

## Spatial assimilation of minority groups

### The case of suburbanizing Surinamese in the Rotterdam region

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**Abstract** The recent debate on segregation in western European countries has been framed with significantly different assumptions from those prevailing in the study of minority-group housing segregation in the US. In the public debate in western European countries, segregation of minority groups is increasingly blamed on those groups themselves. In a now popular narrative, they are thought of as sticking consciously together and not subscribing to the aspirations, including housing preferences, of the indigenous population. Using data on suburbanization in the Rotterdam metropolitan area, we show that that economically successful and socially upwardly mobile migrants of Surinamese background show the same volume and pattern of geographic mobility as do the native Dutch. On top of that, they use the same narrative as other suburbanizing groups in the past. Contrary to the now dominant policy view, it seems that class, more so than ethnicity, determines metropolitan residential patterns and the dynamics behind them. Our data do not corroborate the notion that members of migrant groups have housing preferences that significantly deviate from those of the middle-class Dutch.

**Keywords** Suburbanization · Housing of minorities · Segregation · Social and geographic mobility

#### Explaining the segregation of minority groups: US and European experiences

Almost 25 years ago, Kantrowitz (1981) cynically stated that spatial segregation of minority groups in US cities had been documented almost beyond the point of boredom. The same has now become true for many western European countries at the beginning of the 21st century. Not only is there a difference between the US and western European

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countries in terms of timing, but there is also one in the debate on and the analysis of residential segregation of minority groups. In the US, the dominant model is that of ‘spatial assimilation’, which argues that newly arrived migrants tend to locate in the vicinity of their compatriots in central cities for reasons of affordability of housing opportunities and processes of ‘bonding’ (cf. Putnam, 2000) within ethnic groups. In the course of time—of two or three generations—migrant groups improve their socio-economic position, are more included in mainstream society, and assimilate spatially, which means that members of minority groups leave ethnic enclaves in central cities for middle-class suburban residential milieus (Alba, Logan, Stults, Marzan, & Zhang, 1999). This model is mainly based on the experience of migrants with a European background who arrived in the US in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The problem of this model is that it cannot explain the persistently high levels of segregation of African Americans<sup>1</sup>. Although African Americans have also shown clear signs of spatial assimilation since the 1960s (Massey, 1985; South & Crowder, 1997; Wilson, 1978), they have done so less than could be expected considering their average socio-economic position in terms of income and educational level. In order to explain this anomaly, the ‘place stratification’ model was developed (Alba & Logan, 1991), which explains lagging black suburbanization in terms of cultural prejudice of white population groups and downright discrimination by real estate agents, mortgage providers and local authorities (South & Crowder, 1997: 526). The place stratification model does not so much deny the spatial assimilation model, as complement it. Basically, the model argues that African Americans do not differ from other minority groups in terms of their housing aspirations, but that they do differ in terms of the barriers they find on their way to realise them. In other words, both models have the same point of departure: the assumption that minority groups all share the desire for a middle class suburban residential milieu. The recent debate on segregation in western European countries has been framed with significantly different assumptions from those prevailing in the study of minority-group housing segregation in the US. In the public debate in western European countries, segregation of minority groups is increasingly blamed on those groups themselves. In a now popular narrative, they are thought of as sticking consciously together and not subscribing to the aspirations, including housing preferences, of the indigenous population. When it comes to explaining spatial segregation, it is not so much a case of either the assimilation model or the place stratification model, but rather either the assimilation model or what might be called a ‘sub-cultural’ model: the notion that minority groups do not share the same norms, values and aspirations as does the majority of the population and therefore live spatially segregated. In order to understand the emergence and relevance of this sub-cultural model, one has to take into account the specific migration history of western European countries.

### **The recent debate on immigration in western European countries**

In the last quarter of the 20th century most western European countries had to come to terms with the—originally almost unnoticed and even sometimes neglected—fact that they had become nations of immigration. Three different factors were of importance in this respect. First, there were the unforeseen and unintended consequences of the

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<sup>1</sup> Recently, the US is confronted with new groups of immigrants, many of whom immediately settle in suburbs instead of central cities. This is another challenge to the model of spatial assimilation (cf. Alba et al., 1999). For the issue addressed in this paper, this development is not relevant.

recruitment of guest-workers in the 1960s and 1970s. Not only did they turn out to be permanent residents instead of guests, even after losing the jobs they were originally recruited for, but also they generated new streams of immigration by subsequent family reunion and family formation. Second, there was the aftermath of the decolonization process in which numerous people from the newly independent countries used formal and informal possibilities and networks to settle in the former mother country. Finally, there was a dramatic increase in the number of asylum-seekers caused by the rise of violent conflict all over the world in combination with the increased possibilities of geographic mobility.

These three developments resulted in a dramatic growth of immigrants in western European countries, predominantly from a different ethnic background than the indigenous population and with poor educational qualifications. Many of these immigrants settled in cities, more specifically in poor quality districts and neighbourhoods in inner cities and unpopular peripheral high-rise quarters built in the 1960s and 1970s. The settlement of immigrants in these neighbourhoods resulted in a ‘white flight’, which created more room for migrants to move in. Segregation, therefore, is the result of the influx of immigrants and the out-migration of the indigenous population which makes that influx possible in the first place (cf. Burgers, 2002).

Both the painful restructuring of the industrial economies into service economies and the retreat of the welfare state increasingly made immigrants a highly problematic category. Few jobs were available for them, making many of them structurally dependent on social benefits, which were under pressure anyhow. In the view of substantial parts of the population, the different ethnic background of the migrants and their relatively recent arrival did not contribute to the legitimacy of their claims for welfare. As a result, most western European countries witnessed the emergence of right-wing parties, pleading for the closure of borders for ‘foreigners’ and claiming priority for the needs of the indigenous population. “Our own people first,” is the telling battle-cry of the ‘Vlaams Belang’<sup>2</sup>, the popular right-wing party in Flanders, with over 30% of the Flemish votes in the cities of Antwerp and Brussels, and over 20% of the votes for the Flemish parliament in 2004 ([http://vlaamsblok.be/frame\\_inhoud.php](http://vlaamsblok.be/frame_inhoud.php); for the effect of the electoral success of the ‘Flemish Bloc’ on Flemish urban policy see: de Decker, 2004). The events of 9/11, of course, have further alienated many people from immigrants, especially from those of Islamic origin. Apart from being competitors for different kinds of social provision and jobs, they now seem to be a more fundamental threat to the core values and cultural heritage of the European countries, and indeed ‘the western world’.

The mix of their weak socio-economic position and their cultural deviance (cf. Snel, 2003) has produced a new discourse about the spatial segregation of minority groups. Where originally spatial segregation was seen as the outcome of the poor educational qualifications and subsequent labour-market position of migrants in an increasingly knowledge-based economy—the assimilation model—in a number of western European countries a discourse has become dominant which blames the migrants for the fact that the neighbourhoods they inhabit are highly segregated. In many cases this discourse boils down to the notion that migrants do not want to be part of mainstream society: they are unwilling to obtain the necessary skills to qualify for the labour market and deliberately seek each other’s company in certain urban districts and neighbourhoods where they create

<sup>2</sup> Formerly the ‘Vlaams Blok’.

subcultures of deviance, informal economic activities, crime and religious fundamentalism—in sum: they do not want to be like ‘us’.

Compared to the US, most western European countries have a relatively short history of receiving large numbers of poorly educated immigrants. Therefore, they lack the empirical data that could help to decide whether migrants are either unable or unwilling to adopt a middle-class lifestyle. In terms of methodology, it was hard to differentiate in empirical research between the variables ‘ethnic background’ and ‘social status’, because there were few migrants of middle-class status. For the discussion on the problem of integration of migrants it is therefore of strategic importance to focus on potential upward social mobility of minority groups, whenever the economic tide provides the necessary opportunities for that. For the Netherlands, the latter half of the 1990s was such a period, when a booming economy resulted in a spectacular decrease of unemployment in migrant communities, especially the Surinamese (Burgers & Musterd, 2002). Data on entrepreneurial activities of migrants (Kloosterman, van der Leun, & Rath, 1997) also showed an increase in the number of Surinamese entrepreneurs active within producer services. Looking at different types of jobs, one finds a growing number of members of minority groups, again many of them of Surinamese background, active in professional activities which require higher education (cf. Snel, Burgers, Steijn, Leerkes, & Veenman, 2002). Within the Surinamese community in the Netherlands there are, thus, clear signs of middle-class formation, and therefore this minority group is of great interest in terms of the discussion on assimilation of migrants in general.

In this paper, we focus on the geographic mobility of Surinamese in order to see if upward social mobility is translated into forms of geographic mobility which resemble those of the middle-class indigenous Dutch. For two reasons, we have chosen the Rotterdam region as our research area.

First, the Rotterdam region is interesting because of the fact that the city of Rotterdam has formulated a policy on the segregation of migrants which to a large extent is based on the notion that migrants are not willing to assimilate to Dutch mainstream society. Although this notion now is part of a national discourse, it originated in Rotterdam where it is, more than anywhere else in the Netherlands, the cornerstone of local urban renewal policy. This is made clear in the political manifest of the city government ‘Rotterdam zet door’ (‘Rotterdam carries on’), which argues, among other things, that the influx of migrants from Third World Countries should be controlled and stopped in certain already strongly segregated districts and neighbourhoods. Especially for Rotterdam, therefore, it is interesting to see if the economically prosperous period of the late 1990s did result in an assimilation of migrants, above all in terms of geographic mobility and moving away from the city of Rotterdam, which of all Dutch major cities has the poorest housing opportunities for middle- and upper-class status groups.

Second, we had access to two databases—one municipal, one from the Ministry of Housing—on the suburb Capelle aan den IJssel in the fringe of Rotterdam. These databases contain addresses of people with a Surinamese background who live in the more expensive neighbourhoods and whose previous address was situated in the central city of Rotterdam. At face value, those people—they left Rotterdam for an upscale neighbourhood in a suburb—seem to fit the assimilation model, and therefore are interesting in terms of the motives for their move. In order to really assess the relevance of the assimilation model, the narratives of these people should be the same as those that are told by suburbanizing groups in the past, including native Dutch. Using these databases, we found 18 people

willing to be interviewed at length—some interviews lasting for over 2 hours—on the motives for their move<sup>3,4</sup>.

In this paper, we try to answer two basic questions. To what degree is the upward social mobility of the Surinamese during the 1990s visible in geographic mobility from the central city to middle- and upper-class suburbs in the Rotterdam region? Are the motives of migrants who have left the city for middle- and upper-class suburban areas comparable to those of groups that suburbanized at an earlier stage, such as the indigenous Dutch who have left the city since the 1970s or minority groups in the US?

In section “Members of minority groups leaving Rotterdam for the suburban fringe”, we present statistical data on migrants from a Surinamese background who have left the city of Rotterdam. In section “The motives for leaving Rotterdam and seeking a suburban existence”, we present findings from the in-depth interviews with migrants who have left the city and settled in more expensive neighbourhoods of Capelle aan den IJssel, close to the city of Rotterdam. The last section concludes this contribution by addressing the issue of assimilation and the expectations about other minority groups not (yet?) as successful as the Surinamese.

### Members of minority groups leaving Rotterdam for the suburban fringe

As we noted before, the US has a relatively long experience not only of in-migration, but also of suburbanization. Palen (1995) has shown that notwithstanding the fact that in the mid 1990s one of every three blacks in the US living in a metropolitan area was a suburban resident, the popular assumption remained that suburbanites, by definition, were pale skinned. No doubt, this popular assumption holds true for the Netherlands as well. What about the facts?

In 1992, 23,460 people—that is about 4% of the total population—left Rotterdam and 28,510 people moved in. Of all those who left, about one-third (7,428 persons) moved to one of the municipalities in the suburban fringe of Rotterdam. In 2002, 32,530 people, which amounts to almost 5.5% of the total population, moved out of Rotterdam while 32,168 moved in. Again, about one third of those who left settled in the suburban fringe of Rotterdam and did not leave the region. So roughly during the last decade of the 20th century, the suburban fringe showed stability in terms of its attractiveness for people leaving the city of Rotterdam.

In 1992, 80% of all the people who left for a suburb in the Rotterdam region—almost 6,000 persons—were either of Dutch origin or from other rich countries. In 2002, the percentage had decreased to 60. In the same period, the number of members of minority groups moving from Rotterdam to one of its suburbs doubled. So behind the stability of attractiveness of the suburban fringe—a constant of one-third of those leaving Rotterdam settling there—there is an interesting change in the ethnic composition: the share of minority groups is rapidly increasing, coming closer to their share of the total population of

<sup>3</sup> We preferred a smaller number of in-depth interviews over a larger, possibly more representative sample of respondents, because we were basically interested in a detailed reconstruction of the narratives behind the move from the central city to an expensive suburb.

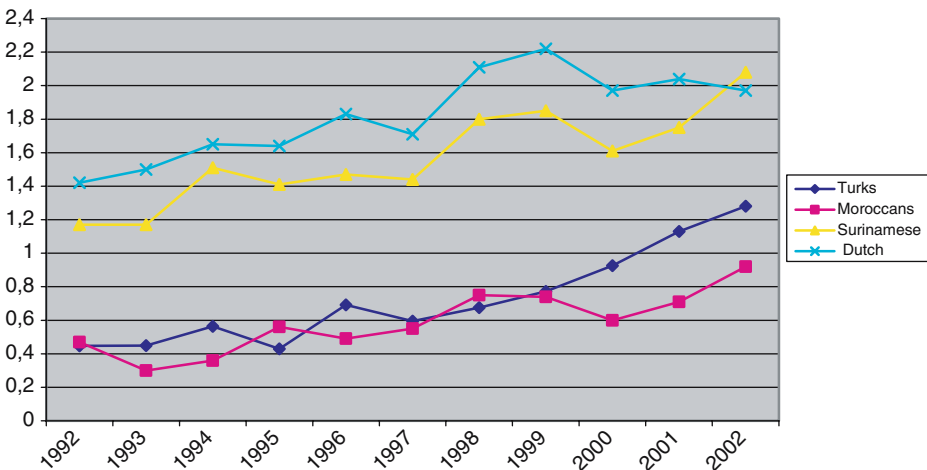
<sup>4</sup> Recently, a study was done on members of migrant groups leaving the city of Amsterdam and settling in Almere (Ministerie van VROM, 2004). For our purposes, data on Rotterdam and Capelle aan den IJssel are of much more interest, because Almere is not really a suburb but a fast growing city. A substantial number of the members of minority groups who recently have moved to Almere live in social housing and therefore are not relevant to deciding on the assimilation or sub-cultural model.

Rotterdam. In terms of suburbanization, this can be interpreted as a process of assimilation. A process of assimilation can also be read from the fact that of all people from different ethnic groups leaving the city, the share which settles in the suburban fringe is converging. In 2002, of all indigenous Dutch leaving Rotterdam, 41% settled in the suburban fringe. For Turks and Surinamese we find comparable percentages, 41 and 37, respectively. Moroccans seem to lag behind somewhat with 28% of all those who leave Rotterdam settling in the suburban fringe.

Figure 1 shows that an increasing share of members of ethnic minority groups are leaving Rotterdam for one of its satellite towns. The data suggest a strong relationship with educational level and labour-market position. Overall, the Surinamese have been most successful in terms of labour market performance, and they now are even more likely to leave the City of Rotterdam for the suburban fringe than are the indigenous Dutch. But Turks and Moroccans are also increasingly leaving Rotterdam for a suburban location, though at lesser rate than the Dutch and Surinamese, corresponding to their less comfortable labour-market position (cf. Burgers & Musterd, 2002).

Of course, the suburbs differ from one another in terms of average household income, the percentage of ethnic minorities, real estate value, the percentage of homeowners, size, et cetera. It should be noted, though, that the average real estate value in the suburbs is in all cases higher than in the city of Rotterdam, and the percentage of social housing (much) lower. In terms of the overall characteristics of the suburban municipalities, a move from Rotterdam to the suburban fringe is a move to a more attractive setting. Take for instance the percentage of non-western immigrants in the suburban fringe, which ranges from 2% (Bernisse) to 22% (Schiedam) and is on the average 8% in the suburban fringe. At 34, the percentage of non-western immigrants in Rotterdam towers even above the percentage in Schiedam.

Not all of Rotterdam’s suburbs are equally popular over time for the different groups. There seems to be a general pattern in which the low-income suburbs remain popular for minority groups while becoming less popular for the native Dutch. But the minorities soon (mostly only a few years later) follow the path of the indigenous Dutch. For instance, since 1996 Schiedam (a low-income satellite town) is becoming less and less popular for the



**Fig. 1** Inhabitants moving out of Rotterdam to one of its satellite towns during 1992–2002, as a percentage of the total group Source: C.O.S Rotterdam 2003; data adapted by the authors

native Dutch. But for Turks and Moroccans this is still the most popular place to settle when leaving Rotterdam. Since 2001 however, Schiedam is becoming less attractive for these groups as well. The lower-income suburbs are becoming more and more 'out of fashion', both for the indigenous Dutch and the minorities.

If we look at the districts of origin, an interesting dynamic can be seen. We made a distinction between districts in Rotterdam in terms of safety, which is one of the most important indicators of the quality of life in the different districts, and as such is also used by the City of Rotterdam in monitoring the city (the 'safety index'). We selected the six most unsafe and the five safest districts using data for 2002 and then looked at the dynamics of migration from those districts to the suburban fringe between 1992 and 2002.

Table 1 is interesting in terms of the dynamics it shows. For the indigenous Dutch, there are no differences between the selected districts: they are at the same level in 2002 and they were at the same level in 1992. There is an increase in the share of people moving from those districts to the suburban fringe. In general, the Surinamese have caught up with the indigenous Dutch for the unsafe areas and even surpassed them in the safe districts, where the share of those moving to the suburbs more than tripled. The safe districts are the wealthier districts, which means that the more successful (in terms of residence) Surinamese are moving in rapidly growing numbers from the city to the suburban fringe.

In the next section, we will present the reasons given for moving to the suburban fringe by Surinamese who have settled in Capelle aan den IJssel, a middle- and upper-class suburb directly bordering the City of Rotterdam.

### The motives for leaving Rotterdam and seeking a suburban existence

When leaving Rotterdam for the suburban fringe, most people move to a large or middle-sized, middle-income satellite town. Most popular for both the native Dutch and the Surinamese is Capelle aan den IJssel. Capelle is a middle-income satellite town of which the number of inhabitants doubled between 1972 and 2003 to a total of 65,229 inhabitants—more than one-tenth the size of Rotterdam. In the 1970s Capelle was designated by the national government as one of a set of so-called 'growth centres': relatively small settlements close to the main cities which were allowed to grow at a fast pace. The idea was that although suburbanization could not be stopped, it actually could be—literally—directed or channelled by choosing a limited number of places in the vicinity of the main Dutch cities where people leaving for a suburban environment could settle.

Like so many suburban locations in the Randstad, Capelle's economy is heavily service-orientated, especially in the form of a fast growing ITC sector. The population is rather young, and about 11% of the population consists of members of minority groups—as opposed to 34% in the City of Rotterdam, as we mentioned before. Real estate value is significantly higher than in Rotterdam, and the appreciation of Capelle neighbourhoods is

**Table 1** Percentage of Surinamese and indigenous Dutch leaving for the suburban fringe from safe and unsafe districts

	Surinamese		Indigenous Dutch	
	1992	2002	1992	2002
Unsafe	1.2	2.1	1.7	2.2
Safe	0.8	2.9	1.7	2.2



much better than in Rotterdam: none of the neighbourhoods failed to be up to the mark (Oostveen, 2003). Capelle is green, safe, and quiet. Interestingly enough, a quarter of the population of the newly built upscale neighbourhood ‘Fascinatio’, consists of members of minority groups, almost two-thirds of them of Surinamese origin. The housing stock represents the Dutch utopian residential image: low density, red brick, ample room to park two cars, tiled roofs, a green and safe environment for children. Only the striking occurrence of satellite antennas—in the popular imagination the very emblem of deprived and ethnically segregated neighbourhoods—betrays the presence of substantial numbers of non-indigenous Dutch residents.

For a more detailed inquiry into the motives and narratives of successful members of minority groups we interviewed a small number<sup>5</sup> of Surinamese people who left Rotterdam during the period 1992–2002 for a suburban residence in Capelle aan den IJssel. Almost all (17 out of 18) of the Surinamese we interviewed are living in new, low-rise dwellings in quiet neighbourhoods with many families with small children. Almost all (16 out of 18) are homeowners. Without exception they all work and earn average (€29,000 per year before taxes) or above-average incomes. Couples usually have two jobs (fulltime or part-time). The main aim of the interviews, as we stated before, was to see if the reasons for moving out of the city were the same as those known from suburbanizing indigenous Dutch. If assimilation of successful minority groups actually takes place, one would not only expect suburbanization to increase, but for this to happen for the same or comparable reasons.

In the literature—both Dutch and American—on motives for suburbanization at least three different complexes of reasons for seeking suburban residence are mentioned (Brunt, 1974; Ministerie van VROM, 2004; Nivola, 1999; Palen, 1995; Saal, 1972; Stein, 1960). One is the availability of a specific type of dwelling that is relatively scarce in a city. That can either be a house with a garden, possibly detached or semi-detached, or an owner-occupied house, or both. The main reason to move is not so much fleeing the city, but getting a preferred housing type (Saal, 1972). The second complex of reasons is a preference for a quiet, small-scale environment, where one expects to be embedded in a community of people with the same views and ideas. In this narrative, the city is seen as a fragmented, ‘cold’ and disintegrated society, where a sense of community is lacking (Stein, 1960). The third complex of reasons comes close to the notion of ‘flight’ and has to do mostly with the fear of all kinds of threats: crime, deviance, drug use and the like (Nivola, 1999). Of course, the three complexes of reasons can partly overlap, or add up in the decision-making of individuals and households. All three complexes of motives are present in the narratives of Surinamese people we interviewed. The motives for the move to Capelle aan den IJssel were asked for in open, unstructured interviews. The three categories of motives known from research among suburbanizing native Dutch were not simply presented to our Surinamese respondents as simple possibilities to choose from or to react to. Open questions were used in order to prevent the possibility of a convergence of answers as a result of the method of data collection we used.

Asked for their motives for leaving Rotterdam, the interviewees responded that the lack of owner-occupied and low-rise dwellings was an important one:

We didn’t even look for a proper house in Rotterdam. If you want to buy a house there, you need to be really rich.

Respondent age 44

<sup>5</sup> As already indicated, we have interviewed 18 people; 4 of them had already participated in an earlier research about the needs and wishes of housing (Woningbehoefte onderzoek 2002).



We were forced to search outside Rotterdam because the quiet neighbourhoods in Rotterdam were far too expensive for us.

Respondent age 43

There aren't any single-family homes, and if there are any, they are too old.

Respondent age 41

We wanted a single-family home, but there aren't any.

Respondent age 29

A substantial part of the suburbanization of the indigenous Dutch in the late sixties and early seventies of the 20th century has been explained as motivated more by a preference for a specific type of dwelling and not as much by flight from the city (cf. Saal, 1972). This motive is clearly recognizable in the narratives of the Surinamese who left Rotterdam for Capelle. Rotterdam lacks owner-occupied, low-rise dwellings. Those dwellings are either too expensive or too old and poor of quality in the city of Rotterdam.

On top of that, neighbourhoods in the city offer too little space for small children or are unsafe because of too much traffic:

Take the pavement, for example. You don't want to let your kids play there; it is 3 or 4 meters wide. They can't play safe there. In Suriname we used to have lots of space around our house.

Respondent age 45

We wanted to have a quiet neighbourhood with other children so my kid wouldn't have to check for cars ten times before she crosses a road'.

Respondent age 43

But also the second complex of motives plays a role in the geographic mobility of the interviewees: a quiet and spacious environment, living next to people whom one knows personally and who display the same lifestyle:

If I compare Rotterdam with 'the old days', it has become even more crowded. Maybe it's because I'm older now, but I'm always glad to be back home in Capelle.

Respondent age 47

I have a lot of contact with my neighbours. Our kids play at their house and vice versa. In the summer we like to sit at the playground here, to talk and have a cup of coffee and stuff like that. In my old neighbourhood everyone kept to themselves.

Respondent age 43

Rotterdam has turned into a concrete jungle. There used to be many parks, and it was much greener, Rotterdam has changed a lot.

Respondent age 50

Each year we organize a party in our street for about 250 people. So you get to know a lot of people that way. But you also meet people through the friends of your kids'.

Respondent age 47

My contacts in the neighbourhood are all right. If we are barbecuing for example, my next-door neighbour, a Dutch man about 50 years of age, comes and sits with us and has a few beers with us'.

Respondent age 30

You know, people don't talk to each other in the city; they don't have any tolerance towards each other anymore. I am afraid to ask anyone in the street for something should there be any problem.

Respondent age 43

The sense of local community is also expressed by emphasizing that ethnic difference plays no role whatsoever in suburbia:

My contacts with the neighbours are very fine. There are some other Surinamese living here but most people are white. For me, that doesn't make any difference whether they are Surinamese or white. I often drink coffee with my [white, JB/HvdL] neighbour; she has a baby of the same age as mine and she is also of my age.

Respondent age 29

I can't imagine that anyone would say that his or her kid cannot play with mine just because he's black. Hell would certainly break loose if anything like that happened in our street.

Respondent age 47

Also very recognizable among the motives given for the move to Capelle is the third complex of motives we mentioned above: the fear of threats in the city—deviance, crime, et cetera. Many times this motive is brought up, referring to children:

The most important reason for us was that we didn't want to raise our son in that neighbourhood. Some of his friends were very...you know...very bad.

Respondent age 45

We didn't think that Rotterdam West was a good place to raise our kids, so we chose to move out. Come to think of it, maybe we should have left earlier'.

Respondent age 47

They have broken into my car once, which happened all the time in that neighbourhood. The municipality had renovated the entire block, so a lot of middle class families moved in their new homes. But this didn't solve the problem; it only made things worse since it became an interesting place for thieves'.

Respondent age 47

And here a very interesting point becomes manifest in the narratives of the suburbanized Surinamese about their move to Capelle and how Rotterdam has changed since they settled there, one or two decades ago. Our Surinamese respondents settled in Rotterdam at the time that the indigenous Dutch were leaving the city in large numbers for exactly the same reasons that the Surinamese have left Rotterdam during the last decade. The difference is not one of motives, but one of timing. Where indigenous Dutch tend to idealize the city of the fifties or sixties, the Surinamese idealize the city of the seventies:

Zwaanshals [a neighbourhood in Rotterdam, JB/HvdL] used to be a nice neighbourhood where you could just leave your key in the door so the milkman could put your order inside. You'd better not do that now. Here in Capelle we still have that habit, so our neighbour regularly comes to tell that we have left our key in the door'.

Respondent age 50

When we just moved in there [their former Rotterdam residence, JB/HvdL] it was a very safe and nice place to live. You could just walk the streets, and the shops had their products on display outside. You could have taken it all if you wished.

Respondent age 46

The parallel goes even further: when it comes to the question of how to explain the deterioration of the city which made them move to the suburban fringe, they also seem to point at the influx of migrants:

We saw the indigenous Dutch leave and the vacancies were filled by ethnic minorities. The Dutch all left for Spijkenisse and places like that. You could see the neighbourhood deteriorating very fast.

Respondent age 43

I used to live in Rotterdam West. At that time a lot of foreigners were coming into the neighbourhood. They just didn't have the same mentality, the same level as we have. For example, they never cleaned the street in front of their house as we used to do. They had other norms and values than we had. It became a mess.

Respondent age 46

Interestingly, the narrative about the role of minority groups in the process of decay of the central city as an important cause of suburbanization is a familiar one with a small but significant correction on the part of the Surinamese: foreigners are indeed to be blamed, but *other* foreigners.

We are not the problem; it's mostly Moroccans and Turks causing problems in the city. I say: send them back!

Respondent age 35

There is certain degree of anxiety on the part of the Surinamese to be mistaken for those minority groups or members of minority groups which cause problems:

People should stop focussing solely on ethnicity. They should look at aspects of class. Sometimes I laugh my head off when I read the application letters my wife gets every now and then. You sometimes see Dutch women making huge writing errors. Then I think to myself: and they are worrying about us?

Respondent age 49

I think they are polarizing the issue. It makes me mad and it is crap. I went to college here (in Rotterdam, JB/HvdL), I got my degree here, paid taxes et cetera. What do I have to do to get rid of that old stigma?

Respondent age 47

And it is stressed that they hold the same tough policy view on poorly integrated minority groups as large segments of the indigenous Dutch:

If I was forced to live in a less segregated area of Rotterdam and was forced to move out, I wouldn't mind. The more different kinds of people you get in touch with, the better it is. You can learn from others. I think one should live according to the Dutch habits and laws.

Respondent age 43.

## Discussion

In this paper, we have confronted the policy paradigm, now increasingly popular in western Europe, about minority groups with empirical data on suburbanization of socially upward migrants of Surinamese background. This popular policy paradigm is based on the assumption of the ‘otherness’ of minority groups, deeply culturally rooted and only to be changed by negative sanctioning and forced integration. The now much less popular notion of assimilation, the gradual integration—in many cases in the course of generations—in minority groups in the receiving society based on their increasing mastering of all possible relevant skills, rests on the assumption that minority groups basically either have or develop the same preferences and aspirations as members of mainstream society. Deviance of all sorts, in this perspective, is not so much the cause of imperfect integration, but the result (Wilson, 1978, 1987).

Our data on the Rotterdam metropolitan area show that economically successful and socially upward migrants of Surinamese origin show the same volume and pattern of geographic mobility as do the native Dutch. On top of that, they use the same narrative as other suburbanizing groups—as the Dutch—before them did, even to the degree that they also blame migrant groups for the decaying inner-city neighbourhoods, migrant groups other than the Surinamese, that is. Clearly, the economically prosperous period of the mid and late 1990s has made it possible for the Surinamese to materialize their housing preference. Surinamese suburbanization is a delayed suburbanization, as the theory of assimilation would predict it to be. One could expect that other minority groups which have not yet acquired the necessary cultural and economic capital to materialize a middle-class residential pattern will follow the path of the indigenous Dutch and the Surinamese in the future, given that the economic climate will be benevolent to their upward social mobility—all the more so because we know from research (Bolt, 2001) that the aspirations of substantial parts of the larger minority groups are very much like those of the indigenous Dutch. In fact, also among those groups, people are leaving the city for the suburbs, but still in small numbers as we have seen for Rotterdam. Contrary to the now dominant policy view, it seems that class, more so than ethnicity, determines metropolitan residential patterns and the dynamics behind them. Our data do not corroborate the notion that members of migrant groups have housing preferences that significantly deviate from those of the middle-class Dutch.

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