

The Theoretical Concept of the 'Civilising Offensive' (Beschavingsoffensief): Notes on its Origins and Uses

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ABSTRACT: It is over 30 years since the theoretical concept of the civilising offensive (het beschavingsoffensief) emerged from Amsterdam and the work of Norbert Elias. Since then a small but important number of studies, primarily focused on the Netherlands, have applied the concept to various historical civilising projects aimed at bringing about cultural shifts and inculcating lasting habits in working-class populations deemed to be 'immoral' or 'uncivilised'. More recently, a number of UK academics have sought to apply the concept to contemporary concerns related to welfare policies aimed at specific 'problematic' populations perceived to be in need of 'civilising'. These disparate but overlapping UK accounts have neglected the Dutch origins of the concept. This paper seeks to reconcile that neglect in charting the genealogy of the concept of the civilising offensive. In doing so the paper argues that a greater appreciation of these theoretical origins and developments can not only aid a more coherent understanding of the concept and facilitate comparative analyses, but also enable its refinement and development - both as a complement to Elias' theory of civilisation and as a tool for exposing the targeted and stigmatising projects of powerful groups. Drawing on existing studies, the paper also suggests that more nuanced insights on the impact of civilising offensives can be gleaned, and greater understanding accrued, by moving beyond the narrow conceptualisation of them as projects of elites (the established) aimed at less powerful groups (outsiders). The importance of internal pressures and group and peer socialisation relative to civilising offensives are therefore discussed. The paper concludes that the theoretical concept of the civilising offensive offers much potential in understanding group conflict and the role of the state in contemporary neoliberal society, as well as historically.

KEYWORDS: civilising offensives; Norbert Elias; stigmatisation; paternalism; group relations; Netherlands; UK.

1. Introduction

It is over a third of a century since the term *het burgerlijkbeschavingsoffensief* - the bourgeois civilising offensive - was first coined (De Rooy 1979) and the concept subsequently developed (Kruithof 1980). It is, 'of course, derived from Norbert Elias' (Mitzman 1987: 682). Since then the term has been disseminated widely across Dutch society and penetrated political and popular discourse as a means of describing the deliberate, conscious attempts of powerful groups, including a historically paternalistic state, at altering the behaviour of sections of the population and inculcating lasting, 'civilised' habits. So much so that the Dutch Labour Party public intellectual and Professor of Urban Studies, Paul Scheffer, can speak explicitly of the need for a 'new civilising offensive' in the Netherlands (Scheffer 2011).

Recently, in the UK, a small number of scholars have similarly utilised the concept of the civilising offensive in seeking to understand *contemporary*, moralising government attempts at altering the conduct and

behaviour of particular 'problematic' sections of the population (Clement 2010; Flint and Powell 2009, 2010, 2013; Powell 2007, 2010; Powell and Flint 2008; Rodger 2012a, 2012b; Rohloff 2011). This development has coincided with the emergence of a more explicit and overt governmental and media discourse on what is perceived to be a social malaise, or de civilising tendencies, within society and an accompanying state retrenchment with regard to social welfare (processes mirrored across western societies (Wacquant 2008)). The concept has also recently been used in application to historical governmental projects in the western world beyond the UK (Pinker 2011). Much of this recent literature, however, has neglected the Dutch origins and uses of the concept. Furthermore, the notion of the civilising offensive used within this literature is often inconsistent and sometimes lacks a theoretical grounding in terms of the relationship to Elias' theory of civilising processes (2000). This paper seeks to reconcile this neglect through an exploration of the genealogy of the concept of the civilising offensive from its Dutch origins to its more recent application in both the Netherlands and the UK. The paper highlights a varied and diverse usage of the concept in application to a range of social relations in Dutch and UK society in which one (usually more powerful) group attempts to eradicate the supposedly 'un civilised' behaviours associated with another (usually less powerful) group. At the same time it also illustrates some similarities to the UK context in its more recent usage and application in the Netherlands: a cross-national consistency in terms of the targets of, and stated 'rationale' for, the civilising offensive. It is argued that a greater appreciation of these theoretical origins and developments can not only aid a more coherent understanding of the concept and facilitate comparative analyses, but also enable its refinement and development - both as a complement to Elias' theory of civilisation (van Krieken 1989, 1999) and as a tool for exposing the targeted and stigmatising projects of powerful groups. The theoretical potential of the civilising offensive in understanding contemporary social processes is then explored with reference to two examples: recent developments in the broad areas of social policy and 'community cohesion' in the UK; and debates on ethnic minority integration/segregation in the Netherlands. Some theoretical lines of enquiry are set out which, it is argued, can help to elucidate the ways in which civilising offensives have altered alongside wider social processes in terms of their targets and techniques, and which lend themselves to a historically informed investigation of contemporary social problems. The paper also engages, albeit implicitly, with recent debates about the neglect of politics within figurational sociology and 'a retreat into the future' on the part of figurational scholars (Dunne 2009). It suggests that the concept of the civilising offensive can provide a bridge from the past to an engagement with the present.

2. Norbert Elias, Amsterdam and the origins of the 'civilising offensive'

As noted, the emergence of the concept of the civilising offensive can be traced back to the Netherlands. In the late 1970s Norbert Elias had settled permanently in Amsterdam [2][#N2], 'where a whole research school of younger social scientists came to flourish under his influence' (Mennell and Goudsblom 1998: 13). Elias' influence in the Netherlands was hugely significant and extended beyond sociology to anthropology and history. It is from Elias' *magnum opus*, *The Civilizing Process* (2000), that the civilising offensive has been derived (Kruithof 1980; Mitzman 1987; Verrips 1987; van Ginkel 1996; van Krieken 1999): 'a number of Dutch historians and social scientists, especially those influenced by the theoretical perspective of Norbert Elias, present examples of civilising missions in the Netherlands' (van Ginkel 1996: 224).

One cannot adequately summarise Elias' meticulously researched and detailed theory of the civilisation process within the confines of this paper (see Elias 2000; van Krieken, 1998; Mennell 1998; Mennell and Goudsblom 1998). To grossly over-simplify the aspects for our concerns here, the long-term civilising process involves the gradual internalisation of external, social constraints (e.g. the use of violence, or threat of

violence, monopolised by the state) in the moulding of self-discipline. As a result people have greater control over their impulses, which is built into the personality structure of individuals, and are better able to act in a more rational and calculated fashion. This gradual shift towards greater self-discipline is explained by the increasing complexity, specialisation and differentiation in society which serves to lengthen and increase the chains of social interdependency such that 'more people are forced more often to pay more attention to more other people' (Goudsblom, quoted in Mennell 1990: 209). That is, social constraints become self-restraints which act automatically as a second nature. These shifts are inherently linked to nation-state formation and facilitated by the monopolisation of violence enabling greater calculability and forethought as public space is pacified. Put simply, 'civilisation is used by Elias to signify specific changes of social and individual habitus tending in a particular direction' (Fletcher 1997: 177). This process is blind, unplanned and unforeseen; it is a *long-term* process and may not be apparent in short-term perspective. As the civilising process continued from the middle ages, later, the *concept* of civilisation developed through group conflict and competition came to be understood by the middle-classes as the 'self-consciousness of the west' (Elias 2000: 5); as something to be disseminated to the lower classes and to other nations. By the latter period of the eighteenth century:

Anything from trade to education, within which "barbaric" practices could be discerned, came under the province of reform in the name of civilisation, involving the refinement of manners and the internal pacification of the country by the kings. This formed part and parcel of what has been described as a 'civilising offensive' (Fletcher 1997: 9).

The term civilising offensive was first put forward by De Rooy as *het burgerlijkbeschavingsoffensief* (the bourgeois civilising offensive) (1979: 10) and was essentially the Dutch translation of Christopher Lasch's 'forces of organised virtue' (Kruithof 2012; Verrips 1987) contained within his text *Haven in a Heartless World* (1977). De Rooy first coined the term when referring to efforts to improve the lot of the working classes in the Netherlands in the first half of the twentieth century. The concept was subsequently developed and elaborated on by Kruithof (1980). That terminology contained within De Rooy's thesis had stimulated Kruithof to delve deeper and in 1980 he published a paper on the *burgerlijkbeschavingsoffensief* of the Dutch Society for the Public Benefit, 1784-1860. This was the first application of the theoretical concept. Kruithof's important research explored the central position of Protestantism, child-rearing practices and education in Dutch middle-class attempts to create a 'virtuous nation' (1980, 1990). His analysis shows how the ultimate goal of the Society for the Public Benefit - the moral improvement of the lower classes - was tied to the promotion of a national identity (Kruithof 1990). Though acknowledged by Amsterdam-based scholars (Mitzman 1987; Verrips 1987; Van Krieken 1989; Franke 1992; Van Ginkel 1996; Fletcher 1997) these origins have hitherto been neglected by English language academics utilising the concept of the civilising offensive (Flint and Powell 2009, 2010, 2011, 2013; Pinker 2011; Powell 2007, 2010; Powell and Flint 2008; Rodger 2012a, 2012b; Rohloff 2011; Vertigans 2010) and are frequently omitted from more recent applications by Dutch scholars (for example, van Den Berg and Duyvendak 2012; Uitermark and Duyvendak 2008). When referencing the term 'civilising offensive' Anglophone scholars have tended to credit Arthur Mitelman (1987) or Robert van Krieken (1998, 1999) with its emergence, both of whom have contributed significantly to its development, rather than being responsible for its origins. It is therefore important that De Rooy and Kruithof be credited with the intellectual endeavour that has spawned such a flurry of research, first in the Netherlands and later in the UK for without the works of De Rooy and Kruithof much of what followed may well not have come to pass. Indeed, Kruithof's paper (1980) was 'noticed by Dutch anthropologists and sociologists, who were at the time deeply influenced by Norbert Elias' and the publication 'was seen as a further elaboration on Elias' theory of the civilisation process' (Kruithof, 2012). Thus, as Verrips notes:

The term 'civilizing offensive' is used by Dutch sociologists and historians to refer to a wide range of phenomena, from nineteenth-century bourgeois efforts to elevate the lower classes out of their poverty and ignorance and convince them of the importance of domesticity and a life of virtue, to the oppression of popular culture in early modern times and, in general, "the attack on behaviour presumed to be immoral or un civilised" (Verrips 1987: 3).

That last quote, referring to the general 'attack on behaviour presumed to be immoral or un civilised', is taken from Mitzman (1987) whose paper arguably represents the most comprehensive effort at theorising the civilising offensive. In clarifying his usage of the term, Mitzman refers to its Eliasian origins and its use in 'Dutch historical discourse' quoting Frijhoff's articulation of this development which emphasises the focus on social processes, group relations and their relation to wider society.

Cultural historians have by now generally adopted a basic model of cultural change, probably under the (usually unconscious) influence of widely diffused sociological theories stressing the crucial importance of politically dominant groups for the modernisation of society. This model consists of the acculturating (and partly destructive) influence of cultural politics of elite groups upon the life of common people, whatever may be meant by this term...morphological or typological description of the cultural forms and their transformations has been replaced by the analysis of the cultural **process**, of its influence on the social groups involved and its functions in the wider society (Frijhoff cited in Mitzman 1987: 682).

For Mitzman the civilising offensive is 'the relation between, on the one hand, the normative psychology of secular and religious authorities in the period since the renaissance and, on the other, traditional popular mentalities' (Mitzman 1987: 663). Following Kruithof (1980), he explores how authoritative institutions, guided by normative notions of what constitutes 'moral' or 'civil' behaviour, sought to repress and eradicate the 'traditional rural mentality' which was deemed to be 'irrational' and 'un civilised'. Drawing on the work of Muchembeld, Mitzman argues that the folk culture that was the target of the civilising offensive was viewed as primitive. Dependent on nature and remote from scientific progress, this culture was characterised by a porosity of social relations expressing more intimate bonds between ego and the world around it. To the urban and religious elites this culture was at a deficit and in need of corrective treatment.

In his theorization Mitzman, following Elias, seeks fusion between the rationalisation and centralising power tendencies underpinning Weber's sociology, and the psychoanalysis of Freud; the latter considered central to an understanding of individual psyches but deemed to suffer from a 'notorious ahistoricity'. The integration of the two theories was seen as leading to a more coherent understanding of 'the large social-historical concerns' (Mitzman 1987: 663). This stand takes as its starting point four interrelated social processes which have altered the socialisation of the individual to varying degrees. Firstly, and most importantly for Mitzman, is the process of individualization which he sees as arguably 'the major historical tendency of the past 500 years' (Mitzman 1987: 664). Increasing rationalisation and centralised control over 'traditional cultures' have changed the relationship between the individual and the agencies of socialisation - both the family and the non-familial. Over a different timespan - the last 250 years - three other social processes are cited: first, 'the evolution of a disenchanted and goal-oriented modern consciousness'; second, and paradoxical to this evolution, 'the development and intensification of national consciousness'; and third, reconciling this apparent contradiction, the civilising offensive: 'the attack on behaviour presumed by those in authority to be immoral or un civilised' (Mitzman 1987: 664-665). For Mitzman, civilising offensives are a key controlling mechanism for authorities from the turn of the sixteenth century onwards and provided:

a prevailing justification for the suppression of popular culture between 1500 and 1800, motivating condemnations of witchcraft, of the festive violence of the young and of irregular sexuality in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. In the 19th century it took a characteristic form of medical-ethical attacks on masturbation, prostitution and concubinage; in the 20th century, of condemnations of drug use and homosexuality; and, throughout the modern era, of efforts to reform what was viewed as the incurable licentiousness, vulgarity and lack of work ethic of the lower classes (Mitzman 1987: 665).

Thus, writing in 1987, Mitzman charts, albeit briefly, the recurrence of civilising offensives targeted at different groups and behaviours. In this respect the emergence of the theoretical concept of the civilising offensive can be seen as a means of addressing Elias' relative neglect of the attempts by elite groups to reframe conduct and steer 'civilisation' in a particular direction (Mitzman 1987; van Krieken 1989, 1999). For,

If we insist too much on the unplanned character of social change, on its 'relative autonomy', if we overemphasise the 'blindness' of human agency, we run the risk of eliminating it as an effective historical force altogether (van Krieken 1989: 199).

Thus 'the active, conscious and deliberate civilising projects of powerful groups' (van Krieken 1999: 303) could provide a complement to Elias' dominant, blind, unplanned process. Mitzman also criticises Elias' neglect of the popular classes and their *culture populaire*: given his focus on elite conflicts in *The Civilizing Process*, there was little discussion of conflicts between the lower and upper strata of society. The civilising offensive is therefore partially seen as a means of addressing those criticisms by drawing attention to the damaging and destructive impact of elite projects on popular culture. Elias always maintained that the gradual, *long-term* development of societies is both unplanned and unforeseen and, in fairness, it may well be the case that civilising offensives, which are far more short-term than Elias' observations, have little impact on the overall dominant trend. Following Mitzman (1987) it could be argued that the importance of *peer* socialisation has been neglected at the cost of this focus on changes emanating from above. Likewise, van Krieken (1989) laments the lack of attention paid to historical changes in family life and the wider social transformations mediated by these changes (family and peer socialisation are issues returned to in the discussion section below). Van Krieken's argument notwithstanding, it may also be the case that some scholars have neglected 'psychogenesis' and over-simplified the complex autonomy of civilising processes in their accounts, thus giving too much weight to civilising offensives in accounting for long term changes in standards of behaviour (see, for example, Pinker 2011: 109-126) who unproblematically accepts the civilising offensive of Leviathan as a wholly dominant structuring force at various points in recent western history). For instance, Verrips (1987) notes the limited success in her account of a civilising offensive in a Dutch village between 1870 and 1920; and van Ginkel posits that 'the bourgeois civilising offensive has a limited importance in so far as it affects only those who are already receptive to bourgeois behavioural standards' (1996: 237). Other scholars have argued that some civilising offensives have met with relative success, albeit based on a less clear definition of the concept (Pinker 2011). However, regardless of their relative 'success' or overall impact on the long-term civilisation process, such civilising missions *do have clear consequences*, particularly for those less powerful groups on the receiving end.

It is important to supplement, systematically, the concept of civilizing processes with that of civilizing offensives, to take account of the active, conscious and deliberate civilizing projects of

both various powerful groups within societies and whole societies in relation to other regions of the world (van Krieken 1999: 303).

With sensitivity to the Anglophone neglect of these Dutch origins, the next section briefly reviews some typical examples of the use of the concept in application to the historical paternalistic tendencies within Dutch society.

3. The application of *het burgerlijkbeschavingsoffensief*: some examples

A small but significant number of Dutch studies published in English provide valuable insights into the development and nuances in our understanding of civilising offensives. This section focuses on two historical accounts covering the same period of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; and more recent applications in Australia and the Netherlands focused on indigenous and immigrant minority populations respectively. Linguistic inadequacies dictate that this section be confined to English language publications [3] [N3]. Nevertheless, these examples do illustrate some commonalities and highlight empirical and theoretical developments driven by scholars primarily based in the Netherlands. In particular, these examples point to the importance of group relations and we-images in conceptualising civilising offensives; and van Krieken's (1999) example offers important insights into the centrality of ambivalence in that conceptualisation (see also Burkitt 1996; Powell 2007).

Verrips' study of a religiously inspired civilising offensive in the Dutch village of Langbroek between 1870 and 1920 details concerns around the conduct of villagers who were deemed 'not very cautious in their behaviour'. Verrips' historical analysis reveals a targeted offensive in response to specific behaviours such as excessive alcohol consumption, drunken fighting and sexual promiscuity; noting the view of the local mayor who felt that inhabitants 'had no scruples about registering the babies of unmarried daughters as children of the mothers of these daughters' (Verrips 1987: 7). Verrips' account suggests the need for nuance in understanding civilising offensives and she complements her analysis with Elias' theory of established-outsider relations in illustrating this point. Verrips argues for the need to look beyond social and economic differences between the source group and the target group. She shows how new religious denominational we-groups formed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Dutch society and, in Langbroek, religious elites turned the civilising gaze on members of their *own* groups in an effort to distinguish themselves.

One of the weapons in the struggle was the extent of civilized behaviour exhibited by the members of these we-groups. In the eyes of the religious elite, the pregnancy of a Protestant labourer's unmarried daughter harmed the status of the Protestant group as a whole (Verrips 1987: 13).

In this respect the we-image of the 'civilizers' is crucial in interpreting the civilising offensive and suggests the need for a focus on group relations, both *within* and *between* groups, and the power differentials that characterise them. The civilising offensive in Langbroek was ultimately unsuccessful owing to the stronger class identifications of the target population - working-class Protestant villagers - in comparison to their religious affiliations. That is, those inhabitants subject to the civilising gaze of the religious authorities exhibited strong class solidarity and identified more with their Catholic peers than with the religious elites of their Protestant church.

Similarly, van Ginkel (1996) details civilising and disciplining campaigns targeted at the 'degenerates' among the villagers of the Dutch rural town of Yerseke between 1870 and 1914. Yerseke became a national centre for oyster farming and attracted a great deal of in-migration that brought with it changes to the social structure of the community: 'social cohesion and social control withered in a substantial part of the local society. Brawls, drunkenness and theft became part and parcel of everyday life' (van Ginkel 1996: 224). Again, the initiation of the civilising offensive is based upon perceptions of social disorder symbolised by public drunkenness (the number of pubs grew from six to sixteen), violence (including knife-fights and riots during the annual fair) and sexual licentiousness ('the number of undesired and illegitimate births increased' (1996: 231)). Van Ginkel identifies two strands to the moralising offensive of Church councils and local government inspired by Norbert Elias and Michel Foucault, respectively: a civilising one and a disciplining one:

By 'civilizing offensive' I mean the attempts of certain people to influence and change the behaviour and attitudes of others through ideological means. A 'disciplining offensive' aims to achieve the same end, although with different means (van Ginkel 1996: 224).

The more subtle *civilising* offensive is complemented by the threat of punishment as the means of the *disciplining* offensive. Van Ginkel argues that these two distinct efforts formed a 'powerful force in the moulding of morality' (1996, p.224) within Yerseke. In contrast to the case of Langbroek, the civilising offensive in Yerseke did meet with success. A crucial aspect of this success for van Ginkel is the source of this civilising offensive which is 'not only performed "from without", but also "from within"' (van Ginkel 1996: 224; see also de Regt 1984). This perspective draws on Elias' account of status competition in which sections of the lower classes seek to emulate the standards of behaviour of the upper strata which is disseminated through greater social interdependence and integration (Elias, 2000). In a similar vein, drawing on Muchembeld's psychoanalytic historicism, Arthur Mitzman details the *internalisation* of an aversion to popular culture among those members who 'were open to the discipline and education emanating from the dominant elite culture' (Mitzman 1987: 667):

This pressure from within the peasant community explains...the suppression of aspects of the older culture which one labored to repress in one's own personality as well as in the community as a whole (Mitzman 1987:.667).

As well as the relative receptiveness of individuals to the civilising offensive van Ginkel also points to the power of internal group opinion in maintaining and disseminating desired standards of conduct, a process which Elias details in his theory of established-outsider relations, whereby 'blame-gossip' and 'praise-gossip' serve as powerful forces in sustaining group norms (Elias and Scotson, 1994). 'People kept a watchful eye on each other and those who failed to live up to the norms, now accepted by the majority of inhabitants, fell victim to malicious backbiting' (van Ginkel 1996: 235). Thus for van Ginkel the suggestion that civilising offensives are incompatible with Elias' theory of civilisation is a non-argument since the pressures of people and groups on one another are a key factor in the moulding of affects within the civilising process. Rather, civilising offensives occur as a particular phase of the civilising process. Like Verrips (1987), van Ginkel calls for a wider interpretation of civilising offensives; one which moves beyond the narrow idea of powerful groups attempting to change the behaviours of less powerful groups. He argues that *internal* campaigns should also be acknowledged and often accompany top-down civilising offensives. In Yerseke the 'successes' of the civilising offensive depended on an accompanying disciplining mission, greater social integration and

community surveillance (see also Croll, 1999), and a relative receptiveness among those aspiring to bourgeois standards of conduct: 'it was a kind of internal mission' (Kruithof 1980 cited in van Ginkel 1996: 237).

In drawing on the theory of established-outsider relations in their accounts the two historical examples presented above underscore the importance of group relations and internal group processes in accounting for the relative efficacy of civilising offensives. Verrips points to the stronger working-class identifications and we-image of the intended target population, which served to repel the religiously driven attempts at altering behaviour in Langbroek; van Ginkel draws attention to the internalisation of the civilising mission among those already receptive to the bourgeois standards of conduct that the civilisers were attempting to inculcate. Van Ginkel's account is therefore valuable in the sense that it marks out a clear relationship to the theory of civilising processes, with social constraints converted into self-restraints and disseminated internally through group pressures from family and peers (socialisation). As Elias constantly reminds us 'social forces are in fact forces exerted by people over one another and themselves' (Elias 1978: 17). The lasting changes in behaviour in Yerseke detailed by van Ginkel were instigated from *within*; and the *external* offensive driven by the Protestant Church in Langbroek ultimately failed. These examples also support the observation that 'the people we usually see as the object of "the civilizing offensive", the lower orders, occasionally went about civilizing themselves and each other' (van Krieken 1989: 199).

However, civilising offensives do not necessarily have to rely on the receptiveness of recipients for 'goals' to be achieved but can exhibit more barbaric practices. One of the most often cited accounts of a civilising offensive is Robert van Krieken's excellent study of the 'stolen generations' in Australia which investigated 'the systematic removal of indigenous Australian children from their families' (1999, p.297). The firm belief that this policy - similarly instigated in the UK in the nineteenth century when Gypsy children were forcibly removed from their parents (Vanderbeck 2005; Powell 2007) - was contributing to the welfare of indigenous Australian children raises profound questions for van Krieken. Such acts of barbarism in the very name of civilisation point to the ambivalence of the civilising process as 'societies are barbaric precisely in their movement towards increasing civilisation' (van Krieken, 1999, p.297; see also Burkitt, 1996). This notion of ambivalence as a characteristic of the civilisation process is also apparent in accounts of the civilising offensive in the UK detailed below.

More recently in the Netherlands scholars have applied the concept of the civilising offensive to contemporary issues within Dutch society, albeit issues that show similarities with historical precedents in terms of the justification and rationale for such projects. For instance Uitermark and Duyvendak (2008) argue that the contemporary civilising offensive in the Netherlands is increasingly targeted at minority ethnic populations based on a perception that cultural differences are impediments to social integration. Like the historical accounts of Mitzman, culture is still the key battleground but the target is different. They see continuities between the past attention of civilising forces on the working-classes in the period of industrialisation and today's focus on minority ethnic populations. This contemporary civilising offensive, for Uitermark and Duyvendak, is made possible by a strong interdependent relationship between the state and disadvantaged neighbourhoods and highlights a distinction between Dutch and American responses to ethnic minority groups (the latter corresponding to Wacquant's account of ghettoisation and advanced marginality in the US): 'The continuing presence of the state prevents exactly the type of processes that Wacquant deems typical of the American ghetto: depacification and institutional desertification' (Uitermark and Duyvendak 2008: 1490). Similarly, a recent study on migrant populations in the Netherlands has drawn attention to the gendered nature of policy interventions in conceptualising efforts at altering parenting practices as a contemporary civilising offensive (Van den Berg and Duyvendak 2012); a focus which resonates with Kruithof's historical account in which child-rearing and education were central to the moralizing offensives of the Society for the Public Benefit (1990). It is argued that more recent Dutch civilising offensives are

disproportionately targeted at migrant women based on the perception of a traditional family structure among minority ethnic populations which is at odds with that of a modern 'individualized' Netherlands (Van den Berg and Duyvendak 2012: 557; see also Schinkel and van Houdt 2010). These cases provide useful examples of how civilising offensives can be utilised in comparative analyses and also resonate with accounts of government responses to immigrant populations in the UK (see Flint 2009) and beyond. It is to the UK literature that we now turn.

4. From *burgerlijkbeschavingsoffensief* to civilising offensive

One striking aspect of the Dutch use of the civilising offensive is the way in which it has developed from an academic concept used to describe and critique the history of Dutch paternalism and entered into the public imagination. The term civilisation offensive was recently used by Scheffer (2011) in his critique of the failures of cosmopolitanism in Dutch society: a new 'civilising offensive' - with community cohesion, the erosion of cultural difference and ethnic integration at its core - is his remedy. In contrast, the concept is still in its relative infancy within the UK and it is difficult to imagine its prescription as an explicit policy mechanism. Nonetheless, it has been the subject of sufficient attention in analyses of the contemporary 'governance of behaviour' to briefly sketch out some key themes and areas of inquiry in reviewing its various applications. Four policy domains in which the concept has been used in critiquing governmental projects are briefly drawn upon here: social welfare; responses to 'outsider' groups; Scottish sectarianism; and climate change.

Rodger (2008) has argued that recent shifts in discourse and welfare policy in the UK represent a 'criminalising social policy' in which efforts at reform are decivilised in character in terms of an aggressive state retrenchment coupled with a more punitive approach towards 'recalcitrant' individuals and groups: social deviance and 'nuisance' are increasingly criminalised. These shifts are accompanied by a recurring discourse asserting that the post-war welfare settlement has failed and resulted in the creation of an 'underclass', a 'culture of worklessness' among certain populations, and the creation of a benefit culture aligned to particular residential spaces in which 'welfare dependency' has become normalised. Familiar concerns around a lack of work ethic; licentiousness symbolised by the stigmatising of single parents and the problematisation of a lack of male role models (fathers); 'anti-social behaviour' driven by alcohol and drug misuse; and violence (see Clement 2010) point to historical precedents in terms of the rationale. Despite the lack of evidence in support of this diagnosis (see Slater 2012; Wacquant 2008), Rodger (2012b) argues that a civilising offensive targeted at populations on the margins of society is the discernible public policy remedy. Similarly, in applying the work of Elias to successive housing-based anti-social behaviour interventions in the UK, Powell and Flint (2009) argue that a contemporary civilising offensive is apparent in which the allocation and governance of housing is centrally implicated. Their analysis points to historical continuities in attempts at altering the conduct of sections of the working classes deemed to lack the required self-restraint and exhibit an appropriate consideration of others.

UK accounts of civilising offensives have, in a similar vein to debates in the Netherlands (see Uitermark and Duyvendak 2008), also focused on 'outsider' groups. For instance, Flint (2009) details a civilising project against immigrant populations based on assumptions of difference between 'domestic' and 'foreign', and what constitutes a responsible citizen, bound up with an imagined notion of British values and national standards of civility. He analyses migrant information packs: codifying government texts targeted at newly arriving immigrants aimed at promoting respect and civility as a means towards ethnic integration. As with the Dutch examples above (Uitermark and Duyvendak 2008; Scheffer 2011) this evidence places immigrant populations

alongside the lower classes of the indigenous population as the targets of intensive regulation, an argument finding further support in Mennell's observation that nineteenth century American efforts at instilling American habits of cleanliness in immigrants can be considered as civilising offensives (Mennell 2007). Drawing on Burkitt (1996) and van Krieken (1999), Powell (2007, 2011) argues that Gypsy-Travellers in the UK have been persistently subjected to the ambivalence of a civilising offensive which sees only contradictions between the cultural practices of a semi-nomadic minority and the dominant norms of a 'civilised' sedentary society. The result is the disruption of legitimate cultural practices (e.g. nomadism) and the persistence of stigmatisation processes damaging to the social relations between Gypsy-Travellers and the wider population.

Another policy domain in which the concept has been used recently is in examining the responses of the Scottish Government and Scottish football clubs in combating Scottish sectarianism. Flint and Powell (2009, 2011, 2013) situate government attempts at eradicating sectarianism within the wider context of the 'civilising' of football spectatorship in general. They argue that the 'unprecedented policy crusade to address sectarianism in Scotland represents an example of a civilising offensive' (2009: 219) and they draw parallels with the 'Respect' paradigm in the UK aimed at addressing a perceived crises of incivility and urban disorder within certain public spaces (see Powell and Flint 2009).

Rohloff (2011) argues that campaigns surrounding climate change could potentially be considered as civilising offensives, centring as they do on altering behaviours associated with overconsumption and sustainable energy use. Indeed, Rohloff's innovative analysis might be extended to account for the various ways in which these concerns are targeted at particular groups and manifested in particular spaces as evidenced in the literature on 'just sustainability' (Agyeman and Evans, 2004). For example, social housing in the UK is centrally implicated in campaigns related to low energy housing in which new technologies are imposed upon tenants in attempts at altering the functions and practices associated with energy use within the private sphere of the home [4].[#N4].

Some of the studies and scholars cited here have incorporated theoretical syntheses in developing their application of the civilising offensive. As well as the more obvious uses of established-outsider relations (van Ginkel 1996; Verrips 1987; Flint and Powell 2009), Rohloff has developed an important theoretical linkage between moral panics (Cohen 2002) and the theory of civilising and de civilising processes arguing that 'moral panics can be conceived as civilising offensives - attempts to "civilize" the "self" and/or the "other" - in a time of perceived crisis' (2011: 72) (a perspective which resonates with recent attention across western European societies at 'civilising' immigrants detailed above). Moral panics and Elias' figurational approach share common characteristics in terms of: their processual nature; a shared focus on group relations; their dynamic reading of societies in a state of flux; and the centrality of the regulation of conduct, of both self and other (Rohloff 2011). Rohloff argues for a move beyond dichotomous thinking (for example, rational/irrational, civilising/de civilising) in exploring the complex relationship between moral panics and longer term social processes suggesting that moral panics are more intensive reactions borne out of lengthier attempts at regulating conduct. Flint and Powell also link civilising offensives with moral panics in arguing that sectarian behaviour at Scottish football matches becomes the media-influenced target of civilising projects as it shifts violence from behind the scenes of social life and 'represents the antithesis of mutual identification and self-restraint' (2013: 3) expected of citizens of modern Scotland. Rodger (2012b) has sought to develop the civilising offensive concept alongside decivilising processes and Loïc Wacquant's theory of 'advanced marginality' in critiquing the damaging effects of neoliberalism on the urban fabric and specifically marginal groups and populations (a synthesis also explored to good effect by Clement (2010)). The link between civilising offensives and advanced marginality is also implicit in Uitermark and Duyvendak's (2008) elucidation of key differences between the US and the Netherlands in terms of processes of ethnic segregation (see above). Also, Flint and Powell (2011) locate the targeted sectarianism civilising offensive within the

'*informalised* spaces of Scottish football' where a looser self-restraint is apparent and 'contemporary social tensions in Scotland around identity, ethnicity, religion, class and culture' are manifest (2011: 203). They juxtapose Wouters' (2007) theory of informalisation alongside the sectarianism civilising offensive in drawing attention to class and spatial correlates. Similarly Powell (2010), drawing on Kilminster (2008), suggests that civilising offensives may sometimes be the product of a misreading of *informalisation* processes as *de civilising* processes resulting in the misdiagnoses of social ills and subsequent misplaced policy imperatives driven by moral panic.

Though historically informed, the UK accounts cited above are primarily concerned with *contemporary* developments in seeking to expose the targeted and often ideologically driven projects of government. That is, historical insights are gleaned in attempts to chart the processes at play in determining what historical continuities are apparent in a bid to understand what is unique about the current situation. In this sense conceptualisations and studies of civilising offensives focused on contemporary social processes mark a particularly interesting development in the sense that they are concerned with understanding and critiquing the present through an engagement with the past. In this regard criticisms of figurational sociology's lack of engagement with 'the politics of the present' (Dunne 2008) seem less convincing (see Dunning and Hughes 2013: 56-58). The continued study of civilising offensives provides a link from the past to the present and enables the exposure of elite projects targeted at outsider groups as a *recurring* process throughout the overall, long-term civilising process. The cursory analysis presented in this paper however, also points to some areas for scholarly inquiry which could aid the development and refinement of the concept. These are discussed below before some concluding remarks.

5. Discussion: some potential areas for inquiry

The above evidence on the application of the concept of the civilising offensive points to some avenues for further enquiry in developing it further, as well as insights from its Dutch origins largely unrealised in studies centred on the UK. Three potential areas for further research are discussed in turn here: the level at which the civilising offensive operates and is mediated; the scope for international comparative analyses; and the continuities and new populations in terms of the targets of civilising offensives.

Firstly, the UK literature has tended to focus on top-down governmental projects in highlighting their stigmatising and potentially destructive nature. Typically this involves a critique of policies aimed at altering the behaviour of lower classes and the assumptions contained therein. However, evidence from the Netherlands highlights a distinct lack of research into the instigation of civilising projects emanating from UK groups and institutions at the lower level (van Ginkel 1996; Verrips 1987; Van den Berg and Duyvendak 2012). This literature also points to a neglect of the role of intermediaries in exerting pressures towards self-discipline. There therefore appears to be the need for more detailed accounts of civilising offensives which seek to delineate the level, and often various *levels* where civilising coalitions are evident, at which the process is transmitted both historically and more recently. This not only calls for acknowledgement of the various public and private institutions implicated in civilising offensives but also the establishment of the role that various social movements (e.g. environmental campaign groups) play. At the micro scale the role of peer socialisation and the changing nature of family relations as mediators of wider social change are also crucial pieces of the jigsaw in any understanding (Mitzman, 1987; van Krieken, 1989). While van Krieken warns of neglecting civilising offensives, the focus on top-down projects in the UK has neglected the consideration of peers and family life, 'probably the primary arena of interpersonal obligation' (van Krieken 1989: pp.197-198). Such considerations bring gender into the fold as well as the 'civilising of parents' detailed by Elias and others (see Kitchens 2007), with women viewed as central to the mediation of civilised standards of manners and

behaviour in the socialisation of children and families. Indeed Pinker (2011) argues that women were central to the civilising efforts in 'taming' the American 'Wild West'. Churches 'added institutional muscle to the women's civilising offensive' (Pinker 2011: 126) as the domestication of the 'Wild West' environment was set in train, aided by a coalition of sorts involving the reaffirmed sanctity of marriage and family life and the temperance movement. In this regard long-term changes in family life and structure - such as the growth in single parent households, the weakening of the power of the patriarch, and the *relative* equalisation in power balances between husbands and wives and parents and children involving greater negotiation in family relations (Kitchens 2007; van Krieken 2005) - are important considerations. A renewed focus on the role of the family and peer socialisation in relation to civilising offensives must also be sensitive to Wouters' theory of *informalisation* in accounting for relative relaxations in the codes framing etiquette and behaviour and associated changes in power relations (see Wouters 1986, 2007).

Secondly, and related to the above, the benefits of international comparative analyses have not accrued with regard to research on civilising offensives. This is due in no small part to language barriers but, even so, the cursory examples explored in this paper would suggest that there is significant scope for understanding to be developed through cross-national investigation. A common theme across the literature is the importance of national habitus in locating civilising offensives (Kruithof, 1980, 1990; Mitzman 1987). The continuing contemporary concerns over the integration of immigrant populations into both Dutch and UK society express this clearly (Flint 2009; Uitermark and Duyvendak 2009). On this issue there appears to be commonality across much of western Europe in terms of the positioning of immigrant cultures as being at odds with national and European domesticity and a threat to stability. Examples from the Netherlands and the UK exhibit clear similarities here in terms of: a discernible shift in civilising projects from indigenous to immigrant populations; a civilising offensive based on an 'imagined' national identity and a reframing of what constitutes Dutch/UK citizenship; governments struggling to reconcile a national habitus with a diversity of immigrant cultures; and a stronger 'we-image' and group identification among some minority groups, which is difficult to square with western notions of individualisation and 'empowerment' (Van den Berg and Duyvendak 2012; Powell 2011). Moreover, contemporary Dutch studies are historically located within the context of a paternalistic state as a recurring theme of research on civilising offensives with emphasis also placed on the Church, charities and other non-governmental bodies serving as mediators of behavioural change. In this sense, historical Dutch accounts focusing on state paternalism in the nineteenth century might also be profitably studied alongside accounts of the civilising projects of the Victorian era in the UK for instance (see Pearson, 2009). At the same time historical analyses underscore crucial differences that national habitus can make to the form, nature and effects of civilising offensives (Kruithof 1990). Aligned with this, there is also a need for a comparison of the *techniques* of governance over time and across different nations.

Finally, Mitzman's commentary on the changing targets of civilising offensives over the centuries (see above: 8) emphasises the interpretation of the justification for such projects in understanding at who and where they are aimed. The earlier offensives from the sixteenth century that he details involved casting the net wide in seeking to change 'traditional popular mentalities' felt to be at odds with civilisation and, specifically, urban elite culture. Research focused on more recent periods, however, suggests a gradual shift to subtler, more discriminatory approaches. As the civilising process has developed, as society has become more differentiated and complex, the targets and techniques of civilising offensives have also become more specialised and precise. Contrast that blanket attack on the *culture populaire* with more recent offensives on populations on the margins of society, invariably distinguished in discourse from the 'civilised' majority in the upper strata, but also from the 'respectable classes' within their own social class. That is, governments appeal to particular (dis)identifications between and *within* groups in mobilising support. For example, recent years have seen a UK governmental focus on 'problem families' (Rodger 2008; Powell and Flint 2009) deemed to be a particular section of the British working class lacking self-discipline. Government-initiated Family

Intervention Projects (FIPs) intervene to address issues including a lack of work ethic, alcohol and drug misuse, healthy eating, child truancy and 'bad' parenting, with these interventions often pervading into the private space of the home (Flint, 2012; see also Van den Berg and Duyvendak, 2012). The increasingly targeted nature of civilising offensives, in terms of both populations and the spaces in which conduct is more intensively regulated, certainly deserves further attention. Again, this calls for greater sensitivity to gender and inter-ethnic relations in exploring how civilising offensives are manifested.

6. Conclusions

This paper has sought to reconcile the neglect of the theoretical origins of the civilising offensive through a review of its development and uses in the Netherlands and, more recently, the UK. This review has highlighted the need for a greater engagement with the Dutch research on civilising offensives on the part of UK scholars. Research considered here also points to a gradual dissemination and utilisation of the concept beyond its Dutch origins, in application to both historical and contemporary elite projects aimed at realigning the conduct of particular groups, which seek to expose their stigmatising and ambivalent nature. Indeed, the theoretical concept of the civilising offensive offers significant potential here. The evidence presented, however, implies the need for a widening of the conceptualisation of civilising offensives, from an overly simplistic notion of the relationship between state and religious authorities and popular mentalities, to one which acknowledges the different levels at which civilising offensives are mediated and enacted; and which accounts for the changing objectives of 'civilisers' alongside wider social processes. Central here is the importance of internal pressures and the role of peer and group socialisation in the internalisation (or not) of constraints on conduct, which are less apparent within accounts of UK civilising offensives. There is also significant scope for international comparative analyses within Western Europe and beyond, not only in terms of the behaviours and targets of civilising offensives over the long-term but also the *spaces* in which they are regulated, both public and private.

Finally, given the above it would seem that van Krieken is right to argue for an understanding of civilising offensives as a complement to Elias' civilisation process (1989, 1999). But while there is a clear research task in investigating the destructive and stigmatizing impact of civilising offensives - both historical and contemporary - on popular and minority cultures, there is less evidence on the relative efficacy of such projects in terms of their *lasting* impact on behaviour and manners; except in cases where there is already a receptiveness to such behaviours (as detailed by Elias (2000)). Within the literature on civilising offensives presented here, there is certainly little empirical support for the idea that civilisation can be 'steered' in a particular direction from above. Rather as van Ginkel (1996) notes, civilising offensives should be considered as particular *phases* of the overall civilising process; phases in which group conflicts and contestations over culture between established and outsider groups are heightened and more clearly discernible.

Biography

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Notes

1. I would like to thank John Flint and Bernard Kruithof for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper. [\[#N1-pt1\]](#)
2. I am grateful to Stephen Mennell for informing me of the approximate time period and circumstances in which Elias settled in Amsterdam. [\[#N2-pt1\]](#)
3. It is important to acknowledge that what follows is by no means an exhaustive excavation of the literature on *burgerlijk beschavingsoffensief*. Such a project that focuses on Dutch language publications

would, however, be particularly useful in contributing further to an understanding of the uses of the theoretical concept. ↗[#N3-ptr1]

4. I am grateful to Aimee Walshaw for her insightful comments on these links and developments relating to social housing and environmental sustainability. ↗[#N4-ptr1]

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