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Conceptualizing Unsettling Dynamics in The Hague

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Introduction

On New Year's Eve 2006–2007, a group of local youth drove their scooters into the local shopping center of what was perceived to be a quiet, family-oriented suburb of The Hague, the Netherlands. With unclear motivation but clear frustration, the youth vandalized public spaces, circled citizens watching the fireworks, and generally disrupted the area. Their disruption did not last long. Local authorities immediately responded by sending militarized police units. Vehicles resembling tanks blocked the streets and youngsters were arrested. Neighbors described the scene as a 'warzone'. How did this quiet suburb turn into a place where police and youngsters stand in opposition on a public street? How were the events that night related to the ongoing conflict about the closing of a self-managed community center two years before? How can we understand the unfolding process of unsettling dynamics between citizens and local authorities?

Urban public spaces are increasingly contested by citizens, younger as well as older people, who sometimes use force to claim their 'right to the city' (Lefebvre 1996; Mitchell 1996, 2003; Springer 2011). Instances such as what the New Year's Eve event make distinguishing between senseless violence and genuine claims to "the right to the city" somewhat opaque. Governments claim a monopoly on violence and its definitions, and thereby legitimize their own violent response to residents contesting the state by self-validating any action as necessary to re-establish order. But this response turns a blind eye to the context of outbursts of violence and alternative meanings that violent acts of citizens might have in public space. I concede with Springer that violence is understood as "both an outcome of attempts to impose an 'ordered' view of public space originating 'from above', and […] an act of resistance 'from below' by those seeking radical democratic spaces of 'unscripted' interaction" (Springer 2011: 526). This chapter seeks to critically

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reflect on the preceding acts of everyday violence practiced by the state, welfare professionals and citizens during the urban conflict that may lead up to a riot. I propose three typologies of unsettling dynamics: dispute, controversy and crisis.

To reflect on the dialectics of (un)settling practiced simultaneously by various actors, we need to study how public spaces allow for embodied spatial practices of citizens contesting local rule and authority (Springer 2011; Thörn et al. 2016), but also how governments resort to closing public space or police it when citizens successfully claim public space (Low 2000). Riots take place in a particular spatial and temporal contexts and are embodied (Moore 2011). In this chapter, I therefore conceptualize unsettling dynamics, by analyzing how rhythms of action-reaction and definitions of public space affect the nature of power relations (Harré and Langehove 1999) between local government actors, citizens and professionals.

To analyse the dynamics of conflict, I make a distinction between strategies and tactics (De Certeau 1984). Strategies are long-term, well-organized practices of people in power who are established in politics, planning and governing (De Certeau 1984). Strategies establish relations between 'powerful' and the 'weak'. Tactics, by contrast, counteract the powerful sphere of strategies and occur in ways that do not fit conventions of political action. They must utilize opportunities to work against control and create surprises (ibid.). This distinction helps to grasp why specific tactics are so effective in defying strategic rules and regulations in public space.

A detailed analysis of urban conflict requires empirical data about people's performances and ideographic experiences during events. An ethnographic methodology is best equipped for such endeavor because it allows to get a deep understanding of the social relationships among case actors and situated events in urban conflict (Verloo 2020; Hammersley and Atkinson 1994; Geertz 1973). I conducted ethnographic fieldwork from 2009 to 2011. The structured participant observations in and around the community center allowed me to study the unfolding relationships after the New Year's Eve riots (see Verloo 2015). To gain in-depth understanding of the events that took place proceeding the riots, I used narrative interviews (Georgakopoulou 2006; Mishler 1986; Verloo 2015) in which case actors narrated their ideographic experiences throughout the sequence of events. Case actors were interviewed several times to delineate the progression of their experiences and memories. The section of the case study that is relevant for this chapter is based on 15 narrative interviews and five focus group sessions (Morgan 1996) with residents from the neighborhood, local youth, policymakers, welfare workers and police officers. The combination of narrative interviews and participant observations in the period after the riots allowed me to validate and reflect on my interpretations of the observations and vice versa (Jerolmack and Khan 2014).

Introduction to the Case Study

The urban conflict I analyzed took place in Ypenburg, a new development in the city of The Hague (see Figure 20.1). Ypenburg was built in the late 1990s, as

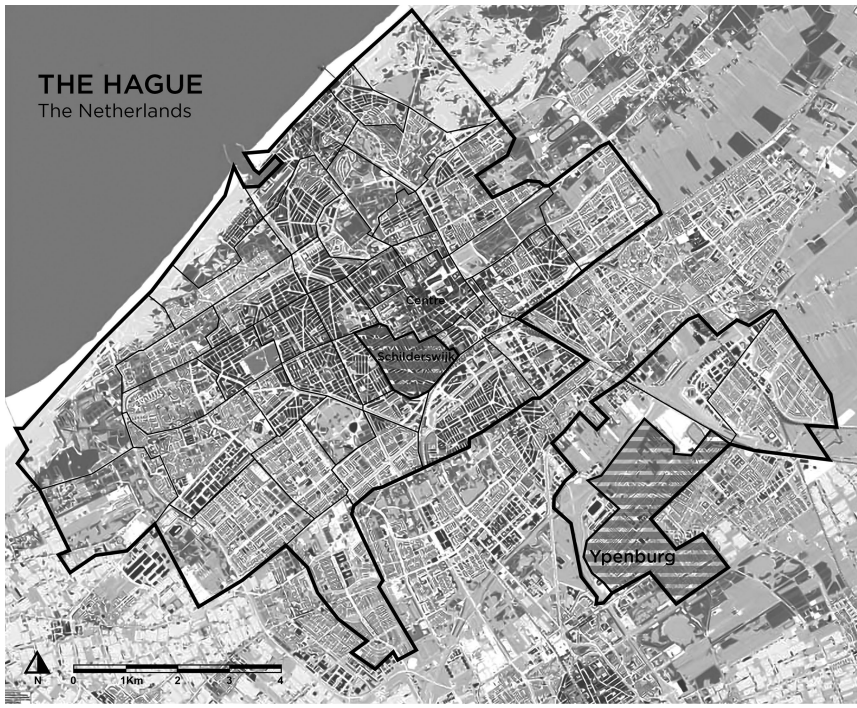

FIGURE 20.1 Map of The Hague.
Source: Santiago Sanchez Guzman, 2020.

part of a popular urban development policy. The policy addressed the growing demand for middle-class homes outside city centers by helping cities build neighborhoods outside established city districts. At the time, politicians in the Netherlands were preoccupied with the ambition to mix people from different socioeconomic backgrounds (Bolt et al. 2009).

The aim to construct a diverse neighborhood was primarily understood in socioeconomic terms. In 2004, 56% of the housing stock was owned, the rest was social rent (Gemeente Den Haag 2005a: 12). In 2015, occupant-owned housing increased to 66%, while social housing was 29%, and 4.5% was private rent (Gemeente Den Haag 2016: 6). The social housing stock declined because social housing associations sold homes or transferred them into the private rental market. Ethnic diversity was and is much lower than in The Hague as a whole. In 2004, 69% of the inhabitants of Ypenburg were of Dutch descent and 15.8% are of so-called Non-Western migration backgrounds, The Hague's average population with a Non-Western migration background was 30% in 2004, 33% in 2015, and 36% in 2019 (Gemeente Den Haag 2019). In the case study below, the ethnic composition was not the main trigger of the described conflict, which unfolded along the lines of neighborhood identity and socioeconomic differences.

The local government of The Hague had been a centralized administration with an elected council of aldermen. The civil servants active in the neighborhood worked primarily in the *Bestuursdienst*, the central body that is responsible for public policy, order and safety. Mayors are not elected in the Netherlands, they are appointed by the national government and the King. Mayors, together with the head of local police and public prosecutor are responsible for public order and safety. The mayor is thus very powerful in moments of crisis, and is the chairman of the council, but mayors are not primarily responsible for making local policies.

Dynamics of Unsettling

Settling

In 2001, the first families arrived to Ypenburg. The neighborhood was still under construction and activities for youth were not yet built. Ypenburg was still territorially under the mandate of the town Rijswijk. To prevent youth from playing in the construction site, a group of early residents were given a temporary hangar and a subsidy to start a community center from Rijswijk. They called it 'the Cockpit', after the airport that Ypenburg used to be.

The founders of the Cockpit were a community of approximately six families that knew each from Schilderswijk. Their shared history of community organizing allowed them to tactically set up children and community activities. Schilderswijk is a lower middle-class inner-city neighborhood in The Hague. In 2005, 72% of the housing stock was social rent (in comparison to 32% in The Hague as a whole), 52% of the inhabitants were lower educated (32% in The Hague), and 42% of the people lived on minimum wage (15% in The Hague) (Gemeente Den Haag 2005a). Currently, 91% of Schilderswijk's inhabitants are of Non-Western backgrounds, but when the people in the case study refer to Schilderswijk, they remember a neighborhood that was primarily inhabited by Dutch lower working-class families. The neighborhood is also known for its long-standing community traditions. The community of families associates their identity as 'Schilderswijkers' with their strong community bonds and role as organizers.

The Cockpit (see Figure 20.2) allowed for a period of settling. The dynamics that constituted this process were noticeable in mundane practices of everyday life (De Certeau 1984). Youngsters from all over the neighborhood came to do activities and, in the evenings, other community members would come to play bingo, cards and have food together.

> Everything went naturally. Not all children have the means to go on holiday. We had to entertain them. Everyone else was away, so in the morning I would fry eggs for the children. […] And then he [points at Tall Harry] would blow up the jumping cushions.
>
> *(Manus, founder of the Cockpit, personal interview, 14 May 2009)*

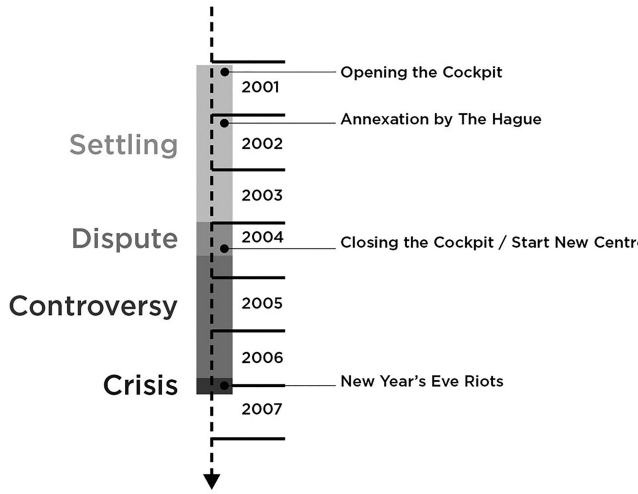

FIGURE 20.2 Timeline of unsettling dynamics.
Source: Santiago Sanchez Guzman, 2020.

The construction of the Cockpit tacitly served the development of a community through a parochial domain, constituting "commonality between neighbors who are involved in interpersonal networks that are located in communities" (Lofland 1998: 10).

A stable rhythm of communal activities allowed for certain predictability of community life and relationships of trust between residents and the local government that supported these activities, and, trust among new inhabitants of various socioeconomic backgrounds who also settled in Ypenburg. As more residents moved in—the population grew from 8,708 inhabitants in 2001 to 17,525 inhabitants in 2004 and 20,640 in 2016 (Gemeente Den Haag 2005b, 2016)—the community diversified socio-economically. Consequently, the Cockpit had to diversify its activities.

When the local government of The Hague annexed Ypenburg in 2002, the settled relationships did not change: citizens continued to self-manage the Cockpit. The initial founders became known as 'the Cockpit Group' and continued to manage and organize community activities.

Unsettling through Dispute

Settling dynamics are always conditionally contingent and fragile. In 2004 (see Figure 20.2), when the construction of the neighborhood was nearly complete, the settled relationships started to unsettle. The Cockpit became a focal point on the political agenda. According to The Hague's administrative rules, community centers had to be managed by a professional welfare organization under the contract of the municipality. The Cockpit had to close.

In the period between the new center opening and Cockpit's closing, the local government started to strategically problematize the role of the Cockpit Group through a narrative that doubted the appropriateness of the existing situation; "that period of the Cockpit is understood as the time in which all the problems originated" (Hans, head of local police office, personal interview, 13 May 2009). The people who founded the Cockpit were blamed for problems; "it was a sort of domain of bandits that nobody had anything to do with and where the residents could do whatever they wanted and also their children" (Frank, local police officer, personal interview, 11 May 2010).

The institutional actors emphasized that the Cockpit Group originally came from Schilderswijk and focused on the neighborhood's majority of lower working-class people. The reference to the Schilderswijk stereotyped the Cockpit Group as lower working class and less educated. Frank, a local police officer (personal interview, 11 May 2010), described the Schilderswijk identity as:

> What they took along is a lifestyle in which the social control is very high, but the living conditions very different. [From Schilderswijk] they bring along a history of social control, way of living, how your parents use to speak to you, and so on. And all of that gets replaced to an environment with front yards. At a certain point they hang on to old values, but other factors are changing.

As Ypenburg became a community primarily inhabited by residents from higher socioeconomic classes (Gemeente Den Haag 2016), the Schilderswijk and their socioeconomic status started to play a role in marginalizing their role as appropriate community organizers. Local police officers and civil servants started a process of 'othering' that disrupted the settled identity of the Cockpit Group as capable community organizers and reframed them as 'bandits' working only for their private interest. The narrative of the Cockpit as a 'domain of bandits' sowed doubt about the public meaning of the Cockpit as a 'parochial realm'. It delegitimized the Cockpit as a place for communal activities characterized by "ties of intimacy among primary group members who are located in households or personal networks" (Lofland 1998: 10).

Unsettling through Controversy

In 2004, the local government decided to close the Cockpit and open a professional community center in a new building. There was no space assigned for the Cockpit in the new center and the role of the Cockpit Group changed from 'founders' and 'organizers' to volunteers in activities organized by professionals. The lack of space and change of roles escalated tensions into a controversy.

The Cockpit Group expected that they would receive a space in the new center to continue their community activities and were discouraged to find there was no space for them. They also felt nobody listened to them despite many

conversations they had in advance: "First we were to have a space and later not anymore. But because we engaged in much talking and efforts, they could not just ignore us" (Sjaan, resident and member of Cockpit Group, personal interview, 14 May 2009).

The Hague's council had the ambition to engage active residents in organizing community activities in the neighborhood (Gemeente Den Haag 2016). The kinds of community organizing they sought, however, were not those of the Cockpit Group. When the new center opened, the local government strategized how to disassociate the new center from the Cockpit. To them, the Cockpit stigmatized the new community center:

> We wanted to get rid of the stigma of the Cockpit Group. We now had the new centre. We did not want it to be related to the Cockpit, because it had such a negative image in the neighbourhood. People said: 'oh those are the old Cockpitters, we don't want to have anything to do with them'. The new centre was much more positive, so we forgot about the Cockpit and called them the volunteers of the new centre.
>
> *(Brenda, local policy practitioner, personal interview, 19 April 2011)*

The local government actively sought to excise the Cockpit's history from the new center because they believed the 'stigma' of the Cockpit Group would make the center unattractive to other residents. Where the disagreement in disputes is contained to a single focus, disagreements during controversies broaden. The disagreement over a space for the Cockpit escalated into interlinked issues of disagreement: a physical space for the Cockpit, and the role of the Cockpit Group, their place in the community, and the institutional power of the welfare organization. A second characteristic of controversies is that new stakeholders are usually introduced, which generates an unpredictable sequence action and reaction. The local government introduced welfare professionals that were assigned to establish an inclusive community center but at the same time to "get rid of the memory of the Cockpit" (ibid.).

Professionals were thus challenged with rising tensions while they had to establish a power position and demonstrate their professionalism. They also had to engage with community members, including the unsatisfied members of the Cockpit Group who were now volunteers in the center. Professionals approached that dilemma by attempting to impose a hierarchy: "I think as a welfare worker working with youth, we have a pedagogical responsibility" (Stan, former manager of the center, personal interview, February 2009). Stan established his position as one being associated with 'pedagogical responsibility', a theme that relates to general ideas about Dutch community organizing. Another strategy was to differentiate the new center from the Cockpit by setting rules: "Rules have to be maintained here. We have the control so we also set the rules" (Dennis, youth worker, personal interview, 16 December 2009). A rule was immediately implemented barring volunteers' activities organization without the presence of

a professional. The seemingly mundane change belied the professionals' attempt to establish power over the volunteers.

The Cockpit Group was not satisfied with their assigned position and wanted to continue their community activities independently. Their own sense of identity was closely related to this self-prescribed community responsibility. In organizing activities, they tacitly celebrated their Schilderswijk background: "I always say, 'I am proud of my background', and it is us who were able to organize a club here and that is what we are still fighting for" (Gonnie, resident and member of the Cockpit Group, personal interview, 14 May 2009). By taking up the role as community organizers, the group celebrated an important identity in the neighborhood, being reduced to volunteers would deny that identity and position.

In their efforts to keep a role in the center, the group resorted to a tactical approach and took up space (Moore 2011) by being physically present and by hanging their old Cockpit sign on the wall. These tactics helped to assert the memory of the Cockpit physically and symbolically. They negotiated that their sign would be allowed to stay, but that was merely symbolic as they were not allowed to independently organize activities. Tactics take place in the sphere of the 'other', they must play in the terrain that is imposed upon them (De Certeau 1984). In the new community center, the tactics of the Cockpit Group were not able to shift the formal hierarchy, nor to defy the top-down strategies of municipal actors to exclude the memory of the Cockpit from the new center.

At this point, the youth became a focal point in the controversy. The youth were pushed around in two simultaneous directions. They were tactically guided by the Cockpit Group in their acts of rebellion to contest the welfare professionals through minor misbehavior in and around the center, while also continuously being punished and criminalized for these incidents by the professionals.

The third characteristic of controversies is fast and unpredictable rhythm of actions and reaction. For a period of over two years (see Figure 20.2), the rhythm of controversy included small but weekly incidents. For example, the youth would lock themselves in the toilet around closing time, so that the professionals could not close the building and go home after their shift. "Another practice was to flush whole rolls of toilet paper so that the toilet would be clogged every week" (Omar, youth worker, personal interview, 20 June 2011). These tactical incidents started to produce ambivalence about the effective performance of the professionals. Dennis, a youth worker reflects on the tensions in this period:

> At a certain moment you feel something like: hey, something is wrong here. And nine out of ten times you can't put your finger on what it is, but you know there is something in the atmosphere. There is a tension that you can almost touch.
>
> *(personal interview, 16 December 2009)*

An important institutional strategy that professionals had at their disposal was expelling misbehaving youth from the community center. Expelling was meant

to re-establish order and maintain a needed power position to keep the center safe for other youth. In practice, however, it also spread the tensions from the center into other public spaces of the neighborhood. Because youth were forced to hang around in the street, new unsettling dynamics between the youth, the Cockpit Group, welfare professionals and other neighborhood residents emerged. "[It] becomes an issue of the police and the neighborhood. Because youth workers are in some sort of crisis in which they cannot keep control over that group" (Hans, head of local police department, personal interview, 13 May 2009).

Unsettling through Crisis

The extended period of controversy created a new form of settlement, continuous tensions became the norm. In line with the dominant narrative, local authorities assigned the Cockpit Group as the perpetrator of these dynamics: "violence increased each year. The breeding ground was that a part of this generation received support from their parents. Because they were in that group who had a key position in the neighbourhood that they had lost" (Hans, head of local police department, personal interview, 13 May 2009).

Unsettling dynamics became a settled state of affairs. The New Year's Eve 2006–2007 riots described at the beginning of this chapter disrupted the fragile settled state and further escalated unsettling dynamics into what I call crisis:

> Well, the same group lost control over themselves and over their youngsters. That's why it became an uprooted disaster. That led to a situation where the police had to intervene harshly [...] we had to intervene harshly with the riot police.
>
> *(ibid.)*

In moments of crisis, the rhythm of action and reaction accelerates: acts of affected citizens and local authorities or vice versa follow each other more quickly. As the state claims a monopoly on violence, they dismiss the act of violence, regain control over the public space and discipline the perpetrator. Often this response is equally or even more violent than the initial riot (Mitchell 2003; Sampson and Raudenbush, 1999; Thörn et al. 2016). Like in many other moments of riot across the globe, local authorities in The Hague responded by sending militarized police and their tank-like vehicles, blocking the streets and arresting youth.

Conceptualizing Unsettling Dynamics

This chapter analyzed the dialectics of settling and unsettling dynamics at the street level. The escalating dynamics in the case study resulted in riots between youth and police. Authorities understand and approach riots by focusing on the necessity to police and contain them. I argue that if we truly want to understand

the meaning of riots, we must dig deeper into various forms of everyday violence that are performed simultaneously by the state, and preceding actions of professionals and citizens.

I proposed three typologies of urban conflict: dispute, controversy and crisis to understand the escalating process of settling and unsettling. These typologies emerged by analyzing the process of action and reaction among state actors, citizens and street-level professionals. The analytical triad of studying the rhythm of (re)action, the positioning of actors (Harré and Langehove, 1999) and the changing meaning of public space (Lofland 1998) was helpful to conceptualize the dialectic dynamics of (un)settling.

The case study revealed that unsettling dynamics start with seemingly small forms of exclusion. Not only in protracted conflicts but also in situations where relatively new tensions arise or where local governments have good intentions, like in The Hague. When studying the process of (un)settling, it is important to become attuned to the seemingly mundane everyday interactions and how they actively shape processes of exclusion and power relations, and lay the groundwork for future processes of (un)settling.

When disputes unsettled fragile settled relationships between the state and citizens, the rhythm of everyday life did not change; the Cockpit Group continued organizing for their club and residents visited the Cockpit. The meaning of the Cockpit and its founders, however, started to change via top-down strategies that produced uncertainty about the Cockpit as a parochial realm (Lofland 1998). The local government started to employ a stigmatizing narrative that reified the Cockpit Group's identity as 'Schilderswijkers' and the Cockpit as a 'terrain of bandits' challenging the Cockpit Group's identity as valid community organizers. The unsettling narrative disrupted the established agreement over ownership of public spaces and community activities. Disputes are often constrained to a single focal point, in this case, the appropriateness of the Cockpit in the neighborhood.

Controversy as a typology of unsettling dynamics is characterized by a broadening of topics over which parties disagree, by the introduction of new case actors, and an unpredictable rhythm of actions and reaction. The period of controversy broadened a dispute over participation in a community center to a controversy over social and spatial injustice. The strategies of local government and professionals deepened the stigmatization of the Cockpit Group and the youth connected to the Cockpit Group. The local government and welfare organization strategically sought to forget the memory of the Cockpit and the group lost their role as legitimate community organizers. At the same time, the youth started to be criminalized through everyday policing practices. In the very mundane interactions between professionals and the Cockpit Group, one type of citizenship was excluded from the public realm; the activities of lower educated residents that did not live up to the formal 'pedagogical' standards of the welfare state. Although the strategies of local authorities had the intention to organize community, their policy discursively and practically valued one form of citizenship over another (Holston and Appadurai 1999).

The narrative of the Cockpit Group reveals how they tactically operated: by claiming space, being present and stimulating disobedience of the youth in the center. These continuous claims of ownership through everyday forms of agency question and challenge the social order (Bayat 2013; Holston 2008). But they were unable to enforce a more equal hierarchy. As they were misunderstood and ignored, the interactions between residents of the Cockpit Group, youth and professionals simultaneously deepened uneven power dynamics.

To understand the moment of rioting that I characterize as crisis, we have to critically consider how the issues underlying the disagreement over the Cockpit became reified notions of identity and positioning that unsettled the dynamics further. As the organizers of the Cockpit became unwanted 'others' and inappropriate community organizers, a tangible process of exclusion unfolded. For the Cockpit Group and the youth, the disagreement was now no longer solely about the Cockpit, nor about their identity and position. The disagreement escalated to a conflict over the discrimination of lower working class and less educated citizens and their children in a community that was primarily inhabited by citizens who were better off and higher educated.

Crisis tends to emerge out of growing frustration and deepened experiences of exclusion. In Ypenburg (but also in other cases of youth riots, see for example Mitchell 2003; Schierup et al. 2014; Springer 2011; Wihtol de Wenden 2006), the exclusion of one voice was so persistent that youth saw no other means to voice their grievances and anger in the public sphere than to take over public space violently. "To demand inclusion in a space often means forcibly occupying the space of exclusion, reinforcing the idea that public space has never been guaranteed, and by its very definition must be contested" (Springer 2011: 542). The contingent process of unsettling closed the public space for the youth and left them with just one way to forcefully claim their right to the city.

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