

# In the Shadow of the Corporate State

*An ethnographic study of the shifting dynamics of the corporate state in the vicinity of Schiphol Airport (the Netherlands) through the exploration of counter-citizenship*



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*An ethnographic study of the shifting dynamics of the corporate state in the vicinity of Schiphol Airport (the Netherlands) through the exploration of counter-citizenship*

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# Acknowledgement

This thesis is the result of a two-year journey in which I did my pre-master and master studies. In these two years, I have grown tremendously on a personal and academic level, been challenged to put things into perspective, and fallen in love with the academic discipline of anthropology.

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# Abstract

The 'corporate' is an increasingly powerful sovereign power, as is the case with the aviation sector in the Netherlands. Politics has become subordinate to the conditions of the economy of the aviation sector. The Dutch government - which owns 70 per cent of Schiphol - provides the aviation sector with an exceptional position with exclusions in the form of lower noise and environmental standards (nitrogen, ultra-particulate and CO2 emissions), the absence of tax levies and the exclusion of the aviation sector from the Paris Climate Agreement. By entrenching the power of Schiphol, the current industrial progress, which is responsible for the loss of biodiversity, the climate crisis and the deterioration of the living environment for residents, seems to be further reinforced. Through an ethnographic exploration of the actions of the opposition groups fighting against Schiphol's growth, I argue that this new political assemblage, also referred to as the corporate state (Kapferer, 2010), has profound implications for its citizens. This includes the rise of a new form of citizenship that I refer to as counter-citizenship, which represents the emergence of a formed group of citizens as a counter-power that challenges the givens of the corporate state by exerting external pressure and playing a significant role in setting the agenda, controlling and sanctioning powerful actors.

Keywords: Corporate state; Citizenship; Sovereignty, Social engineering; Contestation

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# Introduction

A big Etihad Boeing rushes over our heads with an incredible sound and a force that almost gives you goose bumps. I am standing in a so-called spotter's area next to the Polderbaan, Schiphol Airport's most frequently used runway. It is a zone specially created for people to have a good view on the action in the air and on the platform. There are benches to rest on, mobile toilets and a fast food truck in the corner. It's busy today, I see families with children running around, men equipped with cameras with huge long lenses and a group of young people just hanging around. For as long as I have lived in the Haarlemmerpolder - almost 15 years - I have cycled past this spotting area, but never stopped to look at the aeroplanes as these plane spotters do. Today, I decide to have a look anyway. After only five minutes, I hear a spotter say, "Yes, here comes another one!" I have to admit that it is rather enchanting: how such a tin beast rises from the ground at an incredible speed and manages to work its way up into the sky, where it then engages in a battle with an invisible force of nature called gravity. Once there, the heavy tin box floats like a feather in the air until it is a minuscule dot that we can hardly see and finally leaves a large empty sky behind.

For many people, Schiphol stands for something big; Dutch pride, a symbol of economic prosperity and modernity. Since the 1990s, the Dutch aviation sector has experienced spectacular development, with more passengers, more routes and more carriers, and an accessibility that does not exist in most other European countries. Between 1990 and 2019 alone, passenger throughput grew by more than 250 per cent and aircraft movements increased by 50 per cent (CBS 2019). As these developments show, airports and aviation in the Netherlands, as elsewhere, are considered central to achieving global modernity. Like global cities (Sassen 1996, 2002), satellite relays and digital communication networks (Appadurai 1996), they are fundamental to participation in the global service economy (Chalfin 2009). They facilitate the mobility of people, information and objects, support the circulation of capital and the possibilities of time-space compression (Chalfin 2009). Airports like Schiphol are also places where the contradictions of global modernity come to light and where strong social contestation arises (Appadurai 1996). Behind these gleaming big Boeings, modern terminals and impressive control towers, the Dutch aviation sector reveals a clash between citizens and a new state assembly, in which politics has become subordinate to the conditions of the aviation sector's economy and state sovereignty is being reshaped as a result (Kapferer 2010).

Schiphol Airport is 70 per cent owned by the Dutch state and is therefore in effect a state enterprise. The Dutch government provides the aviation sector with an exceptional position with exclusions in the form of lower noise and environmental standards (nitrogen, ultra-particulate and CO2 emissions), the absence of tax levies and the exclusion of the aviation sector from the Paris Climate Agreement (Mommers 2019). By entrenching the power of Schiphol, the current industrial progress, which is responsible for the loss of biodiversity, the climate crisis and the deterioration of the living environment for local residents, seems to be further reinforced. At the same time, there is a large group of residents and environmental activists who oppose the growth mentality and the exceptional position of Schiphol Airport by organising citizens' initiatives and groups. Schiphol is therefore a particularly relevant context for understanding the complex relationship between the corporate, the state and citizenship. Hence this thesis will address the main implications of this entanglement of sovereign power for citizens and their potential for social mobilisation and contestation.

Despite the initial tendency of researchers to view growing trade and capital circuits as a threat to state authority, it is now recognised that state sovereignty is being restructured, not erased (Trouillot 2001). This dynamic has led scholars to speak of the 'unbundling of sovereignty' (Ruggie 1993, 71), a term that refers not so much to the total collapse of the sovereign state, but rather to its disintegration, with certain attributes gaining in importance while others decline. Saskia Sassen (1996, 2000) argues for this position most prominently. She states that global markets depend on governments for regulation, enforcement and infrastructure, creating arrangements for state-based but seemingly 'denationalised' rule. Aihwa Ong (2000, 2006) further elaborates on this notion of reconfigured sovereignty, whereby both the ends and means of state power are rearranged. Ong (2006) points to a differentiated or 'graduated' sovereignty that emerges in the context of economic restructuring in East Asia. In this context, governments assert and share power in very unequal ways. States also cede power to corporations, which ultimately gain control over certain citizens and territories (Ong 2006, 100). This reflects Sassen's (1996) observation that the most defining form of citizenship within states, and internationally, now belongs to corporations and market forces, rather than to individuals or groups of citizens. Kapferer (2010) speaks in the same vein about the construction of new political and social forms. The economy and the market have thus become part of society and politics in a very different way than before. Instead of being shaped by the society in which they were inseparably immersed, they themselves have become the form of politics and society (Kapferer 2010). In this thesis, I focus on how sovereign practices are influenced and shaped by corporate entities, in my case Schiphol Airport, and ultimately how

the actions of this new state assembly erode the trust of these citizens in this political body and become a catalyst for the formation of this new kind of citizenship that acts as a counter-power to the corporate state.

To analyse the exceptional position of Schiphol in the complex state landscape of the Netherlands and the way the 'corporate' is an increasingly powerful sovereign force, I will use Kapferer's (2004) notion of the corporate state. With this concept Kapferer reflects on the construction of new political and social forms, in which the dominant political form of the nation-state is degraded and a new political assemblage under the leadership of the market emerges (Kapferer 2004). The rise of the corporate state is associated with processes of globalization which is strongly connected with the decline of the nation-state as a centralizing commanding institution of territorially determined power. Kapferer (2010) notes that globalization is an integral part of the rise of the corporate state. On the one hand, globalization seems to undermine the nation-state, and on the other hand it gives rise to new state assemblies, such as the corporate state. Globalisation has inevitably changed the sovereignty of the nation-state; and, as I will demonstrate in this thesis, it can have an equally profound effect on citizenship.

While the global economy created new conditions for the supremacy of the nation-state, the institution of citizenship, as I will argue, also evolved. In this thesis, I will work towards a new form of citizenship that mobilises itself as a counter-power against these existing power formations of the corporate state. I call this form of citizenship that is pushed into the role of counter-power when it is in conflict with the corporate state 'counter-citizenship'. In theorising this new concept, I draw on the work of Rosanvallon (2008), who argues that while we have long focused on institutionalised forms of political participation, the vitality of democracy rests equally on forms of 'counter-democracy' through which citizens distance themselves, protest and exert external pressure on the democratic state. By considering counter-citizenship, we can see the question of political participation and citizenship in the shifting dynamics of the corporate state in a new light.

By exploring both top-down actions of the corporate state and bottom-up responses of the citizens group who oppose Schiphol - stipulating that they mutually shape one another- this thesis will provide insight into the way this new sovereign formation manifests itself in the context of Schiphol and how citizenship is transformed under these conditions of the corporate state. Based on these questions, this thesis seeks to answer the following research question: *How is citizenship performed and enacted under the shifting dynamics of a corporate state in the surroundings of Schiphol?*



## **The field**

I conducted my research in the surroundings of Schiphol Airport. Schiphol Airport is located in the north-east of the municipality of Haarlemmermeer, which is based in the province of North Holland. I spent most of my childhood in Hoofddorp, a village which is situated in that backyard of Schiphol Airport. For this research I have returned to my parental home with the very well-known anthropological perspective in mind: “To make the familiar strange and the strange familiar.”

With 72 million passengers and 500,000 flights per year, Schiphol is considered one of the largest hubs in Europe (CBS 2019). It has taken more than 100 years to build the national airport of the Netherlands to its current global status. The aviation sector is therefore often identified by the state as a sector of which the Netherlands can be proud. The airport is an important factor for the economy in the Netherlands, provides employment for people in the surrounding areas and is the symbol of modern inter-connected society. But the growth of Schiphol also has a downside, which is strongly disputed by various actors. The airport leaves a mark on the quality of life in North Holland as local residents experience noise pollution and the heavy flight movements also have a negative impact on the health of local residents (RIVM, 2019; TNO, 2014). For my research, I focused on the action groups and citizens' initiatives that have gathered around Schiphol. They are fighting against the state-owned company Schiphol, to stop the endless growth mentality of the airport.

With Hoofddorp as my base, I went to several municipalities and villages in the vicinity of Schiphol Airport and its five runways. Since 2015, Schiphol Regional Airport Council (ORS) has been the platform where all issues, interests and parties surrounding the development of the airport and its surroundings come together. Representation of residents in the vicinity of Schiphol in this council takes place through five geographically defined areas, the so-called clusters. These clusters are related to Schiphol's runways and have been my starting point to organize my fieldwork in this broad area. (See figure 1.) My research area, which extends about 30 km from Schiphol, is the locus of much resistance and protest against Schiphol and the aviation sector. Around 100 of citizens' initiatives have been addressing a variety of issues related to Schiphol: CO2 emissions, noise nuisance, participation, and the plans for Schiphol to expand. To create a broader picture of how the actions of the state and Schiphol affect its citizens, I conducted research with several of these action groups situated in each defined cluster. In these clusters around Schiphol social contestation is thus very tangible, which made it the perfect location for my thesis.

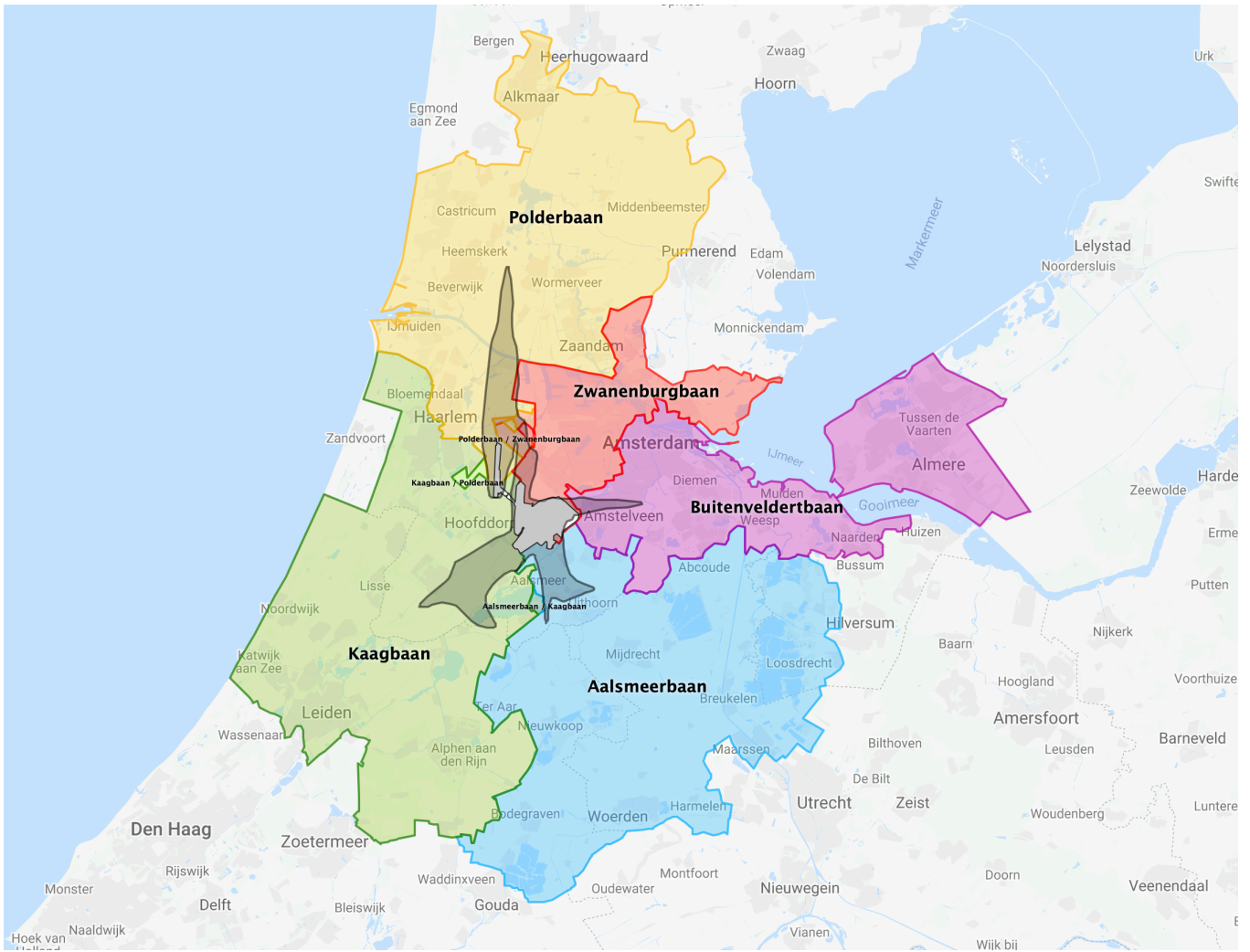


Figure 1 – A map of the Schiphol area around the five runways (Photo credits: "BewonersomgevingSchiphol").

## Methodology

In the early stages of my research, I contacted SchipholWatch, one of the most prominent and active citizens' platform that opposes Schiphol. I soon came into contact with the initiator of this platform, David.<sup>1</sup> He has been actively opposing the growth of Schiphol for years and has many contacts with all the other existing citizens' initiatives and action groups. David was, as O'Reilly (2012, 114) defines it, my gatekeeper. Through him I gained access to many important and valuable informants who are concerned with the contestation around Schiphol. For interviews, I used the snowball method in which initial contacts are used to generate further contacts (O'Reilly 2012, 44). In the end, I completed 18 semi-structured interviews and a number of casual conversations that I did not record. I mainly interviewed individuals from the Schiphol action groups, but also spoke to the environmental manager of Schiphol and councillors from various municipalities. Most of my research participants did not mind their real names being used, some of them were anonymized at their request.

In order to obtain empirical data on the practices and actions of these citizens action groups, alongside open and semi-structured interviews, I carried out participant observation. In order to reveal the impact of the sovereign entanglement between the state and Schiphol, I engaged in acts of citizenship. As explained by Rasch & Köhne (2016) the idea of 'acts of citizenship' is closely related to 'participation' but is not the same. "Through participation, people exercise their voice through forms of deliberation, consultation and mobilization designed to influence larger institutions and policies" (Rasch & Köhne 2016, 109). Acts of citizenship are broader than this, and include practices that may not have traditionally been seen as citizenship: blogging, film making, knowledge production, acts of resistance. Therefore, during my fieldwork, it was important to explore these non-traditional acts of citizenship and identify how they come about as well as the ways in which these acts constitute citizenship.

I participated in activities such as meetings, gatherings, webinars, knowledge production, etc. that helped me uncover knowledge that remains outside the awareness of the research population and cannot be gathered through the method of interviewing. More than that, it allowed me to learn about the lives of these activist citizens from their own perspective within their own lived experience (O'Reilly 2012, 18). It is as O'Reilly describes more than "about just being there," it requires an active way of documenting everyday life and collecting data (O'Reilly 2012, 18). Therefore, I actively took notes of my participant-observation encounters in various field diaries. Besides a diary in which I wrote down 'informal conversations'

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<sup>1</sup> This is a pseudonym, as this research participant specifically requested keeping his identity private.

(DeWalt and DeWalt 2011) I kept an ‘intellectual diary’ in which I shared analytical ideas and insights in relation to my research (O'Reilly 2012, 104).

To study how this corporate state is interwoven in the Dutch landscape and specifically in the area around Schiphol Airport, it was valuable to observe the area itself. What do I see, smell and hear? What kind of companies, organizations and landscapes do I encounter? In order to understand the habitus and how we interact with the world we need to look further and try to comprehend what people say and do, by also looking at what people sense and feel (Howes 2019). Therefore, in addition to the methods of semi-structured interviews, participation and observation of the participants, I use sensory ethnography by collecting sensory data such as recorded sounds. I gained a lot of knowledge by considering the sensory experience of the participants and experiencing the sensory perceptions myself as an ethnographer, in understanding the practices and life worlds of my research participants. As Howes (2019, 18) formulates it most clearly: “Sensing and making sense along with others.” My research informed me about the way in which the sound of airplanes and the smell of kerosene are interwoven in everyday lives of my participants. Moreover, noise pollution is one of the most important motives for activist citizens to oppose Schiphol and the state. In this way the senses of sound and smell have a deep connotation with the political and social contest around Schiphol. Pink (2015) speaks about the perceptual as political in which the idea of the senses such as sound and smell can be connected to the political in different ways. According to Pink it can help uncover different perceptions of the world and the political through the senses. Sound and smell thus helped me to discover how these people living in the surrounding areas of Schiphol, experience and deal with a space where planes and runways are located and how this frames their relationship with the corporate state. Living near Schiphol Airport to conduct this research, it was impossible for me to escape this sensorial experience. Moreover, it gave me insight into the inescapability of the acts of citizenship that are performed and enacted by my research participants under the conditions of the corporate state.

## **Ethics and positionality**

In anthropological research, there is neither complete neutral knowledge, objectivity nor a sharp dividing line between researcher and research participant (Mosse 2008). According to DeWalt and DeWalt (2011), it is therefore crucial to shift our focus from the question “Is the researcher biased?” – as all researchers and research are biased - to the question “How is the researcher biased?” Ethnographers, just like groups they study, come with histories and socialization, and the influence of these elements in ethnographic research needs to be properly understood (Madden 2017, 23). By making explicit “the place from which the observer observes”, the influence and impact of the ethnographer on the research can be understood (DeWalt and DeWalt (2011, 40). Therefore, it is important to reflect on the fact that this thesis is based on the frame of reference of a 25-year-old white Dutch woman who has lived a great part of her life in the municipality of Haarlemmermeer, the place where Schiphol Airport is located. This gave me a head start in the three-month research, as I was already very familiar with the local history of Schiphol Airport in this region. Furthermore, it gave me a good basis to quickly build up rapport with my research participants, in my case the people who oppose the growth of Schiphol. Being witness to the impact of the airport on the residents and the living environment myself for years, I sympathized very much with my research participants. Even though this research has been conducted with a view as open and neutral as possible, my first commitment has always been to the action groups with whom I have worked closely. I therefore concur with Kirsch (2002), who makes a convincing case for the use of anthropological field research in local struggles for social and ecological justice - especially struggles with large transnational corporations. I am deeply convinced that anthropologists have a responsibility to mitigate the suffering of others as much as possible (Oliver-Smith & Hoffman 2002, 14), therefore I hope that this thesis will be able to make not only an academic, but also a social and public contribution. As Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1995) states, seeing, listening, logging, if done with care and sensitivity, can already be acts of solidarity. Above all, they are the work of recognition. By conducting this research together with my research participants, I hope to be able to give an account of the stories that my research partners experience on a daily basis, in the hope of making their experience more widely known outside the political context.

Eriksen (2020) acknowledges that as anthropologists, we must “get our hands dirty”, get involved in the debate and stand up for those who are wronged, but we must do so responsibly and always with an eye to the ethics of our engagement. I have therefore committed myself to all the principles and protocols outlined in the AAA Code of Ethics. One of the most prominent of the principles is informing your research participants about the purpose of my

fieldwork and obtaining informed consent; the consent to use our communication as input for this thesis (AAA Code of Ethics 2020). In addition, as standard practice advises, I always asked participants if they wished to remain completely anonymous. If they did not wish to remain identifiable, I used pseudonyms (Madden 2017). Finally, this research was conducted during the time of the corona pandemic. It was a very unusual period to do this research, something I will address in more detail in the thesis. During this research period, I complied at all times with the COVID-19 guidelines drawn up by the Dutch government. In addition, all meetings with my research participants were conducted in consultation with them and with regard to the COVID-19 regulations.

## **Outline**

The first chapter of this thesis will deal with how the corporate state manifests itself in the case of Schiphol and the state. I will address two different elements that I believe shape this complex new state assembly that is the corporate state. The first element of the corporate state points to the exceptional position of Schiphol Airport. When it comes to policy, taxation, etc., no sector has such an exceptional position as the aviation sector in The Netherlands. As will become clear, the legal entity Schiphol derives from the law, but also plays a role in influencing the law and can therefore act as an exception to the law (Barkan 2013). The second element is closely related to the exceptional position of Schiphol. It concerns the representation of Schiphol as national pride and part of the national identity that legitimises this exceptional position of Schiphol. The construction of such a strong image of Schiphol as part of the national identity normalises the exceptional position of the aviation sector, allowing it to continue to grow.

The second chapter is concerned with how the corporate state relates to resistance. In recent decades, the number of flight movements has increased significantly and with it, social resistance to the airport. In addition to noise nuisance, the climate crisis also puts the sector under great pressure. As criticism evolves, so do the narrative techniques and tools companies use to deal with them. Through the lens of social engineering, I will highlight the social techniques used to shape human minds and behaviour, aimed at ‘managing’ dissent and ‘producing’ consent necessary for ‘the economic operation’ of Schiphol. The lens of social engineering acts as a tool to study both top-down actions and bottom-up responses, arguing that they mutually shape each other (Dunlap & Verweijen 2021).

Chapter three focuses on the lives of citizens who oppose Schiphol and the Dutch state. I tell the story of my interlocutors and try to give meaning to the experience of citizens living

in the immediate vicinity of Schiphol. As becomes clear, living in the shadow of this corporate state brings with it feelings of injustice, powerlessness and ultimately a great distrust in the state. The actions of the corporate state ultimately erode these citizens' trust in this political institution and thus become a catalyst for the formation of what I have coined as 'counter-citizenship' that acts as a counterforce to the corporate state.

Chapter four will explore the three forms of acts of citizenship that embody this counter-citizenship. By focusing on acts that transcend the everyday, we can see how citizenship as counter-power is understood, implemented and maintained under the conditions of the corporate state. By examining the acts of counter-citizenship, it will become clear that the vitality of democracy equally rests on forms of 'counter-democracy' through which citizens distance themselves, protest and exert external pressure on the democratic state (Rosanvallon 2008). The repertoire of counter-citizenship acts that play an important role in agenda-setting, control and sanctioning of powerful actors has been subdivided into three forms that I will discuss in more detail in this chapter: counter-expertise, the media as a countervailing tool and legal action.

*Chapter one:*

# **The Corporate State**

The nation state is no longer the privileged locus of sovereignty (Hansen & Stepputat 2006). Although state sovereignty continues to exist, by looking only at sovereignty that is legally grounded, we ignore a wide range of other actors by whom sovereign power is exercised. In other words, the nation-state's sovereignty model is now in some contexts complemented by transnational corporations capable of performing and controlling state functions (Hansen & Stepputat 2006). This led, as Kapferer argues, to the transformation of the political self, to a restructuring of the nature of the state and of the social order at the behest of the state. The economy and the market thus became part of society and politics in a very different way than before. Instead of being formed by the society in which they were inseparably immersed, they have themselves become the form of politics and society (Kapferer 2010). This emerging and complex configuration of sovereignty bodies and its consequences, calls for new anthropological studies and critical reflection on how the 'corporate' is an increasingly powerful sovereign force: a magical and redemptive one, but also unpredictable and ruthless as described by Comaroff and Comaroff (2000).

In this chapter, I will highlight how the corporate state manifests itself in the context of the Dutch state and Schiphol Airport. To examine how corporations, claim sovereignty and exercise sovereign power, I use Kapferer's (2004) concept of the corporate state, which refers to the process in which the dominant political form of the nation-state gives way to a new kind of political assemblage (Kapferer 2005). However, I should note that I cannot capture the corporate state in its entirety by looking at this case exclusively. The theory of Kapferer on the corporate state is a solid and complete one but also one that is ethnographically difficult to apply while the corporate state is something that is sustained by multiple factors, on many different scales and through many different actors and processes. Therefore, in this chapter the aim is to uncover elements that embody the corporate state in my researched context of Schiphol and that are necessary to work towards the narrative of the impact that such a new state assembly has on citizenship. The elements I will examine that shape this complex phenomenon of the corporate state are the exceptional position of aviation in the Netherlands and the merging of the Schiphol brand and KLM with the Dutch identity.



## **The exceptional position of Schiphol**

One of my interlocutors, Emeritus Professor Fulco van der Veen, is a very active citizen in the “Schiphol file”, as many of research participants refer to the situation of Schiphol and the surrounding contestations and events. He became involved in the resistance against the growth of aviation when he moved to the Bijlmer area for his work as a doctor at the Amsterdam Medical Centre. This is a part of Amsterdam that lies close to one of the runways from Schiphol and is known for the terrible plane crash in 1992, called the Bijlmer disaster. When the noise pollution got worse, Fulco decided to get involved. “Once you get into 'the little world' and become aware of how unfair things are, you get sucked in and you can't let it go,” he told me. In the meantime, he has been intensively involved with the contestation practices around Schiphol for years and has made dozens of informative videos about Schiphol's activities and the state, which he posts on YouTube. Like many of my interlocutors, Fulco always talks about Schiphol and the state in a cynical tone. When I ask him about the relationship between the state and Schiphol, Fulco leaned back in his chair with his arms crossed: “It's dead simple; Schiphol just sets the policy and the government creates the circumstances in which this is possible. That's how it is done.” What Fulco and many other activists have expressed to me is that they feel the government is becoming a facilitator of the interests of big business rather than a facilitator of the interests of the people. As Fulco explained to me: “Schiphol just goes along with the corporate agenda and defends the interests of Schiphol and not the interests of us, the people who suffer the negative consequences. Time and again, the ministry has chosen for the aviation industry. The Ministry has never asked itself, does the endless growth of Schiphol actually work for us? Us the people? And what price do we have to pay for it in terms of safety, health, particulates, climate, the planet.” Not only in the eyes of Fulco, but of many other people who are fighting against the growth of Schiphol, the government has failed completely. Meaning they failed to control and monitor the economic project that is Schiphol, in such a way that it would be in balance with the surrounding environment. By giving Schiphol exceptional rights without corresponding responsibilities or oversight, Schiphol appears to my research participants to be above the law.

When it comes to policies, taxes, etc. no sector has such an exceptional position as aviation. These include lower or no noise and environmental standards (including standards for emissions of nitrogen, (ultra-) fine dust and CO<sub>2</sub>) and the absence of tax burdens. All land transportation (road and rail) is subject to numerous noise and environmental regulations, but these do not apply to aviation. Nitrogen emissions from aviation above 3,000 feet are not considered, while these emissions are highest at this altitude (Remkes et al. 2019). In addition,

excise duty is levied on car fuel and a VAT rate of 9 per cent applies to passenger transport (including trains, buses and taxis). Again, this does not apply to aviation. No tax is levied on kerosene, which costs the treasury 2.1 billion a year. No other sector enjoys such a generous exemption, but for aviation it is standard and enshrined globally in hundreds of bilateral ‘air transport agreements’ (Mommers 2019).

This creates the feeling that several of my research participants describe as: “living in the wild west”. A metaphor that refers to a situation where no one obeys the rules of the law and where the law of the jungle prevails. According to Joshua Barkan (2013) who draws on the work Giorgio Agamben (2005), the corporation and modern political sovereignty are grounded in and bound together by a principle of this legally sanctioned immunity from the law. He argues that it is precisely the legal foundations of the corporation as an economic, social and political institution that entitle corporations to undermine political sovereignty, because they are given the rights of citizenship without the corresponding responsibilities expected of human citizens (Barkan 2013). Agamben defines sovereignty as the power to prohibit - the exception to the law - and the power to cede sovereign responsibility to a population in order to maintain the security of the political community (Barkan 2013, 7). He argues that sovereign power is established through the production of a political order based on the exclusion of bare life and by enacting the state of exception. With the notion of ‘state of exception’ he points to the suspension of the law for the preservation of the political order (Agamben 2005). In other words, the sovereign is the one who can establish and exceed the ‘limits of the law’. In this perspective, corporate sovereignty is a product of the nation state and operates within its borders. At the same time, this corporate entity is legitimized by and intertwined with the state, even if it often contradicts the legal framework of the nation state's sovereignty. This corporate sovereignty derives from the law, but also plays a role in the making of the law and can therefore act as an exception to the law (Barkan 2013). In short, corporations and state sovereignty are thus grounded in and linked by a principle of legally sanctioned immunity from the law. So, when these corporate rhizomic processes take root in the heart of the state, they get the same exemption from the law as the state. The same law that used to limit many of the socially disruptive possibilities of these (new) economically driven developments (Kapferer 2005; 2010).

Corporate entities shift thus from a position that is more external or peripheral to state processes, to a position that is more at the heart of the state, and which also has more overt, state-like ordering effects on national territories (Kapferer 2010). Drawing on the work of Deleuze and Guattari (2004), Kapferer notes that this new corporate dynamic associated with

the state is rhizomic and open. By this he means a complex structure of elements that do not communicate hierarchically or through linear connections, but rather through a unique infinite number of sources that can be accessed from any different point. Hardt and Negri (2000, 327) conclude that the nesting of these rhizomic dynamics in state processes and their ability to synchronise conceal the potential for a mutual negativity - a destructive bundling - that is the enduring crisis of the state. When I began my fieldwork, I was convinced that this dominant rhizomic corporate dynamic would soon become apparent. A phenomenon, I assumed, that would become visible as I explored who was making the decisions and pulling the strings. I imagined a state passively watching corporate power take over. A fundamental error, according to Barkan (2013), in addressing this corporate state is the binary perspective I brought to the field, which assumes a clear, sharp dividing line between the corporation as an institution and the nation-state; and with it, the assumption that corporate interference in regulation, policy and politics is solely in the interests of the corporation and only therefore inherently bad. The perspective that portrays the corporation as the great evil separate from the state is inappropriate and incorrect, as I discovered while conducting this research. Through contact with my research participants and participatory observation, it became clear to me that the state is not a passive spectator, separate from the corporate - but to speak in aviation parlance - a co-pilot of an aircraft set to reach its destination and goal under whatever conditions and with whatever headwinds. In this cockpit, it is difficult to define the division of tasks, responsibilities and duties and to determine who is supervising whom. In the words of Kapferer (2005), “the power of the state is becoming less visible, while the boundaries between state and non-state agents and agencies are becoming increasingly blurred”. In such circumstances, corporate power is likely to be extended through an assembly network of shifting alliances, often motivated by specific local interests (Kapferer 2010, 142).

In the case of Schiphol and the Dutch state: where the sector ends and the government begins is difficult to determine. Even though it has been officially established who is responsible for Schiphol airport and who has ownership, in practice the lines seem to be less clear. The state owns seventy percent of the shares of Schiphol Airport, the municipality of Amsterdam twenty percent, and only ten percent of the shares are in the hands of private shareholders.<sup>2</sup> As a shareholder, both the Ministry of Finance and the Amsterdam Alderman of Finance collect dividends on the profits that Schiphol makes. In 2017 the ministry received over one hundred million euros, the Amsterdam municipality about thirty million. All Dutch airports

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<sup>2</sup> “Corporate Governance,” Schiphol Group. Accessed May 1, 2021. <https://www.schiphol.nl/en/schiphol-group/page/corporate-governance/>

are government-owned and fall under the direct responsibility of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management (IenW). Whereas the government should base its actions on the public interest, Schiphol is a company in which commercial interests are central. As a major shareholder, it is up to the government to weigh the interests and implement policy on that basis. In practice, however, the government appears to have difficulty doing this. The economic interests of Schiphol are often presented as social interests. This shows that with the restructuring of the state, the economy has reached a decisive intensity that surpasses that of the nation-states. This is so because Schiphol has now largely taken control of the regulatory mechanisms that used to limit many of the socially disruptive possibilities of the new developments. It is through the corporatization of the state that the economic is enabled to gain predominance over the political and the social (Kapferer 2010). As we see at Schiphol Airport, the reports on the enormous negative health and climate effects and the negative impact on the living environment around Schiphol pile up, but time and again the aviation sector seems to be given free rein to continue growing (RIVM, 2019; GGD, 2018).

The way these corporations take root in the heart of the state, achieving a privileged position in which they have legally-sanctioned immunity from the law is a story about the representation of Schiphol as national pride and as part of the Dutch national identity, which I will discuss in more detail in the next section.

### **Civic national pride**

From drained polder to global air traffic hub: Schiphol began life in 1916, on some drained land that had been reclaimed from the Haarlemmermeer. The Royal Dutch Airline for the Netherlands and Colonies (KLM) was founded three years later in 1919. Queen Wilhelmina conferred the designation 'Royal' on KLM in formation. In doing so, she emphasized the importance of the burgeoning civil aviation sector just after the First World War. The history of Schiphol Airport and the airline KLM have always been closely connected and have created this long tradition of a strong bond between an airline and its national home port. They are two companies, but Schiphol (70% owned by the Dutch state, 20% by the municipality of Amsterdam) and KLM (14% owned by the Dutch state) are almost inextricably linked. If only because KLM accounts for 56% of the passengers at Schiphol, with Air France, subsidiary Transavia and partners like Delta Airlines even accounting for more than 80%.

More than 100 years since its establishment, Schiphol is an airport of global proportions and KLM is the oldest and best-known airline still flying under its original name. Measured by

the number of passengers of around 58 million annually, Schiphol Airport has been the third largest airport within the European Union since 2016. This makes the airport the most important European hub after London Heathrow and Paris Charles de Gaulle (CBS 2019). Schiphol airport, the airlines, security, catering and so on - together with all suppliers, provided jobs for 113,000 people in 2018. The money earned from this contributed 1.3 percent to the gross domestic product.<sup>3</sup> This makes Schiphol, alongside the port of Rotterdam, the most important and largest infrastructure production in the Netherlands. It is the flagship of Dutch infrastructure. Schiphol Airport paved the way for the Netherlands to participate and be connected to the world economy by acting as a major hub in the large flow of goods.

The story of how courage and pioneering spirit built the Netherlands' national airport to its current world status is one that is often told not only by Schiphol and KLM, but also by the media and the state. In 2020, a new aviation drama series called 'Flying Dutchmen' was launched on AVROTROS a Dutch radio and television network that is part of the Dutch public broadcasting system. The series focuses on the first twenty years of Dutch commercial aviation. It tells the story of aircraft manufacturer Anthony Fokker and Albert Plesman, the director of KLM, who as aviation pioneers made the Netherlands a major player in international aviation. It is a tale that forms the image of Schiphol Airport as a symbol of progress and modernity. Schiphol and KLM, the two united forces, have assumed mythical proportions as the pride of the Dutch nation (Milikowski 2018). An image reinforced by the Dutch state. "The aviation sector is one that the Netherlands can be proud of," is how the 2016 Schiphol Action Agenda<sup>4</sup>, drawn up by the Ministries of Economic Affairs and Infrastructure and the Environment, opens. "What started with four wooden hangars in a field has grown into one of the largest and most modern airports in the world with a very extensive network of connections, partly thanks to hub carrier KLM," reads the report.

The Airport infrastructure is a technology that the Dutch state uses to demonstrate development, progress, and modernity, something that puts the Netherlands on the map as a small country and is given much pride sentiment because of the long history of the Airport (Larkin, 2013). It shows that infrastructures, as Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin (2001) argue, can invoke 'structures of feeling.' By this they mean that infrastructures also shape and

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<sup>3</sup> Decisio. *Economisch belang van de mainport Schiphol: Analyse van directe en indirecte economische relaties*. Amsterdam: Decisio, 2015. Accessed July 11, 2021. <https://decisio.nl/wp-content/uploads/Economisch-belang-mainport-Schiphol.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Ministerie van Infrastructuur en Milieu Ministerie van Economische Zaken. *Actieagenda Schiphol*. Den Haag: Rijksoverheid, 2016. Accessed July 25, 2021. <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/binaries/rijksoverheid/documenten/rapporten/2016/04/29/rapport-actieagenda-schiphol/rapport-actieagenda-schiphol.pdf>

are shaped by everyday human experiences and sentiments of hope, inclusion, pride and abandonment. Several anthropologies of infrastructure (Harvey & Knox, 2012; Larkin, 2013) have described those feelings and emotions of promise that can be reflected in such infrastructural productions. Harvey and Knox (2012) in particular have focused on studying the enchantment that people have with infrastructure (Plets 2020). Using roads in Peru as a case study, they show how both the material conditions of a locus and the everyday experiences of the material possibilities of infrastructure entangle subjects with roads and generate affects. According to Harvey and Knox, building on the work of Bennett (2001), phenomenological encounters with a particular infrastructure actively produce a ‘mood of enchantment’ that eventually spills over into the realm of politics.

In the case of Schiphol, we can see this enchantment in the nationalistic sense of pride that the infrastructure of Schiphol evokes. It is the enchantment of pride and the economic advancement of the airport that has justified the exceptional position I have described under the new state assembly of the corporate state. The way Schiphol acquires an exceptional position is thus legitimised in this case by presenting Schiphol airport as an important anchor of the Dutch identity. A story in which the state contributes strongly. For example, the Schiphol Action Agenda 2016, portrays Schiphol as an important component of what makes us Dutch.

“Apart from the figures, many people feel closely connected to Schiphol. The same goes for hub carrier KLM. They have existed for such a long time, and are such strong brands, that they help determine the Dutch identity. That is why discussions about the future are not just business discussions.”

This statement shows that the policy surrounding Schiphol is not only based on facts, but also to a large extent on sentiment. This becomes further clear when you look at what is happening with the handling and processing of various reports on the future of Schiphol, which clearly paint a picture that the exceptional position is no longer legitimate when you look at the negative impact of aviation and the extent to which Schiphol is actually crucial to the Dutch economy. In 2016, at the request of the Dutch cabinet, the Council for the Environment and Infrastructure (Rli) handed over an advice on the future of the Dutch mainport Schiphol. The advice consisted of a list of highly critical comments on the growth mainport policy of Schiphol.<sup>5</sup> The council concluded that the argument that further growth of Schiphol is in the national interest should be nuanced. For decades, the mantra of the state was that Schiphol should and would drive the

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<sup>5</sup> De Graeff, Jaap et al. *Mainports Voorbij*. Den Haag: Raad voor de leefomgeving en infrastructuur, 2016. Accessed July 25, 2021. [https://www.rli.nl/sites/default/files/advies\\_mainports\\_voorbij\\_voor\\_website.pdf](https://www.rli.nl/sites/default/files/advies_mainports_voorbij_voor_website.pdf)

Dutch economy. Today, the report reads: “Schiphol is not the engine of the Dutch economy”. According to the council, there is not simply economic legitimacy for further growth of the airport or for a preferential position of Schiphol within government policy and government investments. The report calls for a change of course that will allow the economy to grow more efficiently on the one hand, and put an end to the constant increase in noise pollution and environmental damage on the other.

The critical content of the advice did not match the story that Schiphol and the state themselves like to tell. The advice was then put in a drawer and ignored. As one of my informants described it: “They are afraid to kill the goose with the golden eggs.” It is about a deeply rooted Dutch feeling of Dutch glory that hangs over Schiphol. Flag, anthem, airport - is how investigative journalist Floor Milikowski (2018) reflects on the position and representation of Schiphol in an article for *De Groene Amsterdammer*. It shows that this narrative of Schiphol as part of the Dutch identity gives free rein to the growth plans for Schiphol, even though evidence is accumulating that the negative effects no longer outweigh the positive effects of such a growth policy. As Milikowski clearly puts it: “It is very difficult to fight something when it becomes a discussion about sentiments instead of facts and figures.”

In the Netherlands, the aviation sector is sacred and Schiphol's hub function is equated with prosperity (Mommers 2019). It is this narrative of Schiphol as national pride and driver of prosperity in the Netherlands that legitimises the airport's exceptional position and further expansion. It is a sentiment of pride - due to the airport's long history - that Schiphol and the state propagate to prevent a path of de-growth in the future. The construction of such a strong image of Schiphol as part of the national identity normalises the exceptional position of the aviation sector, allowing it to continue to grow. Plets (2020), explains that the desire for growth and expansion of infrastructure is deeply rooted in materialistic notions of modernity. The Netherlands may be a country of great infrastructural achievements, but it remains a small country that wants to compete with the big players in the global economy. As various scholars have shown in their work, certain infrastructures reflect the desires, hopes and aspirations of a society, or its leaders. (Appel, 2012; Apter, 2005; Ferguson, 1999; Harvey & Knox, 2015).

However, the fact that the state and the corporation actively try to structure the way people view an infrastructure project by telling the national pride story does not mean that this sense of pride and ‘Holland's glory’ cannot come from ordinary people's daily encounters with infrastructure, as Plets argues (2020). Enchantment with infrastructure can be produced through daily encounters with the materiality of technology and the material challenges it overcomes; Aeroplanes? For many people they still have something magical. KLM is part of the national

feeling. Schiphol Airport? A symbol of connectivity, progress and Dutch national pride. At the same time, I would like to re-emphasise that these perceptions and valuations are the result of strategic public relations efforts by Schiphol, KLM and the State, both of which have much to gain from further growth of the airport infrastructure (Plets 2020).

*Chapter two:*

## **The Corporate State Attempts at Social Engineering**

Awareness of the nuisance caused by Schiphol airport began around 1970, but from the 1990s, when the airport began to grow exceptionally, resistance only grew stronger. Flight movements began to increase and with them, social resistance to the airport. For scholars engaged in resistance, the tendency has been to reveal the hidden complexities of subordinate agencies, while reifying corporate power as systematic, monolithic, and pervasive (Rajak 2020, 473). As Dinah Rajak states: “By focusing on the weapons of the weak, we overlook the weapons of the powerful, and in particular the weapons, tools and techniques that companies use to deal with the challenges they face” (Rajak 2020, 473).

The aviation sector in the Netherlands is constantly facing resistance, now more than ever as the negative aspects of the aviation sector become more widespread and clearer. In addition to noise pollution, the climate crisis is putting great pressure on the sector. As criticism evolves, so do the narrative techniques and tools that companies use to deal with them: they add new discursive weapons to their arsenal as the old ones are depleted (Rajak 2020). I consider the way the corporate state relates to this resistance a very valuable additional perspective that contributes to a better understanding of the socio-ecological struggle of the disadvantaged and the inner workings of the corporate state. To examine the state's relationship with the opposition, I will use the lens of social engineering. As Dunlap & Verweijen (2021, 1) explain in light of extractive industries: “extraction not only requires physical manipulation, it also requires social engineering”. By this they mean that such ‘economic operations’ require similar efforts to shape the human mind and behaviour, aimed at ‘managing’ dissent and ‘producing’ consent. Although I cannot compare the extractive industry with the aviation sector, this concept of social engineering helps me to look at the less visible and long-lasting



ways in which corporate actors in this case Schiphol and its allies (the Dutch state) hinder, condition and try to shape (re)actions ‘from below’.

Through three months of fieldwork with action groups and citizens' initiatives and extensive research into the actions of Schiphol and the state by studying public relations efforts and policy decisions, I have identified two very clear soft techniques of social engineering. First, at the heart of the efforts of Schiphol's social engineering techniques is the notion of ‘inclusionary control’ (Dunlap & Fairhead, 2014; Dunlap & Verweijen, 2021). Inclusionary control is about creating pseudo-participatory bureaucratic forums that promise reform and influence in decision-making. In the case of Schiphol, this is reflected in the Omgevingsraad Schiphol (Schiphol Environmental Council, or ORS) which was set up by the state and created to allow stakeholders to participate in discussions and decisions about the developments of Schiphol. It is an inclusive path to potential reforms that, although they never materialize as my case study will show, can convince people to wait before taking more radical action.

Moreover, as the national and global effects of the aviation sector on climate change become increasingly clear, in addition to the local negative effects of noise pollution and health impacts, the pressure on Schiphol to act on this is increasing. To manage those who try to resist the growth of Schiphol as advocates of climate justice and de-growth of the airport, Schiphol and the state constantly present the narrative of innovation as a solution to the high emissions of the planes and the massive noise pollution they cause. With this ‘innovation talk,’ which I will present as the second social engineering technique, the state and Schiphol try to convey that environmental protection and capitalist expansion are not incompatible within a regime that combines scientific innovation with state regulation (Rajak 2020). The constant talk of innovation-both in terms of noise and emissions-legitimizes Schiphol's policy, which is solely focused on more growth. Through this constant innovation talk, the resistance of the disadvantaged at Schiphol and climate activists is losing momentum, allowing the aviation sector to continue its normal course.

By exploring these two social engineering techniques I provide insight into the key practices of the corporate state as well as the conditions and actions of the people who experience a lot of negative impact from. Therefore, in this chapter I examine the soft techniques that the state uses to make society bow to the interests and plans of the government and Schiphol (Bräuchler 2017).

## **Inclusionary control**

In the beginning of my fieldwork, I quickly got in close contact with my gatekeeper David. In 2016 he founded the platform SchipholWatch that very actively produces and distributes articles and, in this way, attempts to make people aware of the actions of Schiphol. When I asked David if he could help me find my way through the dozens of associations, action groups and deliberation platforms that organise around Schiphol, he immediately sent me an overview via email. At the beginning of the list I read: “First of all, of course, the resident’s delegation Omgevingsraad Schiphol (ORS), the legal representation of residents at the consultative body that was first called the Alderstafel and is now called Omgevingsraad Schiphol.”

Since 2008, resident groups, the government and the aviation sector have been discussing growth and disruption at Schiphol Airport at the so-called ‘Alders tafel’. The Alders Agreement of 2008 was the most important contract in this respect and can be seen as the pacification of the aviation dispute that was ongoing at the end of the last century. Criticism of Schiphol's growth culminated 25 years ago in opposition to the construction of a new runway called the Polderbaan. In order to end the disturbed relationship between the airport and its surroundings, a trade-off between selective growth and nuisance reduction was agreed upon under the motto “Development in balance with the surroundings”. The Alderstafel, which became part of the Omgevingsraad Schiphol (ORS) in 2015, will be responsible for implementing and enforcing the agreement until 2020/2021. The ORS has two functions: on the one hand, it acts as an advisory body to the ministers of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management by consulting with residents and the aviation sector, and on the other hand, it focuses on the provision of information and the broader dialogue on developments in the area around Schiphol.

The ORS was thus intended to be a solid model for permanent consultation on the implementation of the Alders agreement and advising the government. But despite that, the basis of the agreement has not been implemented: Schiphol's growth ceiling has been reached prematurely, but the nuisance reduction has not been realised. As the Alders report 2019 shows, since 2008 more than 100% of the environmental space created has been used for volume growth.<sup>6</sup> This is certainly not a development “in balance with the environment” as promised in 2008. Pledges regarding the reduction of the number of night flights, the reduced use of the fourth runway and quieter take-off procedures have also not been met. Despite the fact that

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<sup>6</sup> Alders, Hans. *Alders Rapport*. Omgevingsraad Schiphol, 2019. Accessed June 25, 2021. <https://www.omgevingsraadschiphol.nl/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Brief-Hans-Alders-30-1-2019.pdf>

there were clear agreements, these were not implemented in reality. The cause of the failure of this agreement from this consultative body is, according to most people I spoke to simple: the government did not live up to what had been agreed with those involved. Instruments were lacking to sanction and agreements remained up in the air. It is important to note that the government and Schiphol have a different story about the implementation of these agreements. According to them, the promises were misinterpreted by the residents. In a conversation I had with a senior environment manager at Schiphol, I was told that agreements were apparently not properly recorded, because in the words of my interlocutor at Schiphol: “there are just totally contradictory views on what the agreement was.”

I would argue that it is of no importance in this case to find out who is right about these commitments. What is more telling is that the outcome ultimately remains the same, namely that the ORS is a failed consultation platform, the outcome of which has ultimately been favourable to the aviation sector. These consultations did not lead to any direct measures that would impede Schiphol's growth. Furthermore, there is no legal agreement and no future plan on how to deal with the living environment and the climate.

While this participatory instrument of the ORS was thus set to create an agreement on the future of Schiphol and stood for the promise of keeping the development of Schiphol and the surrounding area in balance, in practice it appeared to be a way of keeping the residents on a short leash. During a walk through the Amsterdam forest, I talked about this with David. He lives almost next to the forest, so we decided to meet there for a conversation. It is a lush forest with many beautiful paths where he goes for a walk with his dog every day and where planes pass every two or three minutes to take off or land on the Buitenveldertbaan. Noise in the woods comes through louder than noise in the city, David told me. In the city there is the traffic, the sirens, the crowds of people. In the forest, there is no noise and you expect peace and quiet. But the sound of airplanes carries far into a forest. I ask him about his opinion on the participatory and advisory platform the ORS. He said:

“The ORS is just a deliberative circus. There have been discussions with local residents for decades, but nothing tangible has ever come out of it. Local residents have been kept on a tight leash all that time. In these talks, voluntary residents are pitted against a large force of highly paid professionals from the sector. Residents have to go to great lengths in these consultations to have their views even considered.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Interview, David 03.03.2021

When you consider that after 13 years, since its establishment in 2008, nothing has happened and no agreement has been reached yet, it is clear to many residents that the ORS consultative body is only there to stall for time and to keep residents and action groups sweet. The ORS has even foundered. The Amsterdam newspaper *Het Parool* sarcastically headlined in 2019 about the stranded ORS: “Who knows the joke of the Schiphol Advisory? It didn't come after all. With a shameful finale, the Schiphol Environmental Council has reached its end.”<sup>8</sup> This happened, according to almost all of the active citizens I spoke to, because a majority of the council turned against Schiphol’s growth and previous agreements on nuisance reduction were not fulfilled. According to one of my interlocutors Jan, the agreement did not succeed because the residents simply did not want to agree to the growth of aviation. “The only way to regain the basic quality of the living environment is by not allowing Schiphol to grow any further, and Schiphol does not want to hear about it,” Jan explained. After 13 years of negotiations in what was first called the Alderstafel and later the ORS, unanimous advice to the government on the future of the airport became impossible. The future of the ORS is currently under consideration.

I tell this story about the ORS because it is a clear example of a soft technique of social engineering referred to as ‘inclusionary control’. It is about creating pseudo-participatory bureaucratic forums that promise reform and influence decision-making. It is precisely this act of inclusion, of being taken in as a participant, that can, as Dunlap and Fairhead (2014, 946) note, “symbolise an exercise of power and control over an individual” (Wiegink 2020, 2). As I have shown above, bringing different people together around the same table reduces the space for conflict for a long or short period of time. It also potentially deprives power from those who are in a position to challenge and confront these power relations through these created illusions of dialogue and democratic decision-making (Dunlap, 2018; Wiegink, 2020). As these deliberative platforms set the terms of debate and focus on their internal workings, dissent becomes, in Coleman's (2013) words, ‘docile’. Inclusionary control is thus about ‘keeping people engaged’ giving them the idea that they are working towards something. It is therefore also a technique that is concerned with ‘buying time’, providing a pathway to potential reforms that, although they never materialize, can convince people to wait before taking more radical action. Moreover, it works by forming new subject positions such as ‘the affected party’ (Frederiksen & Himley 2019) and the ‘social actor’ that emphasize individual responsibility, thus preventing systemic change (Coleman 2013, 170).

According to many residents and members of the action groups I have spoken to, the

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<sup>8</sup> Still, Herman. “Het advies over Schiphol: Hans Alders trapte in zijn eigen val.” *Het Parool*, January 31, 2019. <https://www.parool.nl/nieuws/het-advies-over-schiphol-hans-alders-trapte-in-zijn-eigen-val~b7ad970c/>

fact that the state does not honour its agreements in this participatory forum and repeatedly opts for the growth of Schiphol Airport despite the cries for help from many directions, is typical of Schiphol Airport and the state, which are working hand in glove. This becomes clear again when we look at the second social technique I have identified, which I will elaborate on in the next section.

## **Innovation talk**

“100 years ago, our world changed radically by the introduction of aviation. We entered a new era, an era of innovation and technology and today we are at the brink of a new era again. We're shifting gears again not faster but more sustainable. Aviation will play a key role in this.” - Cora van Nieuwenhuizen, Dutch Minister for Infrastructure and Water Management (2021)

In a beautifully produced video of the government, the Minister of Infrastructure and Water Management Cora van Nieuwenhuizen pronounces these promising words.<sup>9</sup> In this promotional film, the minister, together with Shell and KLM, proudly introduces the first flight on synthetic biofuel. For the first time worldwide, a passenger flight partly flown on sustainably produced synthetic kerosene, was carried out. Shell, producer of the sustainable kerosene and KLM, operating the flight, presented this during the event initiated by Cora van Nieuwenhuizen, Dutch Minister for Infrastructure and Water Management.

In recent years, Schiphol, KLM, and affiliated kerosene supplier Shell have increasingly advocated their commitment to a more sustainable future, demonstrating their ‘climate roadmaps’ and pushing the narrative of ‘responsible flying’ and innovative solutions to reduce the impact on the environment the full force.<sup>10</sup> This strategy of companies to symbolically communicate about environmental issues and sustainability and innovation while in reality making a significantly small contribution to achieving sustainability than they claim has been signalled by both academia and the mainstream media (Brock, 2020; Dunlap, 2020; Kirsh, 2010). This discursive fabrication of a sharply defined ‘bad’ and ‘good’ way of flying in this case, is central to the social engineering of large polluting corporations (Dunlap & Verwijen, 2021; Kirsch, 2010).

In contrast to an earlier generation of climate change denial and corporate counter-

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<sup>9</sup> Ministerie van Infrastructuur en Waterstaat, “First passenger flight performed with sustainable synthetic kerosene,” February 8, 2021, 6:33, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IjdlZCS3shk>

<sup>10</sup> “Towards A Sustainable Future,” Schiphol Group. Accessed May 1, 2021. <https://www.schiphol.nl/en/schiphol-group/page/a-sustainable-future/>

science, Rajak (2020) points out that the current corporate climate discourse is accompanied by loudly proclaimed responsibility and global climate consensus. This is fuelled by persuasive moral affirmations from corporate leaders and state personalities, often expressed as investments in the future, exactly as Minister van Nieuwenhuizen also emphasises in the promo video: “It is a good step forward, a step in a sustainable future of aviation.” Meanwhile, the growth expectations and plans of Aviation Schiphol continue. Even in the issued Luchtvaartnota (Civil Aviation Policy Memorandum 2020-2050) - a document in which the Dutch cabinet sets out its future plans for Dutch aviation - it is stated that aviation may continue to grow steadily.<sup>11</sup> Van Nieuwenhuizen pleads for more sustainable flying, but does not set additional requirements for emissions by still not establishing clear environmental and nuisance limits. This is clearly incompatible with the objective of ‘reducing the impact on the environment’ that has become the basis of the self-proclaimed ‘sustainable aviation’.

How do we make sense of this apparent paradox? This is the question that Rajak (2020) also asks when looking at the extractive industry. The key question, she states, is not how big companies try to control their climate footprint, but how they try to manage those who try resist them as advocates of climate justice and de-growth of Schiphol. The more the aviation industry engages in global climate governance, the greater their power becomes to shape the terms of the debate and manage those who critique them (Newell & Paterson 2010). The evolving power of the aviation sector in the raging debate about the future growth plans of Schiphol relies on acquiring moral authority, embracing the cause in an effort to maintain control of the field and to monitor and manage resistance and critique by presenting them with the promising story of innovation (Rajak 2020).

Schiphol and the state are continuously pushing the narrative of innovation. The rhetoric of ‘innovation is the key to success’ is used very frequently in the discussion about how to bring aviation back into balance with nature and the living environment around Schiphol. Innovation in the field of noise and emissions is constantly being talked about and presented as the sole solution. As Schiphol states on its own website: “Technological innovation is crucial to making aviation sustainable.” Innovation in the area of quieter aircraft should also offer a solution for noise pollution as described in the Civil Aviation Policy Memorandum. Furthermore, the Ministry states in the memorandum that further growth of aviation is possible through a high rate of innovation in the field of reducing emissions and noise pollution. This win-win rhetoric between growth and the fight against climate change and noise pollution thus implies not so

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<sup>11</sup> Ministerie van Infrastructuur en Waterstaat. *Luchtvaartnota 2020-2050*. Den Haag: Rijksoverheid, 2020. Accessed February 25, 2021.

much a wilful blindness, but rather an instrumental belief in the miraculous power of low-emission technologies and quieter aircraft to save the world without reducing the number of aircraft movements or regulating the air traffic markets (Rajak 2020).

These promises of innovations, which will probably take decades (if they materialise at all) to come true, is a form of social engineering that I refer to as ‘innovation talk’. The constant talk about innovation - both in terms of noise and emissions - legitimizes the Schiphol policy, which is only aimed at more growth and more flying. Because of this constant innovation talk, the resistance of the disadvantaged at Schiphol and climate activists loses momentum, allowing the aviation sector to continue with its business as usual. This soft technique, which can be situated under the broader concept of ‘political actions from above’ reflects tendencies of the soft social engineering approaches that seek to obtain a ‘social licence’ or win ‘hearts and minds’. This is achieved by using - real or imagined - positive mechanisms to gain legitimacy in a self-reinforcing and economic way (Dunlap 2014). This innovation talk has its own discursive power to side-track alternatives or invalidate criticism by portraying anyone who argues against innovation as the key to success as a ‘pessimist by nature,’ unwilling to accept that ‘the bridge can (or will) ever be built’ (Mol & Spaargaren 2007, 33). The innovation story as the key to a sustainable future is powerful and persuasive. However, in the ‘real’ world, because the vision is far from certain or complete to be made into a reality, the faith and optimism in these innovation narratives are eclipsed and the people who face the negative consequences of Schiphol have their eyes opened to the stern realities (Asayama & Ishii 2017). More and more, the action groups opposing the growth of Schiphol are becoming aware of this innovation story that the government, together with Schiphol, is constantly trying to propagate. One of my interlocutors Pete<sup>12</sup> who is strongly advocating against the growth of aviation in the Netherlands told me the following during an interview:

"Schiphol and the State keep talking about how aeroplanes are becoming quieter and cleaner and how they are doing so well with green technology. If you start calculating, it turns out to be completely unfeasible, both technically and in terms of physics. But because the government and Schiphol continually insist on these aviation 'innovations', a large part of the population and even part of the parliament believe in these future improvements. Which in turn gives them the opportunity and space to just continue to grow."

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<sup>12</sup> This is a pseudonym, as this research participant specifically requested keeping his identity private.

As the following chapters of this thesis will show; these promises of innovation, improvement of the living environment and sustainability have not materialized to date. This has led to disappointment and eventual loss of trust in policy makers, which has become a catalyst for a new kind of citizenship that provides a counter-power to these discursive social engineering techniques of the corporate state.

*Chapter three:*

## **Living in the Shadow of the Corporate State**

The previous chapters illustrated the different elements that embody the corporate state in the case of Schiphol and the Dutch state and how the corporate state relates to the growing resistance. In this chapter, I will focus on the lives of the citizens who oppose Schiphol and the government and how living in the shadow of the corporate state has changed the nature of citizenship for my interlocutors. As this chapter will demonstrate, citizens today increasingly use other means than voting to express their grievances and complaints. The scope, forms and purposes of political expression have also diversified (Rosanvallon 2008). The differentiated nature of political membership and the ways in which citizenship works as an organisational tool and mechanism for making claims on different types of political communities have been increasingly explored by anthropologists (Lazar, 2016; Ong, 1996; Isin, 2009). The ethnographic attention has drawn to the agency of citizens, but also to the means of claiming membership and commenting on the quality of membership, as we can see when people distinguish between full and second-class citizenship (Lazar 2016). This is well exemplified in the work of Petryna (2002) who shows through the concept of biological citizenship how ordinary people frame and claim the state - in her case study explicitly for disability benefits for those affected by the Chernobyl nuclear reactor explosion, or as Holston (2009) who demonstrates with the notion insurgence citizenship how slum dwellers in Brazil use a multiplicity of strategies to rupture the system and try to achieve citizenship by claiming certain rights. These examples all point to the complex relationships between people and state, and between people and law. These studies look at the 'agency' of citizens, and the way they claim citizenship.

In this chapter, I work towards a form of citizenship that pushes this act of agency and



claim-making into another (higher) sphere by mobilising against these existing power formations of the corporate state. I refer to this form of citizenship that claims the role of counter-power when in conflict with the corporate state as 'counter-citizenship'. In theorising this new concept, I draw on the work of historian and sociologist Pierre Rosanvallon (2008), whose work is dedicated to the history of democracy, the role of the state and the question of social justice in contemporary societies. Rosanvallon argues that while we have long focused on institutionalised forms of political participation, the vitality of democracy rests equally on forms of 'counter-democracy' through which citizens dissociate, protest and exert external pressure on the democratic state. Taking this counter-citizenship perspective allows us to see the question of political participation and citizenship in a new light. As Rosanvallon (2008) notes, there has been a diversification of the range, forms and purposes of political expression. As citizens' trust in political leaders and institutions eroded, especially in the West, different types of interest groups and associations developed (Rosanvallon 2008). These important institutions of representation and negotiation saw their role diminish as ad hoc organisations, citizens groups and initiatives grew in number. To move towards this new emerging form of citizenship and how it operates, I will first try to narrate the story of my interlocutors and make sense of the experience of citizens living in the immediate vicinity of Schiphol Airport. By describing the smell, noise and effects of pollution they experience, it will become clear that resistance is inescapable. In the second section of this chapter, I will show how living in the shadow of this corporate state brings about feelings of injustice, powerlessness and ultimately a great distrust in the state. In the final section I will elaborate on how the actions of the corporate state erode the trust of these citizens in this political body and how this becomes a catalyst for the formation of this new kind of citizenship that acts as a counterforce to the corporate state.

## Hopes and fears

*I cycle through the Haarlemmermeer Polder, a place where I grew up and which feels familiar to me. I take de Hoofdweg, a long stretch of country road sporadically interspersed with farms and surrounded by fields. It is spring and it is cold, but the sun slowly warms my sweating body. In the distance, I can see Schiphol's familiar skyline. With the control tower, the yellow lights of the runway and the large grey modern buildings of the terminals. Even though I have been on this road more than a hundred times in my life, cycling through the landscape today feels different, almost strange and unfamiliar. Only when I hear the birds chirping and the trees rustling do I notice that another sound is absent. The disappearance of the sound of the aeroplanes made way for the sounds of nature. I noticed I am smiling. I decide to take a detour, enjoy this peaceful ride a bit longer.*

For those living near Schiphol, the absence is almost tangible, as Schiphol is synonymous with noise pollution. It is the early spring of 2021, and there is absolute silence. Apart from a few stray planes, the corona pandemic has brought air traffic to a complete standstill. An undisturbed night's sleep, a clear blue sky, healthy air and an uninterrupted conversation in the garden. For people who do not live around Schiphol Airport, this is the most normal thing in the world. For my interlocutors, it is a dreamscape that suddenly became reality during the corona pandemic. For many, the pandemic was a time of uncertainty and unrest, but for the people who have been fighting the growth of Schiphol Airport for years, it was also a time of tranquillity and delight. Now that the noise was gone, the windows could be opened again. Long walks through the Amsterdam forest without planes flying over your head every other minute. "We could breathe again" is how Winnie de Wit, my research participant, describes it. This time when the world and also Schiphol Airport were on hold, was a time that raised hopes among my research participants of how things could be. Many of my research participants told me that they hoped this pandemic would be a reset. That this could be the moment for our government to seize the opportunity to stop the mindless expansion of air traffic. But this feeling of hope and finally living free from kerosene smells, noise pollution and concerns about the health effects was one that was quickly overshadowed with fear. Fear of the future.

“New plans already?”

Would the old times return from before the Corona era?

What about the environmental consequences?

What awaits us is disastrous.

Fine dust, noise pollution, damage to the highest air layers. Nitrogen emissions. When this pandemic is over, it will be just like before. Have we forgotten that? Who will stop this?"

These are some of the responses I read under articles by SchipholWatch about Schiphol's plan to continue with its growth plans when the pandemic is over.<sup>13</sup> Reactions such as these reflect fear of the return of everything they have been fighting against for decades. It is the fear of waking up every night to the thunderous noise of the aeroplanes, knowing that it will only get worse in the future looking at the plans of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Schiphol. In the months of lockdown, the action groups tried to turn the fear they felt into an opportunity to perhaps change the future. The action groups decided to join forces and send a joint letter to the government. In the letter, the alliance of action groups asked for an arrangement whereby KLM and Schiphol would only receive financial support from the government during this pandemic if they 'immediately cooperate in reducing air traffic'. In the end, the campaign failed and KLM received 3.4 billion in state aid.<sup>14</sup>

A few months after my peaceful bike ride, the reality that the residents were so afraid of is slowly returning. Winnie, one of my key informants, tells me that she can smell the burning kerosene stench in her bedroom again. A smell that she describes as a strong stench of pollution, like the one you get in a car tunnel - especially in the old days when there was no ventilation - if you have your window open. The black soot particles are also back on her sill below her bedroom window. "Because we can't sleep without an open window, you inhale all of that junk," Winnie told me. Numerous studies show that continuous exposure to (aircraft) noise and (ultra)fine dust leads to an increased risk of cardiovascular disease and respiratory problems (GGD, 2018; RIVM, 2019; WHO, 2018). The health of the people living in the surrounding of Schiphol and the environment are now again under serious threat. Corona seemed to be just a break from business as usual: by the end of next year, Schiphol hopes to be serving the number of passengers of 2019 again. Both these contrasting feelings of hope and fear make the citizens unwilling to give up. Fear is what drives them to keep going, hope in the future is what they need to keep fighting. The struggle against Schiphol will thus continue, as it has for decades.

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<sup>13</sup> "Corona," SchipholWatch, accessed February 8, 2021. <https://schipholwatch.nl/?s=corona>

<sup>14</sup> "Veelgestelde vragen over financiële steun aan KLM," Rijksoverheid, accessed June 15, 2021. <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/staatsdeelnemingen/vraag-en-antwoord/financiele-steun-aan-klm>

## **A parallel world**

I have been invited to Jan Griese's house. A terraced house in a meadow, at the far end of the village of Amstelveen. When I enter his place and quietly settle down on a chair, I take in his small house. There is not much furniture, I see mostly stuff; books, papers and one small desk with a computer on it. This desk is where Jan spends most of his time, he tells me when he sees me observing his place. Jan is one of the activist citizens who has been concerned longest with the nuisance caused by Schiphol. He is referred to as the expert when it comes to the history of the problems around Schiphol. This is also where his nickname, "the veteran", comes from. He has been intensively involved in the Schiphol controversy since 1990, as a member of Schiphol Working Group Amstelveen (SWAB) and as a representative in the Schiphol Area Council. He tells me that he moved to this house many years ago after he had everything re-insulated in his old house to counteract the noise pollution from the planes, but without success. "The huge Boeing planes that flew over always woke me up with a jolt, and once you are awake it is very difficult to turn away from the noise, it just gets to you." That's why Jan decided to move to this place, a few villages away from his former home. It is better here, he tells me. I keep to myself that in this house I hear the planes every four or five minutes, which makes it hard for me to concentrate. Jan is already eighty and I suspect that his hearing has deteriorated over the years, a blessing for him I think in this situation. Jan is not the only one who has moved because of the nuisance; a chairman of an action group in Aalsmeer whom I spoke to also left among many others. Not only because of the noise, he said, but also to literally distance himself from this now decades-long tense situation between residents, Schiphol and the government.

My conversations with Jan and many others reveal how the tension between Schiphol, the state and the citizens are part of a long-standing struggle. This is also evident from the number of reports, newsletters and piles of papers on the development of the airport that hang around in Jan's living room. "I have even more in the attic," says Jan. It's a collection of paperwork about Schiphol spanning thirty years. When Jan goes to look in his archive in the attic, he puts on one the documentaries made by the investigative journalism television programme Zembla about the situation around Schiphol Airport. It's something that many active residents cling to I noticed while observing. By resorting to journalistic sources that reinforce their story, the residents' argument becomes more robust. It counters the narrative of "they're just a bunch of old grumblers," Jan tells me.

The Zembra documentary<sup>15</sup> shows how residents in the 1990s began to take notice of the system of continuous expansion of Schiphol Airport. Many active citizens call this system of expansion the “growth doctrine”. In 1994, the association Milieudéfensie (Friends of the Earth Netherlands) together with the residents, organized one of the first ludic protests against the expansion of Schiphol. In the documentary you see dozens of people busy shovelling, planting and occupying a piece of land. By buying pieces of land from nearby farmers and planting a forest on the spot where a fifth runway would come, the residents tried to stop the further growth of aviation. In the end the fifth runway was finally built in 2003 and has been in full operation for 18 years.

The images I see on Jan's small screen are from 1990, but I recognize the same expressions of frustration, anger and the desperation of the citizens through my observation and conversations I had with them now in 2021, 31 years later. Meanwhile, Jan comes back into the living room downstairs with in his hands some documents he has taken from his attic; a doctoral thesis written about the manipulations of Schiphol by Menno Huijs (2011) and some old newsletters written from the Ministry to the residents. When I ask him if he sometimes feels he is fighting a losing battle, Jan replies with a sigh: “Yes, it does feel that way sometimes, but we must not give up. It has affected my life for so long, I don't want to give up now. And if we give up, it's all over.” My visit to Jan, is one of the examples of the observations I have made that show the extreme extent to which this conflict dominates the lives of the citizens who contest Schiphol. One of my interlocutors Marcel<sup>16</sup> described this to me as if you were being pulled into a parallel world. In this parallel world, aviation means something very different to him than it does to many others. “For me, this world consists of physical unrest and nuisance caused by the airplanes, but also of non-physical struggles of frustration, feeling of unfairness and distrust of the government. For some people, this world does not exist,” Marcel explained to me. In this so-called parallel world of my interlocutors, they feel that the state is no longer on their side. As Fulco expressed to me, “we no longer have a government that looks after its citizens. We have to protect ourselves now. We no longer have a government.”

The way in which citizenship is experienced by my interlocutors is to a large extent the result of a more corporatized state that aims to erect protective barriers around the instruments of the corporate world. As a result, there is a growing gap between the corporate state on the one hand and society or the social masses on the other (Kapferer 2010 127). The social masses

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<sup>15</sup> Zembra, “Decennialang Schiphollen,” February 28, 2020, 43:42, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jmgzn79x4hI>

<sup>16</sup> This is a pseudonym, as this research participant specifically requested keeping his identity private.

are increasingly deprived of their rights; their protests and electoral actions do little to change the political and oligarchical course of those who control the state apparatus (Kapferer 2010). It generates a sense of powerlessness on the one hand, but it is also, as my case study will show, a catalyst for a new form of citizenship. Before I discuss this form of citizenship, I will first focus on another very important component in the emergence of this highly activist form of citizenship. This component is the growing distrust of the state. In the following paragraph, I will gradually work towards my argument that this strong component of distrust pushes citizens into the position of a counter-power. It creates a form of citizenship in which citizens must constantly stand up, fight, be active and counter the prevailing rationalities in order to be protected and to preserve and enforce their rights.

**“A healthy democracy is about reliability and the government is untrustworthy.”<sup>17</sup>**

There are four words that active citizens around the contestation of Schiphol use to describe the actions of the government and Schiphol: manipulation, deception, lies and deceit. These are the four pillars on which the citizens' strong distrust of the state is built. With manipulation and deception, citizens mainly refer to the manipulation and deception of figures, studies and reports. As Jan tells me “this fiddling with figures, has been happening for years to the advantage of the interests of the Schiphol company”. It is indeed very easy to find headlines in various highly respected newspapers such as Volkskrant, NRC and het Financieele Dagblad ranging from “Double aim became double play”<sup>18</sup>, “Environmental standards adjusted for Schiphol growth”<sup>19</sup>, “A lesson in creative accounting from Schiphol to The Hague”<sup>20</sup> and “Schiphol always wins. Always”<sup>21</sup>. As expressed by my interlocutors and confirmed by journalistic sources, the state has a habit of using certain calculation methods to determine, among other things, noise pollution, nitrogen pollution and ultrafine dust, which always end up in favour of the growth of the aviation sector in the Netherlands. These calculations often do

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<sup>17</sup> Interview, Fulco 26.04.2021

<sup>18</sup> Meeus, Jan & Schoorl, John. “Dubbeldoel werd dubbelspel.” Volkskrant, December 20, 2003.

<https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/dubbeldoel-werd-dubbelspel~b5c9f9e5/?referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F>

<sup>19</sup> Schreuder, Arjan. “Milieunormen aangepast voor groei Schiphol.” NRC, April 12, 2006.

<https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2006/04/12/milieunormen-aangepast-voor-groei-schiphol-11111875-a400435>

<sup>20</sup> “Een lesje creatief boekhouden van 'Rupsje-nooit-genoeg' Schiphol,” Volkskrant, July 16, 2021.

[https://www.volkskrant.nl/economie/een-lesje-creatief-boekhouden-van-rupsje-nooit-genoeg-schiphol~bd513666/?utm\\_source=link&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_campaign=shared%20content&utm\\_content=free](https://www.volkskrant.nl/economie/een-lesje-creatief-boekhouden-van-rupsje-nooit-genoeg-schiphol~bd513666/?utm_source=link&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=shared%20content&utm_content=free)

<sup>21</sup> “Schiphol wint, altijd,” Financieel Dagblad, October 15, 2016. <https://fd.nl/ondernemen/1171426/schiphol-wint-altijd>

not seem to match the reality that the residents find themselves in or, worse, they are no longer up to date. For example, in 2016 Schiphol claimed that it causes less noise pollution than was actually the case. For this, the airport used outdated calculation methods that lead to more favourable results for the growth of Schiphol than if current calculation methods had been used. This was the conclusion drawn by the Commissie voor de Milieueffectrapportage (Environmental Impact Assessment Committee) (Zembla 2016). The juggling with figures also occurred in the nitrogen calculations carried out by the Ministry. Schiphol and the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management consistently ‘downscaled’ the nitrogen emissions of Lelystad Airport. Both the National Institute for Public Health and Environment (RIVM) and the Environmental Impact Assessment Commission (EIA) confirmed this. I cannot determine to what extent these actions were deliberate. What I can ascertain - drawing on all my interviews and observations - is what effect this has had in fuelling mistrust of the government.

The other two words, lie and deceive, refer to not implementing or incorrectly executing the agreements made with the citizens. “Alleged successes are exaggerated by the state and Schiphol and broken promises are concealed,” Marcel informed me. Many people blame the state for the fact that the social and ecological damage caused by aviation is always put into perspective, or even hidden away in reports. The verb “Schiphollen”, which former Environment Minister Pieter Winsemius coined when he tried to describe the state's handling of the Schiphol conflict in an interview, is synonymous with this and implies that agreements are repeatedly made with citizens while the government knows in advance that it will not honour them, causing citizens to perceive the government as unreliable. In the interview with the Dutch television the former Minister Pieter Winsemius stated: “I am not against Schiphol, but against the way they lie and deceive people every time”. Pieter Winsemius refers to the fact that the residents have been promised less nuisance for years, but in the meantime, Schiphol only continues to grow. The term “Schiphollen” has even been included in Van Dale's Groot Woordenboek der Nederlandse Taal (the leading dictionary of the Dutch language) as “to mislead by manipulation, lies, distortion of facts”. I reflect on this with one of my interlocutors Mat Poelmans, who had an important role as chairperson of the residents' delegation in the ORS discussed earlier:

“It is of course madness that a royally approved state-owned company Schiphol, got that verb in the dictionary. The worst thing you can do is lie and then you have Schiphollen. The government tries to

hide in the figures the real consequences of aviation on us people and the climate. You don't expect something like that from your own government and so it completely damages your trust in them.”<sup>22</sup>

The feeling of distrust is one that keeps returning among the citizens I have spoken to and observed. It is on the basis of this substantial component of distrust in government action that citizens unite in activist groups and interest groups. Even more so - as I will demonstrate in chapter four - this specific component of distrust shapes the way in which these citizens challenge the state and Schiphol through various acts of citizenship. This sense of distrust, I argue, is thus in this case a catalyst for the emergence of citizenship that is pushed into the position of playing a counter role to the corporate state. Rosanvallon (2008) reflects on this new role of citizens as counter-powers by introducing a comprehensive framework of counter-democracy to capture these frequent expressions of mistrust. The term ‘counter-democracy’ refers to a form of democracy that is formed by a group of citizens who complement the usual electoral democracy by playing a sanctioning and agenda-setting role (Rosanvallon 2008, 9). Rosanvallon argues that we have long focused on institutional forms of political engagement (particularly voting), but that the strength of democracy rests equally on forms of counter-democracy, in which citizens protest, dissent and exert external pressure on the democratic state.

In order to fit the observations I made in relation to the emergence of a form of citizenship under the conditions of the corporate state, I would like to take this concept of counter-democracy and bend it a little to a form of very active citizenship that claims the role of counter-power when it is in conflict with the corporate state. I refer to this form of citizenship as ‘counter-citizenship’, which stands for the emerging figure of the activist citizen as a counter-power that questions the givens of the political body and opens its borders wide (Isin, 2010; Rosanvallon 2008). Drawing on Rosanvallon's work, these counter-citizens - as I refer to them - who mobilise on the basis of mistrust, fulfil an important role in agenda-setting, monitoring and sanctioning powerful actors. Unlike citizens who adhere to the scripts already written, such as votes, tax payments, these counter-citizens occupy themselves with writing the scripts and creating the scene. The emerging figure of the counter-citizen questions the self-evident nature of that political body as the distrust in it grows (Isin 2008).

Isin (2013) echoes the argument of Rosanvallon (2008) that it is thus no longer adequate (if it ever was) to think of states as “containers” of citizens as its members. He states that new

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<sup>22</sup> Interview, Mat 23.02.2021



actors articulate claims for justice through new sites that involve multiple and overlapping scales of rights and duties. These citizens seek to change the current order by forming a kind of counter-power to the corporate state assemblies. I state that they do this by means of a number of forms of ‘acts of citizenship’. Isin (2008) coined this term referring to “those acts that transform forms (orientations, strategies, technologies) and modes (citizens, strangers, outsiders, aliens) of being political by bringing into being new actors as activist citizens (that is, claimants of rights) through creating or transforming sites and stretching scales” (Isin 2013, 383). Acts are deeds that break with the repetition of the same, in order to change and reshape our legal order (Isin 2008). By focusing on acts that transcend the everyday, we can see how citizenship as counter-power is understood, implemented and maintained under these new assemblages of the corporate state. I will therefore examine the phenomenon of declining trust in this oligarchic-corporate political emergence (Kapferer 2010) in a broader context that considers these new forms of citizenship acts.

In the next chapter, I will outline three types of citizenship acts that embody this form of counter-citizenship. By examining the acts of counter-citizenship, it will become clear that the initiatives and action groups I have ethnographically explored have in common a broader desire to improve the quality of electoral democracy, because they feel that it does not function now or functions only marginally. Therefore, a series of diverse practices have developed through which society exerts pressure and corrective power over its rulers (Rosanvallon 2008, 290). I argue that to compensate for the erosion of trust in the corporate state, distrust is organised and transformed into certain acts of citizenship.

*Chapter four:*

## **Acts of Counter-Citizenship**

“An act of citizenship in its full worldly reality is more than voting for someone else to act and speak in one’s behalf. It requires the full experience of acting and speaking’ itself.”<sup>23</sup> - Kieran Bonner (2008)

The inability of the state to keep its promises and the mistrust that this has produced has led to the development of a multitude of civic acts that seek to control, discipline and counteract this corporate state. In order to make sense of the civic acts that embody the form of counter-citizenship I outlined in the previous chapter, I have subdivided the repertoire of citizenship acts that constitute this counter-power into three forms that I will discuss in more detail in this chapter: counter-expertise, the media as a countervailing tool and legal action. First, through counter-expertise and by acting as think-tanks, these citizens are monitoring the actions of government outside parliamentary control. By becoming experts on everything to do with aviation and Schiphol, they install a form of continuous evaluation and criticism of the government's actions by the governed (Rosanvallon 2008).

Secondly, through the use of media, citizens uncover and expose worrying developments in the case of Schiphol. These actions, in which media play a crucial role in exposing and revealing misdeeds of Schiphol and the Dutch state, may bring certain issues and certain forms of governmental behaviour into the public eye. In this way, it constitutes a test for the reputation of certain actors and institutions. Finally, by taking legal action against the state, citizens use the courts and especially the judicial system to force the adoption of legal measures against the negative effects of aviation. As will become clear from reading this chapter, these three acts of counter-citizenship have different functions, but all point in the direction of the same goal: to control, oversee and oppose the behaviour and actions of the corporate state (Rosanvallon 2008). By demonstrating these citizenship acts, I will work towards my argument that distrust in the state is expressed and organised in a multiplicity of citizenship acts that embody counter-citizenship.

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<sup>23</sup> Bonner, K. "Arendt's citizenship and citizen participation." *Disappearing Dublin*. In: Isin & Nielsen eds. *Acts of citizenship*. London: Zed books (2008): 137-159.

## Counter-expertise: citizens as think tanks

“You have to have a lot of knowledge, decisiveness and commitment to mean something as a counterparty for Schiphol. Citizens have literally become think tanks.”<sup>24</sup> - Fulco

When I started interacting with my interlocutors it soon became clear that I was a novice in terms of knowledge about the complex and diverse set of effects of aviation. No matter how well I tried to be informed and up-to-date, I always seemed to play catch-up while talking to my participants. Complex calculations about noise calculations, nitrogen figures and other calculations are a big part of the discussion. My research participants seem to be experts in aviation. And some of them really are, since they have been working on this issue for thirty years. During one of the conversations I had with one of the few female interlocutors, Winnie, she described this way of producing knowledge to me as a way to contest the state and Schiphol: “All those individual citizens' initiatives and action groups around Schiphol take a different approach, but many try to speak the government's language through facts, studies and science. By getting to the same level of knowledge of the state, it is possible to control and challenge them”.

What my interactions with my interlocutors have shown me is that for citizens, finding the right ‘scientific’ arguments is a strategy to be included in the political process. But also, how becoming an expert is a method to resist the growth of Schiphol. It is a way to enact this form of counter-citizenship (Köhne & Rasch 2016). Through counter-expertise they can bring about changes in government regulation of practice. As Chhem and Clancey (2016) argue, counter-expertise interventions can disrupt the boundary between lay people and experts. They challenge the epistemological content of credentialed expertise (Nikol & Jansen 2020); and mobilise expertise through collective action (Williams & Moore 2019). It encompasses multiple types of knowledge and ways of knowing, including the use of science to reveal facts, such as a higher incidence of diseases due to ultrafine dust emissions and people's experience of suffering (Nikol & Jansen 2020).

In the case of the citizens who unite against the negative consequences of the growth of Schiphol, this process of counter-expertise is driven by two factors. Firstly, the citizens do not trust the expertise of the government; according to the citizens, much knowledge is lacking among policy makers or is fragmented. Secondly, citizens feel that policies are only based on so-called calculations instead of measuring citizens' actual experiences. The information that

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<sup>24</sup> Interview, Fulco 26.04.2021

politicians and policymakers rely on is therefore completely unrealistic, according to the citizens. My research participants therefore feel that by basing policy on calculations, their actual reality is not considered. As a result, the counter-citizens have become very active in acquiring scientific literacy and creating instruments to measure and collect the negative effects of Schiphol themselves. Moreover, they examine previously published calculations of the state and check reports for errors. One of the most important tools in the formation of counter-expertise is the citizen-created application Explain, which bears the slogan: “Real measurements instead of sham calculations.” With this app, the citizens are able to record and document flight noise. All measurements are made public. With this information the citizens hope to inform all stakeholders (local residents, media, politicians, administrators) about the real impact of aircraft noise. The app is widely promoted by all action groups and initiatives. By focusing on the measurement of noise pollution with the app, they add a critical and reflexive perspective to the conventional scientific view of calculations that the state adheres to. It is a way to counter.

In addition to conducting their own measurements, and coming up with new findings and knowledge, I also observed ways for citizens to connect or articulate different existing ideas and knowledge. For example, by organising webinars that aim to discuss the latest research from research institutions and share expertise with each other. During one of the webinars I attended online, a new study by the Municipal Health Service (GGD) on the health effects of aviation around Schiphol Airport was discussed in detail. Some people are against Schiphol because of the noise pollution, others are more concerned about the consequences for the climate and still others about the health effects. By informing each other and bringing knowledge together, the citizens try to form a united front. Fortun and Cherkasky (1998) see this articulation or ‘cooperation’ as a politics of difference, which “brings together people with different knowledge, perspectives and skills in a synchronised effort to achieve something that could not be achieved individually” (1998, 146).

The acquisition and dissemination of scientific knowledge through webinars, as well as the measurement of its negative effects through the app, enabled the emergence of a political subject whose relationship to the state was transformed by these skills and who used the new knowledge to conclude that the state could not be trusted to protect the population from the risks of aviation in the Netherlands (Cisterna 2015). Due to this mistrust, as Rosanvallon (2008) thus argued, it is clear that social movement and civic organisations often act as ‘watchdogs’ in their specific policy areas. As I have shown these counter-citizens call on counter-expertise (to combat the calculations from the other camp) and research. It is fair to say that these counter-

citizens thus play a dual role, acting both as a think tanks and a pressure groups that challenges prevailing rationales.

### **The media as a countervailing tool**

*A blonde girl with big blue eyes, wearing an orange dress, wiggles and smiles into the camera. At the bottom of the screen a text appears: "This is Sara, she is already 3!" In the next shot we see a young woman, also with blonde hair and blue eyes, it is her mother. In a pleasantly calm voice, she says her name is Noortje and that she has lived in Assendelft all her life. A new older face appears, it is Winnie de Wit the mother of Noortje. She has lived in Assendelft since 1981, she explains for the camera, she is the founder of S.O.S Zaanstreek, a citizens' initiative that fights against the expansion of aviation. Finally, an elegant old lady appears, with beautiful white hair that is held back with a green diadem. "I am Will de Wit and I am 97 years old. I left the Zaan region because of the aeroplanes".*

*Noortje de Wit appears back on the screen:*

*"I think it is important that my mother takes up this fight, because it concerns the living environment of the citizens."*

*Noortje's mother Winnie has been involved in the fight against Schiphol since 1990, but when the pressure and stress became too much for her, she stopped for a while. But after her grandchild Sara was born in 2017, she picked up the fight again.*

*Wil de Wit: "Since she has grandchildren she fights even more strongly, for them. We have to take care of those little children, who are also my great-grandchildren."*

*Wil moved to Heerhugowaard and found her peace there. But since last year she says that peace is no longer there either.*

*Winnie de Wit: "You just have to be able to live safely, don't you? And I think that is just not possible anymore." It is precisely for this reason that Winnie continues to oppose the uncontrolled growth of Schiphol Airport.*

*In the last shot we see little Sara again, with both her arms stretched out beside her, as if she were an aeroplane.*

*The image slowly fades away.*

The vignette above shows how citizens use storytelling and media as tools to get their message across and create public attention for the alarming developments around Schiphol Airport. This video, made in cooperation with activist Winnie, tells the story of four generations who have to deal with the negative consequences of the expansion of aviation in the Netherlands. It gives a face to the long-term effects of aviation. When I speak to Winnie during a long walk through her beloved village of Assendelft, she emphasizes the importance of using media to open people's eyes and make them aware. For Winnie, it does not work to speak the language of aviation by becoming an expert on noise calculations and nitrogen graphs. According to her, as an ordinary citizen the threshold for speaking out against aviation is getting higher and higher. That is why Winnie is trying to do her bit and form a counterforce by sharing her experiences and telling stories which she then shares on the internet.

It is a form of countervailing power and oversight that Rosanvallon (2008) classifies under the heading of denunciation. With the counter power of denunciation, he argues for citizens as a counter-power who can draw the public's attention to new developments or worrying trends. Denunciation often takes the form of a public statement against the representative or the system as a whole, with the grand aim of publicity and awareness. Looking at this case, I argue that citizens are already fulfilling this role. Bringing to light and unmasking worrying developments in the case of Schiphol Airport is done by citizens through the use of media and internet. Not only by collaborating on films and producing them themselves, but also by spreading revealing information quickly and widely through articles.

A good example of this is SchipholWatch, a very professionally set up (news) site that focuses exclusively on the developments around Schiphol. It is a critical collective of local residents that tries to raise and expose the actions of the state and Schiphol by writing substantive articles on Schiphol policy and recent developments. Under the almost daily published articles, people can react and inform each other by exchanging views. It is often a place where people with different backgrounds and motivations can discuss the issues surrounding Schiphol. This shows that the media is not only a real political form, but also a social form in the fullest sense of the word. It plays a role in attempts to build unprecedented kinds of communities that together can exert enormous pressure on the existing power forces by creating a large consciousness and thereby holding the state to account (Rosanvallon 2008).

It is precisely for this reason that the action groups also make extensive use of Twitter. "We use Twitter to exchange news and developments with each other," one of my interlocutors

Richard told me.<sup>25</sup> “It is the most effective way of creating awareness and exerting pressure,” He continues. On twitter the activists individually post daily updates on the developments around Schiphol. Reports and articles about the negative effects are shared on the platform. It is a place where they ask for support for their petitions, and draw attention to their upcoming campaigns. These acts of citizenship, such as writing twitter updates, producing articles and making videos, are part of the process by which citizens redefine their relationship to the corporate state. It is a way, as I argue, of trying to change the current order of the economically driven rhetoric of the corporate state. The use of the media as a tool to change the current order reflects the rise of the politics of mistrust, in the sense that these media-driven citizenship acts seek to create transparency and accountability, two elements that are missing in the relationship between the citizens and the corporate state.

### **Doing it the legal way**

I walk along the quay of the Westeinde lakes, there is a strong wind, the sun is reflecting in the water and on the glistening waves I see dozens of coloured screens moving. Windsurfers. I am in Aalsmeer. A place about 15 km from the big city of Amsterdam, which is not only known as a water sports paradise, but is also famous for its flowers, as it is home to the world's largest flower auction (called VBA). Aalsmeer is also located directly beside one of the main runways of Schiphol Airport, the Aalsmeerbaan. The proximity of the international airport Schiphol has a great influence on the municipality and its inhabitants. On the one hand the airport is of great importance for the economy of the village, especially the flower trade. On the other hand, it causes a lot of noise nuisance and has a considerable impact on the quality of life. For a number of years now, the use of the Aalsmeerbaan has increased and so has the resistance in the village.

Right here along the quay at the edge of the Westeinde lake is the house of Piet Bon with whom I have arranged a meeting. He is a well-known figure in the village. Many know him as their trusted doctor, but far beyond Aalsmeer he is known nationally and internationally as a sports doctor and medical supervisor in football, hockey and rowing. Five years ago, Piet stopped his general practice and started to focus largely on the opposition to Schiphol Airport. In 2019 he participated in a protest action of Greenpeace who organised a protest festival at Schiphol Plaza with the aim to demand a climate plan from Schiphol, as it is one of the biggest polluters the Netherlands. “It felt good to be there,” Piet tells me as we take a seat at a large

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<sup>25</sup> This is a pseudonym, as this research participant specifically requested keeping his identity private.

wooden table in his spacious home. Although the ludic protest actions of such formal organizations like Greenpeace remain important, a number of citizens' groups in Aalsmeer are now taking a different approach. After decades of raising awareness through research and drawing attention to the problem through the media, people have become numb, Piet Bon explains to me. Since this year 2020, three citizens' organisations in Aalsmeer has started a civil lawsuit against the state. For many people I have spoken to, the lawsuit against the state feels like a last resort. Piet is part of a core group that in April 2020 set up the Recht op Bescherming tegen Vliegtuighinder foundation. The foundation wants to force the government (the State of the Netherlands) through the courts to take legal measures against the negative effects of aviation.

What exactly has led to the pursuit of this legal route, I learn talking to one of the initiators of the foundation, Jan Boomhouwer. Jan has played an important role in the opposition to Schiphol here in Aalsmeer since 1990. After countless efforts to oppose Schiphol through petitions, protests and creating awareness, it was necessary to hold the state accountable in a 'neutral' way, he told me. When I ask Jan what he means by neutral, he explains that in his opinion, the economic argument of Schiphol and the state, and the way citizens tried to challenge it, is very polarising and not constructive at all. Focusing purely on what they are rightfully entitled to as humans by law makes the discussion more neutral according to Jan. The lawsuit against the state will cost a lot of money, and crowdfunding for the civil procedure is in full swing. As Jan expressed to me, this move to sue the state was one that was ultimately irreversible. "The dissatisfaction, anger, frustration and powerlessness are growing among our members. Residents are simply not heard. Many people feel they are being treated as second-class citizens. Not only residents' associations, but also representatives from various municipalities feel that the quality of life - health, residential enjoyment and safety - in the far surroundings of Schiphol Airport is under severe pressure. There is no legal framework to prevent the deterioration of our health and living conditions. As a result, aviation is elusive," he explained to me. This was the reason for setting up the Recht op Bescherming tegen Vliegtuighinder (RBV) Foundation. RBV wants to force the government (the State of the Netherlands) through the courts to take legal measures against the negative effects of aviation. "So that we, as citizens, can claim our rights." I read on the foundation's website. As many of my research participants voiced to me. Schiphol has so far always received the benefit of the doubt from the state, so they want to try it the legal way. But when I asked my research participants how they rate their chances, I often heard doubt. "After all, the state and Schiphol Airport have endless bags of money from which they can draw, we don't," Jan told me. I have



a feeling that, after decades of struggle, these people no longer dare to hope so much. After all, they have been told off so often.

But then, the moment my fieldwork comes to an end, something happened that was worthy of celebration for many of my research participants. On 26 May 2021, the Dutch environmental group Mileudefensie won its climate case against Shell. The judge ruled that Shell must reduce its CO2 emissions by 45% by 2030. A case that was also closely followed by the action groups at Schiphol, since it many parallel with their legal pursuits. A few hours later after the news broke, I immediately read the following on SchipholWatch:

“At last, a judge has considered the future of our and future generations in her ruling. Their right to a decent standard of living and health prevails over economic gain. And that prompts the mobilisation of a lawsuit against KLM/Schiphol. Decades of polder deliberations, studies of air and noise pollution have revealed a wealth of results and publications. The evidence for the harmfulness of airports in the Netherlands is undeniable. Harmful to the health and well-being of citizens. A violation of Article 21 GW and universal human rights. If Shell is vulnerable, then Schiphol can be too.”<sup>26</sup>

I see the comments under the article flooding in:

“This is worth a celebration! We are not there yet but the power is starting to waver. Congratulations and many thanks to all those who have worked to achieve this result.”

“It feels like Troye has fallen after years of siege. Amazing!

It also illustrates that here in the Netherlands there is still an independent judiciary. And that can be called quite special under the pressure of so many lobbyists and government interests. There is hope for the future.”

“As expected, the tide is turning.

Finally, .....

Here in Oegstgeest, the flag goes out.”

The people have hope. Hope that after decades of fighting, they might finally succeed in making a fist against the mighty giant that Schiphol is. I am glad that the case of Shell gives the people of Schiphol a glimmer of hope for a future in which the state (in this case the rule of law) will decide in their interest, in the interest of humanity and the climate. But I would be lying if I did

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<sup>26</sup> “Shell onderuit in rechtzaak ook gevolgen voor KLM,” SchipholWatch, accessed May 26, 2021. <https://schipholwatch.nl/2021/05/26/shell-onderuit-in-rechtszaak-ook-gevolgen-voor-klm/>

not admit that I have serious doubts about a happy ending. When I followed the citizens enacting and performing these acts of counter-citizenship, such as (counter-expertise, creating awareness through the media and starting a lawsuit) I really started to wonder if it was leading anywhere. Do all these actions really lead to holding the state to account? Were these citizens not just fighting a losing battle? “Maybe,” Fulco said to me, “but there is no choice but to keep on fighting. After all, what is at stake is our health, our lives and the future of our children,” he continued. Many of my research participants expressed to me that it is their civic duty to keep going. As Fulco pointed out to me when I called them activists: “I prefer not to call us activists, because I think we are just citizens. I am not an activist, this is just our civic duty.”

# Conclusion

The invention of the economy and the market began as a relatively autonomous phenomenon, separate from society and, most importantly, controlled by the state. In the present context, the situation is almost the reverse. It has come to the point where the political has become subordinate to and controlled by the conditions of the economy and the corporate. This is the core of the political assemblage that Kapferer (2010) refers to as the corporate state. My case of Schiphol Airport and the Dutch state is an exceptional and extreme example of this since Schiphol Airport is literally 70% state-owned. This complex political assemblage, as I argue in this thesis, has led to a transformation of the nature of the state, but above all has had a profound effect on citizenship and the way it is enacted.

This thesis has captured the lived reality of the citizens living in the shadow of the corporate state with the aim of understanding this new state assembly and how citizenship is enacted and performed under these conditions of the corporate state. As my ethnographic research has shown, the corporate state is a difficult phenomenon to capture, partly because this new state assembly has a rhizomic character in which we can't find a beginning nor an end (Deleuze & Guattari 2004). The corporate state is something that is maintained by many things, on many different scales and by many different actors and processes that are interrelated. Despite this, in exploring this corporate state, a number of elements have emerged that I believe embody the corporate state in the specific context of Schiphol Airport and the Dutch state. One important element is when this corporate entity becomes entwined in the heart of the state, it acquires an exceptional position in which the corporate is excluded from various established norms and laws that apply to other corporate sectors. In the case of Schiphol, this concerns lower or no noise and environmental standards (including nitrogen, (ultra-) fine dust and CO<sub>2</sub>) and the absence of tax burdens. The exceptional position of Schiphol is legitimised in this case by presenting Schiphol airport as an important anchor of the Dutch identity and national Dutch pride. A narrative to which the state makes a strong contribution. The construction of such a strong image of Schiphol as part of the national identity normalises the exceptional position of the aviation sector, allowing it to continue to grow. Moreover, as long as the state continues to let the discussion about the developments of Schiphol be about sentiments instead of facts and figures, the corporate state is hard to challenge (Milikowski 2018).

The stories and the lived experience of the people who opposed Schiphol revealed how living in the shadow of this corporate state brings feelings of injustice, powerlessness and

ultimately a great distrust in the state, as the state deliberately sides with the aviation industry and makes agreements with citizens that it never fulfils. The way in which citizenship is experienced by my research participants is thus to a large extent the result of a more corporatized state that wants to erect protective barriers around the instruments of the aviation industry rather than protect its citizens from the negative consequences of the growth mentality of Schiphol. As a result, I argue, this new state assembly erodes the trust of these citizens in this political body and become a catalyst for the formation of this new kind of citizenship that acts as a counter-power to the corporate state.

Counter-citizenship - as I have labelled this form of citizenship - mobilises on the basis of distrust, and fulfils an important agenda-setting, monitoring and sanctioning function. With this concept I draw on the work of Rosanvallon (2008) who argues with the term counter-democracy to a form of democracy that is formed by a group of citizens who complement the usual electoral democracy by distance themselves, protest and exert external pressure on the democratic state. To suit the purpose of the analysis of my case I reinterpreted the term and moulded it to a form of highly action-oriented citizenship that is pushed into the role of counter-power when in conflict with the corporate state. Counter-expertise, the use of media as countervailing tool and taking legal action are ways of enacting this form of counter-citizenship (Köhne & Rasch 2016). In contrast to citizens who comply with the scripts that have already been written, such as voting and paying taxes, these counter-citizens take actions that enable them to control and oversee the behaviour and actions of elected and appointed rulers (Rosanvallon 2008). In this way, they are able to exert pressure and ultimately change the current order. As the negative consequences only intensify and the corporate state continues to manipulate and deceive in pursuit of its growth plans, the emerging figure of the counter-citizen is inescapable.

This concept of counter-citizenship helps to grasp the complex phenomenon of the corporate state. Assuming that they are mutually constitutive, counter-citizenship is a valuable lens through which to understand how this new sovereign formation manifests itself and how it radically reshapes the social and society itself. In addition, it has a broader relevance to examine this form of counter-citizenship in different contexts. The way in which the state has become increasingly corporate-oriented instead of citizen-oriented has created a widening gap between the corporate state on the one hand and society on the other, is in fact a phenomenon that is present all over the world (Kapferer 2010,127). The assemblage of the corporate state arises within the context of the nation-state and is likely to take different forms depending on local circumstances. This discussion is based on the Dutch experience, and there is reason to believe

that some of the dimensions I have outlined are likely to be different elsewhere. Therefore, I believe it is valuable to examine more locally in different contexts the way in which the corporatization of the state allows the economic to gain ascendancy over the political and the social. In doing so, we as scholars can get a better grip on the impact of this new state assembly.

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