconceptions. They argued that criminalizing their approach was unjust, as it was fundamentally about removing taboos and promoting healthy, loving relationships. "Apparently, in the eyes of the judiciary, you are criminal when you consciously handle your love for children and take sexuality out of the realm of taboo and dirty games" ("Commune: Sex Geen Taboe", 1985) trying to break with the complex construct of norms on sexuality shaped by historical, social and political forces, as Foucault analyzed (Foucault, 1979).

4.2 Legal battle for the return of the children

The resistance efforts of the communal living group to combat their marginalization included a legal fight to regain custody of their children. Four communal living groups in Rotterdam took action against the government seeking at the right to visit their six children who had been placed in the care of the Child Protection Council ("Woongroep: 'Geen Ontucht'", 1985; "Woongroep Zou Ontucht Plegen met Kinderen", 1985; "Communeleden Langer in Arrest", "Gevecht Om Kinderen te Zien", 1985; "KEN Weer in Opspraak", 1985). The parents contended that their children had been subjected to severe stress during a three

day period and were subsequently denied any visitation privileges (“Woongroep Zou Ontucht Plegen met Kinderen”, 1985). To support their case, the parents and other caregivers presented statements from the school principal, family doctor and parents of the children’s friends all speaking positively about the groups’ care and environment. A spokesperson for the group criticized the justice departments actions as unfounded, suggesting that they stemmed from rumors and an misguided police search related to child pornography allegations (“Woongroep Zou Ontucht Plegen met Kinderen”, 1985).

In the end, the court ruled in favor of the parents. The vice president of the court in The Hague determined that the public prosecutor in Rotterdam could no longer prevent the parents from seeing their children, recognizing that there was no basis for the accusations and insufficient evidence to support any wrongdoing (“Opnieuw Arrestaties Voor Ontucht”, 1985; “Ouders van Woongroep Mogen Kinderen Zien”, 1985). This legal triumph marked a moment in the communal living groups’ struggle against oppressive power dynamics (Foucault, 1991) and underscored their dedication to their values of transparency and honesty in raising children.

4.3 Public statements and denial of accusations

Besides their legal battle, the members of the communal living group also actively interacted with the media to publicly refute the allegations of indecency and defend their child rearing approach. They consistently worked to correct the narrative, highlighting the baselessness of the claims against them. Publicly, they insisted that their methods of raising children, which involved conversations about sexuality was inaccurately portrayed as criminal. They argued that their practices were geared towards creating a caring environment, in contrast to the accusations of impropriety (“Wij Houden Allemaal van Onze Kinderen”, 1985). They reassured that all interactions were respectful and centered on the well being of the children, disputing the idea that their transparency amounted to legal misconduct (“Woongroepen: Politie Kan Ontucht Toch Nooit Bewijzen”, 1985)

In response to the widespread media coverage and public scrutiny, the group members highlighted their professional backgrounds and societal contributions, countering the existing stereotype of a disorganized or irresponsible ‘commune’ (“Ouders van Woongroep Mogen Kinderen Zien”, 1985; “Iedereen Voelt Zich Hier Voor Elkaar Verantwoordelijk”, 1985). They pointed out that their members included lawyers, educators, and journalists, all of whom were unfairly labeled as child abusers without proper evidence (“Commune Dolgelukkig”,

1985). In their attempt to defend themselves, the group argued that they were, in fact, 'normal,' thereby reinforcing traditional norms. By highlighting that their members included respected professionals such as lawyers, educators, and journalists, they aimed to demonstrate their alignment with societal standards of decency and integrity, illustrating their internalization of 'normal' societal norms (Foucault, 1976) inadvertently upholding and reinforcing power structures even when trying to resist these.

Despite their efforts to clear their names, the group continued to face accusations of being a sect, a narrative they vehemently denied. They stressed their integration with society, unlike typical sects, and dismissed any claims of being politically motivated remnants of the KEN ("Weer Twee Arrestaties in 'KEN-woongroep'", 1985; "Iedereen Voelt Zich Hier Voor Elkaar Verantwoordelijk", 1985). Their statements consistently aimed to dismantle the stigma imposed by the dominant society and to reaffirm their commitment to alternative, yet responsible and loving, forms of communal living and child-rearing ("Woongroep Ontzet Uit Voogdij", 1985) as introduced and acclaimed by many queer and feminist theorists (Kollontai, 1973; Barrett & McIntosh, 1991; Griffiths & Gleeson, 2015; Hardt, 2017; Gilmore, 2020; Lewis, 2022).

4.4 Critical external voices

The question of justice's fairness was raised early on. On April 30, 1985, a headline read, "Justice's Actions Unjust?" ("Wij Houden Allemaal van Onze Kinderen", 1985). This sentiment was echoed by a special consulting doctor, W. de Jong, who withdrew from the case, disagreeing with the prosecutor's approach ("Woongroepen: Politie Kan Ontucht Toch Nooit Bewijzen", 1985). This withdrawal highlighted the ethical concerns professionals had about the state's handling of the case.

Criticism of the prosecutor's premature announcement to indict the parents was also noted ("Officier Voorbarig met Aankondiging Ouders van Woongroep te Dagvaardigen", 1985). The children, unaware of why they were placed in a children's home or that two group members were in pretrial detention, were promised explanations that never came, leading to distressing scenes during visits ("Kinderen Woongroep Wisten Reden Niet van Plaatsing in Tehuis", 1985). The prosecutor's basis for the charges appeared weak, relying on an incident where K. de Boer's children saw him making love and he explained it to them, an act some experts argued was not uncommon in private family settings ("Justitie Vreesde Voor Zelfmoord Binnen Commune", 1985). Several organizations, including the Dutch Association for Sexual Reform, the Dutch Association for the Integration of Homosexuality, and the

Dutch branch of Defense for Children, condemned the police and judiciary's actions. They described the treatment of the children, removal from school, intense interrogation, and placement in a children's home, as disproportionate and akin to government terror ("Commune Dolgelukkig", 1985; "NVSH Noemt Beleid Justitie Rond Kinderen Woongroep 'Terreur'", 1985; "Protest", 1985). This is an example on resistance Foucault (1978) describes, where organized groups challenge and subvert norms and expectations.

The involvement of these organizations emphasized a critical view: "It is disturbing that abduction and extensive interrogation of children by the police are deemed acceptable when it involves a non-traditional family structure" ("NVSH Noemt Beleid Justitie Rond Kinderen Woongroep 'Terreur'", 1985). This critique highlights the visibility underlying bias against alternative living arrangements and the state's role in enforcing traditional family norms. Legal professionals and scholars also weighed in. S. Hogenhuis, a criminologist, criticized the judiciary for neglecting the children's interests during the investigation ("Strafdossier Bevat Weinig Belastends", 1985). Behavioral scientist Mrs. Magnus supported the communal living group's approach to sexual education, suggesting it could serve as a model for traditional families ("Strafdossier Bevat Weinig Belastends", 1985). In the political arena, left-wing parties in the Dutch Parliament labeled the police action an "unacceptable invasion of privacy" ("Strijd Woongroep Nog Niet Voorbij", 1985). The Child Protection Council, which was bypassed during the raid, expressed concerns about the legitimacy of the judiciary's actions ("De Overval op de Woongroep Voorheen KEN", 1985). Reports indicated that the children's testimonies were inconsistent, a consequence of the police's inappropriate handling of the interrogations ("De Overval op de Woongroep Voorheen KEN", 1985).

Further analysis by experts, such as Leiden sexologist Dr. J. Frenken, concluded that no indecent acts had occurred within the communal living group ("Toch Vervolging Voor Ontucht met Kinderen", 1985). The involvement of high-profile experts underscored the contentious nature of the case and the divergence between state actions and professional opinions. The broader implications of the state's intervention were significant. The state's aggressive approach potentially caused more harm to the children than the communal living group's practices ("Vraagtekens Bij Aanpak Rotterdamse Woongroep", 1985). Reports indicated that the police raid and subsequent interrogations inflicted psychological damage on the children, deepening their mistrust of adults ("Deskundigen Gaan Na Of Leden Woongroep Kinderen Misbruikten", 1985).

Ultimately, the court ruled that there was no evidence of indecent acts within the communal living group ("Gerechtshof Stelt Leden Woongroep Buiten Vervolging", 1987;

“Leden Rotterdamse Woongroep Buiten Vervolging Gesteld”, 1987; “Hof Stelt Twee Leden van Rotterdamse Woongroep in Gelijk”, 1987). This ruling did little to alleviate the damage done, as the sensationalism and criminalization had already taken a toll on the group's reputation (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2009). The High Court, two years later, criticized the state's actions, comparing the raid to a bull in a china shop, indicating a significant overreach by the authorities (“Justitie Liep met Inval in Woongroep Als Olifant door de Porseleinkast”, 1987).

Conclusion

This thesis set out to explore how the 'family abolition project' by the communal living group of Rotterdam (1980-1987), and its subsequent criminalization, reflect and challenge prevailing ideologies and power structures regarding community and sexuality within capitalist society. Four main areas were the focus of the analysis; tensions between traditional family norms and communal living groups, the criminalization and sensationalization of the communal living group, the discourse of morality and moralism, and the group's resistance against marginalization.

The media and societal norms have long upheld the family structure as a cornerstone of stability and well-being in society. Scholars like Parsons (1951) and Smelser (1991) have championed this view highlighting the social advantages of family setups while casting a negative light on non-traditional arrangements. Non-conventional family forms, such as single parent households and communal living arrangements have often been stigmatized by the media as elements to a virus. This aligns with Beckers (1963) labeling theory, which suggests that media representations contribute to the labeling of traditional families as deviant. Additionally, the focus on the challenges faced by single parent families echoes McClintock's (1995) argument that families bear the burden of caregiving responsibilities serving as a cornerstone of society.

The communal living group was severely criminalized and sensationalized, especially when false accusations of sexual abuse emerged. The states harsh actions, such as police raids and separating the children from their families and putting them in children's homes, brought to light the panic surrounding the groups' practices. Media portrayals depicting the group as a 'cult' fueled this panic as discussed by Cohen (1972) and Garland (2008). The intense media coverage and public scrutiny resulted in a trial by media (Reinier et al. 1978; Jermyn, 2016) where the group was presumed guilty before any conviction. This criminalization and sensationalism reflect societies' apprehensions and resistance towards alternative family structures reinforcing prevailing beliefs and power dynamics.

The discourse of morality and moralism played a role in how society reacted to the communal living group. The media and the state portrayed the groups' practices as unethical, associating their views on sexuality with immorality. This discourse aligns with Foucault's (1979) analysis on how society regulates and dictates sexual behavior, as well as with Cooper's (2017) view on social conservatives influencing values on sexuality through curricula. These narratives created a moral panic that led to strong state actions further

demonizing the group and reinforcing traditional family values. The fear of destabilizing traditional family and sexual norms highlighted the broad societal resistance to the group's non traditional way of life.

The communal living group strongly protested to being marginalized amidst prosecution and moral condemnation. Eventually, they successfully won the court battle to regain custody of their children, which served as proof of the false accusations made against them. Their public denials of the allegations aimed to set the record and validate the way they were raising their children. The group aimed to demolish social taboos and confronted conservative values with a mindset that embraced sexual openness. This resistance is rooted within theoretical frameworks, such Foucault's (1991) idea of power and resistance, where marginalized people resist dominant ideologies and values.

The results of the study cannot be applied to other communal living experiments or circumstances because it only focused on one group in the study. Moreover, no access was provided to judicial documents about the arrest of the six members of the communal group. Despite these limitations, the study's strength is its in-depth analysis of the Rotterdam case, which provides a nuanced understanding of the interaction between social norms and communal living practices.

The conflicts arising from the clash between family values and non-traditional living arrangements, the exaggerated portrayal and moral panic over the groups' activities and their resistance against their marginalization showcase the relationship among societal norms, governmental authority and unconventional beliefs. Through an analysis of these interactions, this research adds depth to our comprehension of how family arrangements and sexual standards are both upheld and challenged in societies. The experiences of the group living communally highlight the necessity for continuous assessment of the ideas and power dynamics that influence our perceptions of family and community.

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