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Community Building Interventions

*Fenneke Wekker*



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# **BUILDING BELONGING**

**Affecting Feelings of Home through  
Community Building Interventions**

## **ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT**

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor

aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam

op gezag van de Rector Magnificus

prof. dr. ir. K.I.J. Maex

ten overstaan van een door het College voor Promoties

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in de Aula der Universiteit

op vrijdag 30 oktober 2020, te 14:00 uur

**door**

*Fenneke Esseline Antoinette Wekker*

geboren te Nijmegen

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## **BUILDING BELONGING**

AFFECTING FEELINGS OF HOME THROUGH COMMUNITY BUILDING INTERVENTIONS

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# PROMOTIECOMMISSIE

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## **Promotor(es)**

prof. dr. W.G.J. Duyvendak

Universiteit van Amsterdam

prof. dr. J.C. Rath

Universiteit van Amsterdam

## **Copromotor(es)**

prof. dr. M. Kremer

Universiteit van Amsterdam

## **Overige leden**

prof. dr. P. Boccagni

University of Trento

prof. dr. M.J. Trappenburg

Universiteit voor Humanistiek

prof. dr. A.A. M'charek

Universiteit van Amsterdam

prof. dr. J.L. Uitermark

Universiteit van Amsterdam

prof. dr. S.A.E. Bracke

Universiteit van Amsterdam

Faculteit der Maatschappij- en Gedragwetenschappen

# CONTENTS

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	Acknowledgements	10			
<i>Chapter 1</i>	<b>Community Building Interventions</b>	15	<i>Chapter 4</i>	<b>The Cauliflower Neighborhoods</b>	137
1.1	Introduction: “ <i>Participation is important to me</i> ”	16	4.1	Introduction: Back to the Human Measure	138
1.2	A Brief History of Community Building Interventions (1920s – today)	23	4.2	The Intervention	141
1.3	The Netherlands as an Extreme Case	31	4.3	Feelings of Home in the Cauliflower Neighborhoods	147
1.4	Theoretical Foundations	35	4.4	The Empowering Effect of Mutual Recognition	159
1.5	Research Questions and Methodology	41	4.5	Discussion: Insiders and Outsiders by Institutional Design	163
1.6	Outline of the Dissertation	49			
<i>Chapter 2</i>	<b>The Neighbors groups</b>	53	<i>Chapter 5</i>	<b>Affecting Feelings of Home through Community-Building Interventions</b>	169
2.1	Introduction: “ <i>I want to have fun like normal people do</i> ”	54	5.1	Building Belonging Through Social and Physical Design	172
2.2	The Intervention	56	5.2	Familiarity and Feelings of Home	181
2.3	Feelings of Home Prior to the Intervention	63	5.3	Implications for Social Science Research and Policy-Making	187
2.4	Feelings of Home Through Participation	77	5.4	Conclusion	189
2.5	Discussion: The Privilege of Being Perceived as Normal	82			
<i>Chapter 3</i>	<b>The Community Restaurant</b>	87		Summary	193
3.1	Introduction: Bridging the Gap	88		Dutch Summary	199
3.2	The Intervention	91		Bibliography	207
3.3	“ <i>Birds of a Feather Flock Together</i> ”	110			
3.4	Different Types of Familiarity, Various Strengths of Home Feelings	126			
3.5	Discussion: Community Empowerment Through Ethnic Leveraging	129			

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All respondents were targeted by or directly involved in state-supported community building interventions in urban settings aiming at encouraging specific population groups to belong to a local community, and thereby enhancing their collective sense of home.

Asking people about their sense of home and belonging opens unexpected Pandora's boxes. For those who do feel at home, it is hard to explain why they do so: they just feel comfortable, at ease and in control in their own house, as well as in the extended environment of their neighborhood and city. For most of my respondents, however, feelings of home were not at all self-evident and indeed experienced as painfully lacking in their lives. Missing such feelings led to a whole set of other, related emotions, such as deep personal insecurity, a sense of inferiority, fear, anxiety, distrust, vulnerability, anger, and nostalgia.

For my respondents, but also for me, diving into this research project and exploring how and why it was so hard for some to belong to the local setting, while it seemed so self-evident and 'natural' for others, was an intense learning experience. I am grateful for the trust I have been given and impressed by the strong shoulders of those considered 'vulnerable', 'marginalized' or 'disadvantaged' by mainstream society. I feel very much obliged to my respondents to use the insights I gained through this study to help establish a society in which they can be naturally at home and experience the privilege of belonging. Thank you all so much.

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# COMMUNITY BUILDING INTER VENTIONS

CHAPTER

**1**

# 1.1 INTRODUCTION

## *"PARTICIPATION IS IMPORTANT TO ME"*

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[Vignette One] It's a rainy day in Amsterdam. Willy de Boer takes the bus, carefully carrying a suitcase with his favorite DVDs. Once he arrives at the Quartermaster's<sup>1</sup> home, the other participants of the Neighbors Group are already there. While a few of the men visibly have intellectual and development disabilities, just like Willy, the others look pretty "normal" to me. Willy would never have joined the group if there had been "normal people" too, he had confided in me before. He does not trust them; normal people have taken advantage of him, made him believe they were his friend, and used him. Luckily, everyone present tonight "has something".

A small group of men is talking loudly and vividly, laughing at each other's jokes. Willy hesitates at the doorstep. No one says 'hi' to him, except for Quartermaster Melvin. Willy does not respond. He sits down at the nearest table and waits, hands firmly holding on to his suitcase. After a while, the social worker asks which movie the group wants to watch. They vote for 'E.T.'. Willy opens his suitcase and hands over the DVD to Melvin. The participants, all in their forties and fifties, are fully captivated by the story of the extra-terrestrial alien who wants to go home. No sounds are made for one and a half hours.

When the movie ends, Willy finishes his soda and puts the DVD back in its case. Before he leaves, he whispers to Melvin: "We could do this again sometime."

---

[Vignette Two] Somewhere else, in a working class area in Amsterdam-North, manager Robert Janssen has changed the regular table setting of the Community Restaurant. His initiative clearly causes some turmoil among the regular visitors, who normally stick to their 'own table' firmly.

<sup>1</sup> A Quartermaster is a professional community builder who works with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and psychiatric issues. For an elaboration on this, see Chapter Two.

"We don't want to mix, Robert, you know that," Winny de Zwaan says, while the other visitors around her nod in agreement, but "we want to sit amongst ourselves." Manager Robert tries to stay calm, but can hardly hide his impatience with the small group of visitors who call themselves "The Cozy Table". While he gives each of them a piece of paper, colored in red, green, yellow or blue, he replies: "You have booked a meal in this community restaurant, not a fixed place to sit. Now, go and sit at the table of your color."

Willy and what she calls her 'restaurant friends' are stunned. "You try to tear us apart, Robert, but that won't work." Her face has turned red and her eyes fill with tears. Then, decidedly, she turns her mobility scooter toward the exit door and leaves the restaurant. The others look at Robert silently for a moment, and then leave as well. "Participation is important to me," Robert explains to me once the small group of visitors has gone, "that is what gives this community restaurant its added value. If you don't want to participate, don't come." He smiles at me apologetically, then turns around and continues distributing the colored pieces of paper among the other attendants.

It takes several weeks before the members of The Cozy Table return to the community restaurant, firmly sticking together to 'their' table again. Robert has not initiated the mixing table activity since.

---

[Vignette Three] In the city of Hoofddorp, Lilianne Kammer looks out of her kitchen window and sees mothers and their children sitting at the playground in the urban yard. The urban yard is designed in such a way that all kitchen windows of the surrounding houses face the playground. "It's impossible not to see what happens out there," Lilianne sighs. The mothers laugh and chat, enjoying their collective picnic, while their children are energetically running around the slide. Lilianne sighs again and closes the curtains. Earlier that day, she was the one who removed the bottles and shattered glass from the slide, left behind by drunken youngsters the night before. "I do that every morning," she says to me, while she turns on the lights in the dim kitchen, "because the playground should be safe for children. They are not meant for those annoying youths." But none of the mothers has ever thanked her for that. "Oh no, they totally ignore me. It's like I don't exist to them, because I

don't have any children of my own." When I ask her how she feels about that, Lilianne replies, "I only feel at home in my own house. Not outside."

The three seemingly different vignettes presented above are all ethnographic accounts of practices in Dutch neighborhoods, where community organizers and urban planners have intervened to enhance local community life among specific groups of residents. While the first and second vignettes describe a social activity organized by professional community builders, respectively targeting people with intellectual and development disabilities and psychiatric issues, and white, working class, native Dutch elderly people, the third vignette focuses on an encounter in a deliberately designed urban environment, built to enhance community life among young urban families.

---

This ethnographic research project asks how state-supported community building interventions that attempt to create a collective sense of belonging among (specific groups of) residents in urban settings affect feelings of home of the individuals they target. It scrutinizes if and how feelings of home of residents involved are affected, by mapping out in great detail how these interventions work in practice, how they are experienced by participants, and by comparing accounts of those who see themselves as insiders and those who – (un)willingly – remain outsiders of the professionally established local community.

The three longitudinal case studies at the heart of this study, conducted between 2010 and 2018, all deal with social and physical state interventions in urban environments where the (local) government reported an alarming lack of social cohesion among residents. Though initiated in different political eras, for different reasons, embedded in different policy frameworks and based on different underlying assumptions, the interventions under scrutiny all aim at encouraging specific target groups to become part of a local community, in order to enhance their collective sense of belonging and enable them to feel at home (again) in their neighborhood.

From a social science perspective, a sense of belonging to a local community is seen as an indispensable condition for individuals to feel at home in their residential area. Belonging to a (local) community brings about a sense of security, familiarity, control over space and mutual identification; aspects that are considered conditional for human beings to feel at home and

thrive (Boccagni, 2017; Duyvendak, 2011; Yuval-Davis, 2011; Mallet, 2004; Ahmed, 1999; Hage, 1997). From a policy perspective, this is deemed indispensable as home feelings encourage residents to take responsibility for their social and physical environment. In other words, when residents start to feel at home, neighborhood and city life are believed to improve as well (Blokland and Nast, 2014).

This study explores to what extent and how community building interventions foster a sense of local belonging among residents and, subsequently, if and how this affects their home feeling in the residential environment. The question if and how residents' feelings of home – or the lack of it – affect neighborhood and city life lies beyond the scope of this study. Instead, it focuses on the fundamental first part of the equation: can and do community building interventions affect residents' feelings of home? And if so, how?

---

The reason to study community building interventions in the Netherlands has to do with my own background as a community artist in disadvantaged neighborhoods. In the early 2000s, I initiated and established multiple neighborhood projects with the aim of helping residents from various backgrounds to bridge their mutual differences, to get to know each other a little better, and to start to feel at home amongst each other a little more. I believed – and to a certain extent, I still do – that by making community art and organizing local, collective activities this could be achieved. The proposals in which I described my projects, their aims, methods and expected results, turned out to be very appealing to funders. Various municipalities and governmental organizations made generous amounts of public money available for me and my colleagues to run all kinds of cultural activities in deprived urban settings, which were meant to make residents feel more at home. And indeed, a handful of residents did participate in our well-organized activities and thanked us for the great project we had brought to their neighborhood. However, most residents did not.

I recall the cynical remark of a man who stopped by and watched me while I encouraged residents to write down and paint what made them feel at home in their neighborhood: 'And who is paying for all of this? I guess it's the municipality who wants us all to become friends, isn't it?' And then he left. Although I tried to store his remark away as some grumpy, old man's grievances, it kept ringing in my ears and it still does. Because he was right:

I was trying to make friends out of residents with the support of the municipality. But based on what assumptions exactly? Was it even possible to create a local community of neighborhood friends from the top down? And why were so many residents not even willing to participate in all our well-meant attempts to make their neighborhood a better place? I felt the man was right to question what we were doing, and I started to increasingly question our endeavors myself.

This study builds upon the questions that have been forcing themselves upon me ever since, and have led me to ask: is it even possible to affect feelings of home of residents through means of community building interventions?

---

In light of the recent establishment of the Social Support Act (*Wet maatschappelijke ondersteuning*, Wmo 2007/2015), these questions have gained increasing relevance. The Dutch government now obliges residents in need of daily help and support to stay at home ‘in the neighborhood’ (*in de wijk*) as long as possible. Instead of applying for welfare-state arrangements or for living in health-care institutions, they now need to reach out to ‘their community’ first. For those who lack a private support network, the local community of neighbors and fellow residents has now become the first resource to reach out to. As I found in my own previous work (Wekker, 2017; Duyvendak & Wekker, 2016), and as backed up by a multitude of social scientific studies (e.g., Calhoun, 2014; Bos et al., 2013; Van der Graaf and Duyvendak, 2009; Blokland-Potters, 2006; Duyvendak and Veldboer, 2001; Fincher and Jacobs, 1998; Elias and Scotson, 1994), the existence of local, caring communities is not self-evident at all. While politicians as well as the Dutch king (Rijksoverheid, 2013) deploy a discourse of a strong and empowered ‘participation society’, a society in which residents look after each other and share a sense of local belonging together cannot be taken for granted or easily established.

If, with the current retrenchments of European welfare states, the establishment and maintenance of cohesive local communities will become ever more indispensable, the study into how such communities bring about a shared sense of belonging and affect feelings of home in the neighborhood becomes ever more relevant too.

As touched upon above, the three case studies deal with different types of community building interventions, established in different periods of time, based upon different principles, and targeting different population groups. The first case study is concerned with an example of a social intervention that aims at enhancing a sense of belonging among residents with intellectual and development disabilities and mental health issues. During the course of the fieldwork this intervention was still in its pilot phase, so the case study looks at the stage in which residents who were not familiar with each other were encouraged to become part of a *new* local community.

The second case study focuses on state-supported attempts of professional community builders to create a local community restaurant, where residents with different cultural and ethnic backgrounds can bridge their mutual difference and feel more at home amongst each other. It deals with a restaurant community that was established in 2006, meaning the outlines of both the in-group and out-group of the local community are already clearly defined.

The third case study deals with a physical intervention of urban design and architecture, to literally build a material environment where community life among young urban families can thrive. These so-called cauliflower neighborhoods (*bloemkoolwijken*) were established in the 1970s and 1980s, and are still inhabited by their original residents, as well as by new generations. Here, as will be shown in Chapter Four, the boundaries of the local community were already *well-established*, together with barriers to outsiders.

This research project does not aim to assess the effectiveness, success or failure of the interventions under scrutiny – in contrast to most social scientific studies on community building interventions (e.g., Ohmer and Korr, 2006; McLeroy et al., 2003; Wandersman and Florin, 2003; Mattessich, Monsey & Roy, 1997). Rather, it focuses on how such interventions work in practice, how they are *experienced* by the targeted residents, and to what extent and how they affect residents’ home feelings in the residential area. Through an intersectional analysis of the empirical data, the aim is to provide new and profound insights into the power dynamics at play in state-supported community building interventions, and among various groups of local residents. It thereby keeps a close eye on how ‘difference’, in terms of intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, class, health, and lifestyle,

plays out in these attempts to build a sense of belonging.

During the course of my research project, across almost 8 years, I was able to closely follow 67 residents in Amsterdam and Hoofddorp, who were all targeted by or involved in one of the three state-supported community building interventions under scrutiny. I furthermore engaged with over 50 other residents and social professionals who were either voluntarily or professionally involved in the interventions.

---

In what follows, I will first give a brief outline of the history of community building interventions as a predominant strategy of social engineering in Western countries since the turn of the 19th century. Attention will be given to the idea of the Neighborhood Unit as the locus for community building, and the recurrent governmental call for local community life in Western countries during the 20th and 21st centuries. Finally, the Netherlands will be highlighted as an extreme case of implementing state-supported community building interventions since the early 1900s.

Second, this chapter discusses the core theoretical concepts this monograph builds upon: respectively ‘local community’, ‘belonging’ and ‘feelings of home’. Here, the theoretical foundations will be laid bare that form the lens for interpretation and analysis of the empirical data. It thereby provides a deeper understanding of what these concepts are constituted of and how they are interrelated.

Third, I will describe and elaborate upon the objectives, research questions and methodological approach of the research project. I thereby underscore the empirical and theoretical contributions as well as the societal relevance of this study.

## 1.2 A BRIEF HISTORY OF COMMUNITY BUILDING INTERVENTIONS (1920S – TODAY)

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### The perils of city life

Since the turn of the 19th century, social scientists have made an effort to argue that modern city life causes a threat to society and its citizens. Classical sociologists, such as Ferdinand Tönnies (2001[1887]), Emile Durkheim (2014[1893]), W.E. Burghardt Du Bois (2007[1899]), Georg Simmel (2002 [1903]), and Louis Wirth (2005[1938]) were among the first to suggest the disorder within large cities should be viewed as a breakdown in society’s moral order.

Although 19th century city life provided more freedom and autonomy for the individual than was the case in rural and community-based eras, “if the unceasing external contact of numbers of persons in the city should be met by the same number of inner reactions as in the small town [...], one would be completely atomized internally and would fall into an unthinkable mental condition” Simmel argued (2002[1903]: 15). Wirth (2005[1938]) suggested that:

*“whereas [...] the individual gains, on the one hand, a certain degree of emancipation or freedom from the personal and emotional controls of intimate groups, he loses, on the other hand, the spontaneous self-expression, the morale, and the sense of participation that comes with living in an integrated society” (12).*

From the perspective of the impoverished African American communities in the slums of great northern cities in the United States at the time, Du Bois (2007[1899]) posited that statements of individual freedom in these dense urban settings contained a misapprehension: “[For Negroes in a great Northern city] the environment is such that it is really more oppressive than the situation in Southern cities” (8) – the latter still more rural and community-based.

In order to prevent communities from dissolving into impoverished and morally deprived, atomized individuals, social reforms were needed to help them integrate and assimilate into the standards and dominant norms of (white) European and American society. Access and social inclusion into, for example, public schools, working associations, and political parties was therefore seen as indispensable (Durkheim, 2014[1893]; Du Bois, 2007[1899]).

Building on Durkheim's concept of 'organic solidarity' – i.e. social interdependence through heterogeneity, as opposed to 'mechanical solidarity' where social interdependence occurs through homogeneity – contemporary social scientists have argued that city life does not lead to social disintegration per se. Granovetter (1983) has argued that "weak ties [in urban society], far from creating alienation, as one might conclude from the Chicago school of urban sociology – especially from Louis Wirth – are actually vital for an individual's integration into modern society" (203). In a similar vein, Tonkiss (2005) has stated that: "Solitude in the modern city can be read not simply in terms of estrangement from others, but in terms of an ethics of indifference which creates its own forms of freedom and a broad space for tolerance" (4). She argues that an urban lifestyle actually supports community life through shared ideas of individual freedom and the recognition of 'mutual strangeness' (Ibid.: 27).

Following the early insights of Du Bois, however, Fitzgerald, Rose and Singh (2016) have shown why this rosy picture of personal freedom and 'indifference to difference' (Tonkiss, 2005; Fincher and Jacobs, 1998) in the city is only partly true: large cities have long histories of segregation and oppression, based on class, race, ethnicity and gender. This has led to structural poverty in parts of large cities, racial segregation, localized physical violence, and unequal, gendered distributions of power and capital (Fitzgerald, Rose and Singh, 2016: 152-155).

### **Social engineering**

The rise and institutional establishment of the social sciences in the United States and Western Europe in the early 1900s led to "[a] movement toward an empirical study of society *in order to control the social, political and economic forces at work*" (Chiang, 2001: 1, my italics). W.E.B. Du Bois in 1899 already added "a word of general advice in the line of social reform" to his book *The Philadelphia Negro* (p. 9). Many sociological insights of the time

were indeed adopted by governments and civil society, in order to improve societal conditions. Although social engineering is by no means reserved to the Western world only,<sup>2</sup> this section limits itself to professional and state-supported attempts to improve and control the human condition in urbanized modern times.

Social engineering is traditionally geared towards steering economic growth, through controlling political and social processes. Within the larger scope of social engineering, different strategies to 'improve the human condition' (Scott, 1998) have been developed since the 1900s. Two such strategies are urban planning and creating strong, self-sufficient local communities. With these, it was and is still believed to a large extent, social order, public health and economic prosperity will be enhanced in large cities.

The most famous examples of total city planning are the utopian, high-modernist urban schemes of city planners like Le Corbusier in Paris, Moses in New York, and Costa and Niemeyer in Brasília. Examples of social engineering through community building programs are preventive street-corner work in deprived urban settings in American cities like Chicago, but also the *Woonscholen*, i.e. specific residential areas established throughout the Netherlands, where working class families were helped to integrate into dominant standards of 'decent living'. Throughout the 20th century, a multitude of all-encompassing policy programs were implemented to improve the human condition, focused on marginalized, disadvantaged and vulnerable individuals, families and communities (Dercksen and Verplanke, 2005; Scott, 1998; Rath, 1992). This way, as Rath (1991) has argued, new categories of minorities were constructed, which enabled the national and local government to more easily target them with social and policy interventions.

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From the 1920s, while in the United States and the U.K. technocratic thinking mainly developed within civil society, in other Western countries like France and the Netherlands, the principles of social engineering were primarily developed by the political establishment (Rodenburg, 2014; Scott,

<sup>2</sup> The belief in the technocratic potentials of social engineering inspired governments in other parts of the world as well, such as the Republic of China from the 1930s on (Chiang, 2001).

1998). The Dutch state, at the time governed by the radical socialist party SDAP, saw *socialization* as the most important strategy for social engineering.

The term socialization refers simultaneously to the processes in which private material means for production are handed over to the state, as well as the process of education and upbringing during which the individual adjusts his or her conduct to the norms and standards of ‘the community,’ in social democratic countries such as the Netherlands believed to be represented by the state (Kammeyer, Ritzer and Yetman, 1990). Through state-supported processes of socialization ‘the efficiency problem’ would be solved, which would lead to economic growth, a well-adjusted workforce, as much as an integrated society (Rodenburg, 2014).

Social engineering strategies led by the state were believed to inevitably transform individuals into a greater community of habits and predispositions, through “[t]he uniformity of customs, viewpoints, and principles of action” (Alder, cited by Scott, 1998: 66). The idea of “a uniform, homogeneous citizenship” (Scott, 1998: 65; see also Watkins, 1990) would not only lead to well-adjusted citizens, but also give people equal rights before the law, guaranteed by the state.

In his book *Seeing like a state: How certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed*, James Scott (1998) has brilliantly critiqued strategies of state-led social engineering. He argued: “No administrative system is capable of representing any existing social community except through a heroic and greatly schematized process of abstraction and simplification” (50). In other words, social engineering assumes and produces an omniscient image of the state, while simultaneously simplifying the lived reality, conducts, viewpoints and experiences of citizens.

In line with Scott’s argument, the findings presented in this dissertation also show how state-supported attempts to help local communities and individuals are inclined to fail, due to the inherent simplification and desire for uniformity of ‘residents’. Hence, social engineering strategies lack the ability to take into account all the power dynamics, complexities and incongruences that shape daily residential life.

## **The Neighborhood Unit**

While the idea of the neighborhood seems self-evident today, the concept of the Neighborhood Unit was only conceived by Clarence Perry in 1939. His influential work *Housing for the Machine Age* (1939) and the new concept became a guiding principle for social engineering in twentieth century America, and was meant to improve the health, safety and wellbeing of urban dwellers (Banerjee & Baer, 2013). The concept of the Neighborhood Unit drew heavily on the insights of theorists of the Chicago School of Sociology (among others, Cooley and McKenzie), who perceived the local neighborhood as “a particularly critical primary grouping in mediating an individual’s relations with society as a whole” (Brody, 2009: 40). The Neighborhood Unit, thus seen as a local grouping associated with the larger world, became the principle site for governance, first mainly through urban planning and architecture.

After World War II, the concept of the Neighborhood Unit was largely adopted by professional and governmental organizations throughout the Western world for suburban development and urban renewal. The idea of the neighborhood, as a demarcated area for urban communities, became deeply ingrained in professional practices, urban policies, urban planning and architecture (Banerjee & Baer, 2013; Brody, 2009).

## **Community Empowerment**

*[Community building] enables people to break their crippling isolation from each other, to reshape their mutual values and expectations and rediscover the possibilities of acting collaboratively—the prerequisites of any successful self-help initiative. (Obama, 2012: 29)*

Since the 1960s and 1970s a new vocabulary of community empowerment became dominant in the discourse of the Neighborhood Unit, influenced by the work of intellectual activists in the American civil rights and women’s liberation movements (for an overview, see Beeker, Guenther-Grey and Raj, 1998). Instead of placing the focus on helping working-class families and other marginalized communities adjust to dominant norms represented by the state, “empowering” interventions should now help, educate and raise consciousness among the marginalized, disadvantaged and vulnerable, to promote their equal rights, and improve their health and eco-



conomic position through organized community effort. The role of the social professional became increasingly important, thereby facilitating these communities to solve their own problems, to control their quality of life and enhance their capacity to be self-determining (Beeker, Guenther-Grey and Raj, 1998: 832-834; see also Minkler, 2012).

Steered by social professionals and policy-makers, community building interventions in lower income neighborhoods were now concerned with, for example, capacity and skill building of local residents (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993), promoting independent living of people with disabilities in 'mainstream' neighborhoods (Oliver, 1999; Shakespeare, 1995), or helping racial and ethnic communities to integrate and improve their socio-economic position (Banerjee & Baer, 2013; Varady, 1982).

### **The Neighborhood Unit; A Critical Perspective**

In 1955, the Dutch sociologist J.A.A. van Doorn was one of the first to critique the *wijkgedachte* (the Neighborhood Unit concept). He argued that, in contrast to what was then widely believed, residents would not necessarily identify with their neighbors, but rather seek out their 'own community' beyond the borders of the neighborhood unit. Similarly, Banerjee and Baer (2013) have recognized that "the residential environment, even though important, is neither the sole nor even one of the most important determinants of the quality of life" (12). According to the authors, the idea of a neighborhood as a community barely contributes to the well-being of residents.

Contemporary scholars (e.g., Hoppe, 2011; Smith et al., 2007; De Boer, 2001) have also emphasized that the Neighborhood Unit is mostly a demarcated administrative unit for governance. Or, in the words of Smith et al. (2007): "The identification of the neighborhood is itself a feature of *administrative* and/or professional convenience, rather than a reflection of service user or resident identity" (12).

Furthermore, as Banerjee and Baer (2013: 8) point out, the Neighborhood Unit paradigm assumes cultural homogeneity, whereas everyday residential life is marked by a wide variety of racial and ethnic groups, alternative lifestyles, and household types. Even in those parts of large cities segregated along lines of race, ethnicity and class (most often in close intersection with each other), residents' identities and positionalities cannot be reduced

to the place where they live (Smith et al., 2007; see also, Fitzgerald, Rose and Singh, 2016).

Due to the institutionalized and deeply ingrained perception that neighborhood units consist of a local grouping with a collective identity, the neighborhood population at large can easily become stigmatized when their neighborhood is perceived as particularly 'bad' (Kleinhans and Bolt, 2010). The localization of societal problems, such as the presumed 'lack' of integration of ethnic minorities, helps to relocate and distance mainstream Dutch society from responsibility (Duyvendak and Veldboer, 2001). Seemingly comfortable, through the lens of the Neighborhood Unit, societal problems are not 'here', but 'over there', thereby "building a trap rather than a route out of disadvantage [...] by 'responsibilising' the most excluded residents – expecting them to manage their own exclusion" (Smith et al., 2007: 34-35).

### **The Renewed Promise of the Neighborhood Unit**

Despite the well-informed critique on the concept of the Neighborhood Unit, from the 2000s on we have witnessed a renewed interest of Western European governments in 'the local community'. In the light of the retrenchments of European welfare states, governments now expect citizens to "reach across the boundaries [...] of private life to include those with whom there are no prior definitions of mutuality" (Calhoun, 2014: 3).

This transition towards a 'Big Society' (U.K. Prime Minister David Cameron, 2009) or 'Shared Society' in the U.K. (U.K. Prime Minister Theresa May, 2017), or 'Participation Society' in the Netherlands (Rijksoverheid, 2013), has been described as "a cultural change, where people, in their everyday lives, in their homes, in their neighbourhoods [...] feel both free and powerful enough to help themselves and their communities" (Kisby 2010: 484). Thus, while in earlier decades citizens were mostly *indirectly* responsible for the health and well-being of those outside their private circle, through paying taxes and sustaining collective welfare state arrangements, today, they are – like before the 1950s – encouraged to *directly* care for and ask for help of others besides their own private network. Hence, in contemporary political discourse, the local community has now replaced the state as the primary institution that should take care of citizens from cradle to grave (Bos, Wekker and Duyvendak, 2013).

Within this political reasoning, the idea of the Neighborhood Unit is again considered the designated area where societal problems can be solved. Like in the early 1900s, some neighborhoods are seen as more problematic and deprived than others, which evokes ideas of some residential areas harboring more “problematic social groups [...] that need to be more cohesive (racialized and religiously inflected ideas) or more engaged (read social class)” (Mills & Waite, 2018: 132) than other residential areas.

Building upon the early insights of Du Bois (1899), I suggest the idea of local communities as ‘free and powerful enough to help themselves’ (Kisby, 2010) must be considered a misapprehension. While especially neighborhoods with large concentrations of working-class residents, low-skilled migrants and people of color are most often problematized in political discourse, they are at the same time depicted as empowered local communities able to solve their own problems. These problems, however, cannot be separated from the structurally disadvantaged societal position these neighborhood populations find themselves in, based on intersections of race, ethnicity, class, and health.

Hence, while the neighborhood as a unit is depicted as the locus for personal freedom and empowered community life, most residents living in disadvantaged neighborhoods do not have many opportunities to “break out of their crippling isolation” (Obama, 2012: 29). Nor is thriving local community life self-evident in urban settings (Duyvendak and Wekker, 2015). I therefore suggest the social reform that has taken place in Western countries over the last decade, with the renewal of the idea of the Neighborhood Unit at its core, is again an example of a stark simplification of social life, and a reflection of the political and administrative desire for uniformity (cf. Scott, 1998).

## 1.3 THE NETHERLANDS AS AN EXTREME CASE

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As discussed above, community building interventions are not particular to the Netherlands (see also, Hoppe 2011; Smith et al. 2007). However, the Netherlands has a particularly long and well-established tradition of *state-supported* social engineering, through physical and social interventions in disadvantaged neighborhoods.

Starting from the 1920s, Dutch socio-democratic government administrations made an effort to build specific urban settings (the so-called *woon-scholen*) for working class families (the so-called *onmaatschappelijke*) where the latter were educated by social workers to learn how to live and structure their lives according to dominant (middle-class) standards (Dercksen and Verplanke, 2005; De Regt, 1995).

In the same period, Dutch society at the time became consciously segregated along lines of religion and ideology, resulting in four main pillars: Protestant, Catholic, Socialist and Humanist. This Dutch system of ‘pillarization’ (*‘verzuiiling’*) rigidly divided residents across schools, sports clubs, political parties, media, memberships and hospitals. During the pillarization, between the 1920s and the late 1940s, the Neighborhood Unit was not seen as the primary level for community building. Instead, community life moved across the borders of the local, connecting residents from all over the city who shared the same religious and ideological identity.

After World War II, the study group Bos was installed by the government to outline guidelines for the development of Dutch post-war cities. In their legendary book *De stad der toekomst, de toekomst der stad* (Bos et al., 1946 [City of the Future, Future of the City]), the study group introduced the concept of the Neighborhood Unit, following the American example of the sociologist Clarence Perry (1939). The idea of the Neighborhood Unit (*‘de wijkgedachte’*) was believed to provide a new framework for social integration after an era of pillarization and social segregation at the local level (Blom et al., 2004; De Boer, 2001).

Between the late 1950s and 1960s, with the influx of migrants from former Dutch colonies and guest workers from Turkey and Morocco, new social

and economic problems entered the stage. Due to a huge housing shortage at the time, residential areas such as the Westelijke Tuinsteden and, a little later, the Bijlmermeer were constructed in a short period of time, according to the idea of the Neighborhood Unit. This intervention through urban design led to an increasing geographical concentration of low-skilled migrants in large cities; a phenomenon that was shortly after considered to be a threat to social cohesion and integration in Dutch society (De Boer, 2001). At that time, class, race and ethnicity became intersected in political discourses around ‘disadvantaged neighborhoods’, with the concentration of working-class, racial and ethnic minorities seen as the core problem that should be solved through new state interventions.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the Dutch government became concerned with the well-being of the middle-class, white Dutch families – still the cornerstone of Dutch society at the time. Again, the Neighborhood Unit served as a guiding principle to design the so-called *woonerfwijken* (urban yard neighborhoods) on the outskirts of urban cities. Here, young urban families could live as a cohesive, homogeneous community, saved from the perils of living in the heterogeneous and chaotic large city (see also Chapter Four).

Sparked by economic crises in the 1980s, increased unemployment rates and an accumulation of problems in urban settings, the Dutch government became deeply worried about the advancing phenomenon of ‘urban poverty’, mostly among ethnic and racial minorities. In the 1990s, criticisms were raised against the one-sided physical orientation of state interventions through urban planning. Physical interventions should now go hand in hand with socio-cultural interventions, in order to enhance the well-being of urban dwellers – especially those living in disadvantaged areas with large concentrations of low-skilled, working-class migrants (Donkers, 2002; De Boer, 2001). Large restructuring policy programs were implemented not only to improve the physical, but also the socio-cultural environment of deprived urban settings (Musterd & Ostendorf, 1993).

From the 1990s up until the late 2000s, the idea became dominant that the integration of working-class migrants thus far had failed, due to the ‘soft’ approach of leftist governments of the past. Policies regarding family reunification of migrants became more restrictive, thereby drawing strict boundaries between insiders and outsiders of Dutch society (Bonjour, 2007). The idea of the Neighborhood Unit became less prevalent, as the ‘Dutch community’ was now primarily demarcated by national and cultur-

al boundaries, rather than by the local boundaries of the neighborhood. Low-skilled, working-class citizens were now activated to become less dependent on welfare state arrangements and take their own, individual responsibility for integration into Dutch society.

Rath (1991, 1992) points out how categories of ethnic minorities were constructed and problematized during this period through policy-making and state interventions. Drawing the parallel with the historical example of problematizing the ‘*onmaatschappelijken*’ in the early 1900s, Rath (1992: 254) has argued that migrants were now predominantly seen and approached as *a community of unadjusted individuals*, collectively in need of education into dominant Dutch norms. This paradigm of problematizing ethnic and racial populations was administratively and publically captured by the term ‘*allochtoon*’ – referring to Dutch residents with a migrant background – as opposed to the notion of ‘*autochtoon*’, which referred to the ethnic and racial white Dutch population.<sup>3</sup> Due to the large geographical concentrations of ‘*allochtonen*’ in Dutch cities, complete neighborhoods were now problematized and racialized as ‘*allochtonenwijken*’ and therefore considered sites in need of focused governance: similar to the *Woonscholen voor onmaatschappelijken* (Housing schools for ‘antisocial’ working-class families) of the 1920s. The main difference with the interventions of the 1920s, however, was the political emphasis on the individual’s responsibility to improve their own life conditions (Walsum, 2004).

The ‘empowering’ discourse of self-responsibility and self-reliance found its way into the all-encompassing policy program of the Empowered Neighborhoods Policy (*Krachtwijkenbeleid*), implemented by the Dutch government from the mid-2000s on (see also Chapter Three). Interestingly enough, this program attempted to embrace the idea of the Neighborhood Unit again, through its focus on 40 so-called Empowered Neighborhoods (*Krachtwijken*) (Wittebrood et al., 2011). The associated Neighborhood Approach (*wijkaanpak*) was aimed at encouraging residents of disadvantaged areas – not coincidentally those with a majority of inhabitants with a migrant background (VROM, 2007) – to become more self-reliant.

The Empowered Neighborhoods policy program received considerable amount of criticism. Many (native Dutch, white) politicians claimed the

<sup>3</sup> In 2016, the pejorative term ‘allochtoon’ was abolished by the Dutch government, following the advice of the Scientific Council for Government Policy (Bovens et al., 2016).

focus on neighborhoods with a majority of ethnic and racial minorities would be at the expense of residents living in other neighborhoods (read: in settings with a majority of native, white Dutch residents) (Kullberg, 2009). Furthermore, the question was raised (again) of whether societal and economic problems could be solved at the local level. Finally, pushed by the financial crisis of 2008, the costly and highly debated policy program was prematurely aborted in 2010.

The Dutch government then adopted a new approach towards urban poverty, disadvantaged communities, and vulnerable citizens in need of structural support of the welfare state, molded after the example of the U.K.'s Big Society (U.K. Prime Minister David Cameron, 2009). With the implementation of the Social Support Act (Wmo 2007/2015), Dutch citizens are now obliged to become self-reliant, through participation and integration in (local) community life (De Wilde, 2016; See also Chapter Two). Again, the idea of the Neighborhood Unit is guiding the implementation of the Social Support Act, with its focus on enhancing local community life in residential areas (Klerk et al., 2010). The political discourse conveys that “the classical welfare state, stemming from the second half of the 20th century, is unsustainable in its current form” (Rijksoverheid, 2013, my translation), and that now “the community” must help citizens in need of structural care and support. The vocabulary is again one of empowerment, as “in this era, people want to make their own choices, arrange their own lives and be able to take care of each other,” according to the Dutch king (Rijksoverheid, 2013, my translation).<sup>4</sup>

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In this section, we have seen how the Dutch government since the early 1900s has put major efforts into reforming Dutch society, and helping specific population groups (i.e. the working class, citizens with a migrant background, people in need of structural care) to adjust and integrate into Dutch dominant norms and standards. Although the accompanying discourse varied over time from ‘educating’ and ‘helping’ to ‘empowering’, the aim remained the same: to control social, economic and political problems, through state-supported urban and social interventions.

<sup>4</sup> Translation [“De klassieke verzorgingsstaat uit de tweede helft van de twintigste eeuw [is in de] huidige vorm onhoudbaar [...] en [sluit] ook niet meer aan [...] bij de verwachtingen van mensen. In deze tijd willen mensen hun eigen keuzes maken, hun eigen leven inrichten en voor elkaar kunnen zorgen”]

In sum, the Netherlands provides an excellent example of state-led social engineering, with community building interventions in disadvantaged neighborhoods as one of the main strategies of social policy. The case studies that will be presented in Chapters Two, Three and Four all deal with instances of such Dutch state-supported interventions between the 1970s and today.

## 1.4 THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

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As elaborated upon further below, the approach of this study is predominantly inductive, meaning that I will start from the empirical material, i.e. thick descriptions, participant observations, interview data and respondents’ informal accounts, in order to derive a more general conceptualization of what feelings of home mean and how they are affected by community building interventions, instead of using a theoretical hypothesis as a point of departure. However, like all social scientists, I am no *tabula rasa*. My work is inevitably guided by some prior assumptions and theoretically informed foundations, on the basis of which I categorize, gather and analyze the empirical data.

First, I will lay bare some of the theoretical presumptions this study builds upon, thereby focusing especially on the core concepts of community, belonging and feelings of home. By doing so, I will show how and in which ways these concepts are theoretically intertwined. Second, taking into account Fendler’s (2006) warning that “it is dangerous to celebrate and promote community building as if it were unproblematic” (315), this section will engage with social science literature that, from an intersectional standpoint, has critically discussed the perils of cohesive community life.

## Community

Community, as I will use the notion in this study, means the sphere beyond the domestic, moving into the local and the national realm “where one is able to be ‘oneself’ in public and feel connected” (Duyvendak, 2011: 40). It refers to a collectivity of persons, bounded through a shared identity, self-expression and a sense of belonging through shared symbolic forms, morality and values in public space.

Although communities of people are defined by their shared interests and identities, similar to ‘groups’, they should not be seen “as if they were internally homogeneous, externally bounded groups” (Brubaker, 2010: 35). Rather, we must keep in mind that all communities are internally heterogeneous and that their boundaries are ever-changeable, even though some common social markers, such as gender or race, might be prioritized above other markers in order to create the idea of a bounded unit. Coherent, homogeneous communities “exist only in and through our perceptions, interpretations, representations, classifications, categorizations, and identifications. They are not things in the world, but perspectives on the world – not ontological but epistemological realities” (Brubaker, 2004: 45).

Instead of focusing on communities and community life in general, this study is concerned with *local* communities more specifically. In addition to the conceptualization of communities mentioned above, a local community is characterized by “a common identity, interests and collective practices of individuals *sharing a bounded area*” (Smith et al., 2007: 22). I deem this definition as powerful, as it makes clear that a local community is epistemologically bounded not only by symbolic, but also physical boundaries. It involves a common identity, expressed and sustained through daily local practices on the interactional level between residents.

As the segregation in large cities indicates, local communities do often overlap with communities based on a shared identity along lines of race, ethnicity and class, but also gender and sexuality – see for example the ‘gay district’ Castro in San Francisco, a physically bounded space inhabited by predominantly gay men. However, as Benson and Jackson (2013) have argued: “People do not merely select a place to live that matches their habitus; rather, places are made through repeated everyday actions and interventions that work both on the neighbourhood and on the individual” (794).

In other words, local communities are not (only) constructed because people living in a space turn out to share a primordial common identity, but instead they construct their common identity through their daily encounters in this shared space. Through daily practices, residents construct a local identity, by emphasizing and prioritizing common traits among them. Hansen and Verkaaik (2009:16) therefore suggest that cities should be regarded as ‘performative spaces’ – i.e. urban settings that become readable and livable through repetitive circulations of narratives of a shared identity.

The other side of the coin, as scholars have shown, is that community life inherently involves the exclusion of ‘the others’ (Edgell et al., 2016; Butler, 2011[1993]; Hage, 2000; Besnier, 2009). Especially when community members start to perceive themselves as a homogeneous and substantive group, bounded by a common identity, agenda and interest (see Brubaker, 2010), such cohesive and self-essentialized in-groups can “actively breed distrust, intolerance, or even hatred for and violence towards outsiders” (Fukuyama, 2001: 14). The establishment of group boundaries in order to define the community thus simultaneously creates a ‘constitutive outside’ (Butler, 2011[1993]; see also Meder, 2010; Hansen and Verkaaik, 2009; Jaworski and Coupland, 2005; Wimmer, 2004, 2005; Schultz, 1999; Barth, 1998). Thus, to belong to a community not only entails knowing who ‘we’ are, but simultaneously who ‘we’ are not.

## Belonging

“Belonging is about emotional attachment, about feeling ‘at home’ and [...] about feeling ‘safe’” (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 197). This definition of belonging shows the close intertwinement between belonging to a community and feelings of home. According to Yuval-Davis (2006: 198-203), people can ‘belong’ in three different ways. People can belong together based on 1. a shared *social* location – i.e. on the basis of gender, race, class or nation, or specific intersections of those social signifiers; 2. people can belong through *personal* identifications and emotional attachments, mediated through narratives of ‘us’ and ‘them’; and 3. people can belong based on shared *ethical* and *political* values on the basis of which the social positions, identifications and attachments of others are judged.

With the focus on belonging to a physical location, I turn to literature on place attachment. Low and Altman (1992: 5) introduced the phenomenological concept of place attachment in order to explore “the interplay of

affect and emotions, knowledge and beliefs, and behaviors and actions in reference to place". They show it is the identification with fellow residents through place that leads to a sense of belonging to a place community. Saunders and Williams (1988) have argued that it is the "physical setting through which basic forms of social relations and social institutions are constituted and reproduced" (82). This does not imply that physical settings determine social relations as such, but they do provide possibilities for residents to engage with others who share similar attachments to the physical and social environment. In a similar vein, Uzzell, Pol and Badenas (2002) have argued that a place-related community "is derived from processes of identification, cohesion, and satisfaction" connected to the physical environment (29).

The concepts of 'rootedness' and 'bonding', used by Van der Graaf and Duyvendak (2009) in their comparative study into social dynamics in 'disadvantaged' Dutch and English neighborhoods, also point out the interplay between being attached to the physical environment (rootedness) and being embedded in the social environment (bonding). Hence, it is not so much the physical environment itself that produces a sense of belonging among residents, but rather the identification and mutual recognition with those who feel attached to and satisfied by the physical environment in similar ways.

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An important theoretical notion that is closely connected to a sense of belonging is 'familiarity', which refers to the emotional and cognitive 'knowing' of the physical and social environment (Boccagni, 2017; Duyvendak, 2011). Familiarity is most often used to capture the social relations and physical surroundings of the private domain. When familiarity is used to refer to social relationships among strangers *in public space*, this is commonly conceptualized as 'public familiarity' (Blokland-Potters, 2006; Fischer, 1982). Public familiarity is concerned with the visual recognition of other residents in public space, in the sphere in between the private home and the public "world of strangers" (Lofland, 1973). It refers to the weak or even absent ties (Blokland and Nast, 2014) between residents, who only know each other from their quotidian "choreography on the sidewalk" (Jacobs, 1989[1961]).

Blokland and Schulze (2017) have argued that "rubbing shoulders, those fluid encounters in a neighbourhood between people who are on their way to do something else, indeed produce forms of belonging" (245).<sup>5</sup> In other words, simply by becoming familiar with the comings and goings of fellow residents in public space, a sense of local belonging can emerge among "familiar strangers" (Tonkiss, 2005; Jacobs, 1989[1961]). Knowing the place and its inhabitants by heart is again intertwined with "spatial and practical control which in turn creates a sense of security" (Hage, 1997: 103). Public familiarity can thus lead to a sense of belonging in public space.

On the other hand, social scientists have argued that knowing the whereabouts – i.e. public familiarity – of fellow residents is not sufficient for people to have a sense of belonging. When residents are not familiar with each other's social locations (for example in terms of race, ethnicity, class, gender, lifestyle, or culture), do not have any mutual personal or emotional recognition, or experience a gap between their ethical or political values, a comfortable sense of local belonging can easily vanish (Yuval-Davis, 2011). This is why, for example, the challenges of living with diversity can impact on our sense of local belonging (Foner, Duyvendak and Kasinitz, 2019).

Jan Willem Duyvendak and I have also argued elsewhere (Duyvendak and Wekker, 2016) that it is important to take into account the double meaning of the word familiarity (Oxford Advanced American Dictionary, 2019) in order to gain a better understanding how it informs a sense of belonging: the term familiarity should not only be narrowed down to knowing or recognizing others, but moreover implies amicability – a friendly and informal way of passing and dealing with others. These informal manners among familiar strangers bring about a sense of intimacy among neighbors, as they treat each other as if they were friends. Without amicability, we have argued, public familiarity might perhaps lead to a sense of knowing the place and its residents superficially, but not necessarily to a sense of belonging among urban dwellers.

<sup>5</sup> In a footnote, James Scott (1998: 233) has pointed out: "If the eyes on the street are hostile to some or all members of the community, as Talja Potters has reminded me, public security is not enhanced". Talja Potters, who now publishes under the name of Talja Blokland, thus has nuanced the claim that public familiarity *always* leads to a sense of home and belonging among residents.

## Feelings of Home

Feelings of home must be distinguished from *being* at home as a practice or thought. Feeling is different from doing and thinking, although all three aspects are an equal and integral part of social interaction. Hochschild (1990) has argued: “What we feel is fully as important to the outcome of social affairs as what we think or do” (117). Feelings, like doing and thinking, produce and are a product of social interaction. They are structured by ‘feeling rules’ (Hochschild, 1979, 1983), and connected to specific relational patterns, closely intertwined with the social and cultural context in which the feeling subject finds itself (Bericat, 2016). In other words, by studying feelings of home, we do not only gain knowledge of what the individual feels, but also what dominant normative rules and standards for having such feelings are. Bericat (2016) suggests that “feelings emerge in specific social situations, expressing in the individual’s bodily consciousness the rich spectrum of forms of human social interaction and relationships” (495). Hence, once we are able to recognize feelings of home, we will also be able to understand better in which social interactions and relationships such feelings are likely to occur – or not.

Although analytically separable, social science studies often use feelings of home and belonging interchangeably, as if they are one and the same. And indeed, narratives of (forced) migration, diaspora, homelessness and nostalgia show how deeply intertwined (lost) feelings of home and belonging are. Ahmed (1999), for example, argues feelings of home can only occur whenever one has the security of a destination, whenever one perceives the “contours of a space of belonging” (330). Belonging must thus be considered a precondition to feelings of home. Building on other social scientific insights, it turns out that other conditions are equally important to establish feelings of home, such as safety, control, and familiarity (e.g., Boccagni, 2017; Duyvendak, 2011; Mallet, 2004; Hage, 1997).<sup>6</sup> Hence, belonging to a community is one of the prerequisites for feelings of home, besides safety, control and familiarity. This means that a sense of belonging alone is insufficient to establish strong feelings of home. Moreover, belonging should not be conflated with feelings of home. For the purpose of this study, this establishes an important theoretical guideline: although community building interventions that aim at creating a shared sense of local

<sup>6</sup> Other aspects have also been mentioned as conditional to feelings of home, such as care, food, language and home-making practices. For the sake of conceptual clarity, I focus here on the role of belonging as one of the conditions to feel at home.

belonging can never bring about full feelings of home – as those feelings are also dependent on other aspects than belonging – such interventions can theoretically affect home feelings by influencing one of its prerequisites, i.e. a sense of belonging to a community.

In Chapters Two, Three and Four, I will make use of these conceptualizations to assess, interpret and analyze the empirical material.

## 1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

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As mentioned earlier, this ethnographic study seeks to gain an in-depth understanding of how feelings of home and belonging of targeted residents are affected by state-supported community building interventions. This section introduces the research questions, as well as the methodological approach and methods used to answer them. It furthermore shortly introduces the three extensive case studies, thereby discussing the case selection and sample of core respondents, as well as the time-path of the ethnographic research project. Subsequently, this section will elaborate upon the tools used to analyze the empirical data. Finally, it will summarize the main contributions, as well as the limits of this study.

### Research questions

With this study, I seek to answer the following research question: How do community building interventions in Dutch urban settings attempt to create a sense of local belonging among residents and, subsequently, how does this affect feelings of home of the residents involved?

To do so, I consider the following sub-questions:

- 1 What are the underlying assumptions, aims and strategies of the three community building interventions?
- 2 How do those assumptions, aims and strategies influence social dynamics between the residents involved?
- 3 How are categories of local insiders and outsiders shaped within the framework of the intervention?

#### 4 How and in what ways does this affect feelings of home of the involved individuals?

### Methodology

#### Approach

This study combines a structuralist-constructionist approach (Emirbayer and Goodwin, 1994) with an intersectional one (Crenshaw, 1990). The first approach considers human agency as “the capacity of socially embedded actors to appropriate, reproduce, and, potentially, to innovate upon received cultural categories and conditions of action in accordance with their personal and collective ideals, interests and commitments” (Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994: 1442-3). It thus takes into account the fact that individuals are not only subjected to and shaped by the cultural and institutional context in which they are embedded, but at the same time have the agency to act upon these conditions and appropriate them according to their needs. This pragmatist approach enables me to take into account both the structural and institutional setting that shape individuals’ ways of feeling and thinking, while at the same keeping a close eye on the micro-level where individual decisions and actions are pursued.

This I combine with an intersectional approach (Cho, Crenshaw and McCall, 2013; Yuval-Davis, 2011; Wekker, G. and Lutz, 2001; Crenshaw, 1990), meaning that I take into account structural intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, class, health and lifestyle of those ‘who are talking’. The intersectional approach helps me to gain a multi-perspective understanding of how experiences are shaped and situated. It enables me to detect the role of gender, race, ethnicity, class, health and sexuality in community life, belonging and feelings of home.

The structuralist-constructionist and the intersectional approaches are very compatible, as they are both based on the social pragmatist thinking that regards human beings as subjects both shaped by and actively (re)shaping cultural repertoires for feeling and thinking, structures for action and behavior and normative rules for social encounters (see also Swidler, 2011; Lamont, XX; Butler, 1998). It allows me to look into how “distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space” turn into symbolic boundaries (Lamont and Molnar, 2002:168). In the study of community building this is even more important, as “symbolic boundaries also separate people into groups and generate feelings of sim-

ilarity and group membership” (Ibid.). Hence, by adopting this approach, it becomes possible to capture the dynamics at play, both structuring and constructed in social interaction, that classify and categorize groups and individuals along lines of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, and health.

This research project does not start from a predefined hypothesis on whether or not state-supported community building interventions bring about a sense of belonging among residents and affect their feelings of home. Rather, it inductively explores if and how a sense of belonging emerges through community building interventions, and if and how feelings of home are affected by it.

### Methods

In order to find answers to the research questions of this study, qualitative methods were used on the level where ‘the action takes place’ (c.f., Goffman, 1983; Calhoun et al., 2014) – in other words, the micro-level of social interactions, encompassing the personal and local spaces where those interactions are situated. Extended ethnographic fieldwork, in-depth analysis and interpretation of the empirical data were conducted to scrutinize the ways in which the state-supported interventions are brought into practice and, thereby, how they affect the targeted individuals and the interactions between them.

The complete fieldwork entailed over 200 *participant observations* in public space, i.e. on streets, urban yards and in shopping malls; in semi-public places, such as neighborhood centers, cafés, schools and churches; and in the private homes of 30 individuals in Hoofddorp and Amsterdam. During and directly after the participant observations, detailed, *extended field notes* were made, including detailed descriptions of the formal and informal conversations I had had.

Furthermore, 50 *semi-structured interviews* and 2 *focus group interviews*, each around 90 minutes long, were conducted with a total of 67 people. The interviews took place either in a semi-public place or in the respondent’s own home. The interviews have been transcribed, resulting in more than 500 pages of *transcripts*. The gathered empirical data provide a rich, multi-layered, longitudinal overview of how different state-supported interventions work in practice and how they bring about or impede a sense of local belonging, and affect individuals’ feelings of home.



### Three Case Studies

The project deals with three case studies, each of them focusing on a state-supported community building intervention that aims at creating a local community and enhancing feelings of home among specific categories of residents. Each intervention starts from different policy assumptions that have been implemented within different policy frameworks, in different political eras between the 1970s and 2010s, as will be further addressed below.

Respectively, the interventions under scrutiny have targeted: 1. people with intellectual and development disabilities and people with psychiatric issues; 2. the white working class; and 3. young urban families. Furthermore, the three interventions are in different phases of establishment, respectively: 1. the *starting* phase in which residents are targeted and encouraged to become part of a new local community; 2. an *established* phase in which the boundaries of the built community are already quite clear, and well-defended and sustained by the members of the in-group at the expense of a local out-group; and 3. a *well-established* phase in which the local community is already strongly cohesive and barriers have become insurmountable to local outsiders.

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The first case study, dealt with in Chapter Two, is concerned with a starting intervention called ‘Neighbors groups’, initiated in the Dutch capital city of Amsterdam in 2016. During the pilot phase of the project, social professionals with financial support from the municipality attempted to bring socially isolated residents with intellectual and development disabilities and psychiatric issues together, with the ultimate aim of helping them create their own support network and make them feel at home in their neighborhood. The innovative aspect of the pilot phase was the attempt to build a local community of ‘vulnerable’ residents only, without the active interference of ‘able-bodied’ residents.

The second case study deals with a state-supported community restaurant in a very demographically diverse working-class neighborhood in Amsterdam. The by now established local community restaurant, initiated in 2006 and still running, explicitly aims at building an inclusive local community for residents with different cultural backgrounds. While the local restaurant management actively attempts to bridge differences between native

Dutch, white working-class visitors and residents with a migrant background, the established local community remains predominantly white, native Dutch until today.

The third case study focuses on a state-supported community building intervention through urban planning and design. In the 1970s and 1980s, the so-called Cauliflower-neighborhoods (*Bloemkoolwijken*) were built with the explicit aim of enhancing community life amongst young urban families. The ethnographic case study deals with two such neighborhoods in a middle-sized Dutch city of Hoofddorp, and looks into the dynamics between the well-established local community of young families, and the designated outsiders who do not seem to be able to fit in.

By scrutinizing in-depth the specificities and context-bounded aspects of the three different state-supported community building interventions, as well as the overarching features, the comparative design of this research project provides new and critical insights into how such interventions shape, affect and influence feelings of home of residents on the local level.

### Case selection and sample

The 67 respondents who have been interviewed were selected because they were all ‘targeted’ by one of the interventions under scrutiny; some of them were well-established members of the local communities built by the intervention, others felt excluded from it, or were still in the process of becoming a member of the local community. I approached respondents via municipalities, social organizations, neighborhood centers, churches and public schools. In sum, 36 of the interviewees were female, and 31 were male. With regard to age, respondents ranged from 9 to 84 years old. All of them have a working-class or middle-class background. My sample contains respondents from Dutch, Surinamese, Dutch Antillean, Iranian, Ethiopian, Turkish, Moroccan and Polish descent.

### Time-path

The three ethnographic case studies were conducted in 4 rounds of fieldwork of in total 25 months, over the course of 7.5 years between September 2010 and March 2018.

The first part of the fieldwork was conducted from September 2010 until

April 2011, in two cauliflower neighborhoods in Hoofddorp. The second part took place between August and December 2014, in a disadvantaged, very demographically diverse working-class area in the Dutch capital city of Amsterdam. The third and fourth rounds of research were conducted between August 2016 and June 2017, and from January 2018 until March 2018, in different residential areas in Amsterdam.

### **Data Analysis**

#### *Grounded Theory*

The analysis and interpretation of the ethnographic data are primarily based on the qualitative method of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory “is an inductive, comparative, iterative, and interactive method” that allows researchers to “subject their inductive data to rigorous comparative analysis that successively moves from studying concrete realities to rendering a conceptual understanding from these data” (Charmaz and Belgrave, 2012: 347). Moreover, it offers flexible strategies to study processes and transformations over time (Boer, 2016; Charmaz, 2006).

In this study, the iterative process of data gathering and analysis is embedded in different rounds of fieldwork. In between those periods, reflection on and analysis of the qualitative data was conducted, making use of the methodological tools of initial coding, focused coding and theoretical coding (Boer, 2016). During the periods in between rounds of fieldwork, research questions and methods were further refined, guiding the next round of ethnographic data gathering. Besides comparison between and within cases, the qualitative data is also analyzed through comparison with scholarly findings of researchers working on similar topics, with similar population groups, and theoretical concepts.

### **Critical Narrative Analysis and Discursive Psychology**

In addition to the analytical methods based on grounded theory, the interview data have been analyzed on the basis of insights of Critical Narrative Analysis in Psychology (Emerson and Frosch, 2004) and Discursive Psychology (Edwards and Potter, 2001).

Both approaches start from the standpoint that individuals construct mental representations of the world, and talk on that basis within a situated, institutional context. Critical narrative analysis in psychology and discursive

psychology focuses on “the situated, action-performative nature of talk” (Edwards and Potter, 2001: 1). It emphasizes the ways in which “the culture ‘speaks itself’ through the individual’s story” (Riessman, 1993: 5, cited in Emerson and Frosch 2004: 24).

From a similar cultural approach, social science scholars have pointed out how actors make use of cultural repertoires of evaluation, changing over time and space, to “raise persons and things to ‘commonness’” (Lamont and Thevenot, 2000: 5); to see how identities “are achieved through the course of social interaction” (Scharff, 2008: 333); and to see how they draw upon dominant narratives and discourses to establish accountability and respectability (Skeggs, 1997). Using critical narrative analysis, inconsistencies in talk are not regarded as problematic, but rather as a clue for analysis (Edwards, 2003: 33). “Individuals’ accounts can differ, depending on the function they seek to fulfill,” Scharff (2008: 332) has argued.

In sum, the analysis of the interview data has been conducted from the perspective that individuals make use of dominant narratives to perform, establish and justify their actions, feelings and thoughts, thereby taking into account the social location in which they are positioned.

### **Contributions and limits of the study**

Studying state-supported community building interventions is by no means unique in the social sciences (e.g., Guinan and O’Neill, 2019; Minkler, 2012; Kimmel et al., 2012; Bettez, 2011; Mulroy and Lauber, 2002). A multitude of studies have been presented where the impact, the outcomes and results, the policy implications and accounts of social professionals involved in the interventions have been scrutinized. This study, however, distinguishes itself through its focus on *belonging to a local community and the feelings of home* of those targeted by state-supported community building interventions.

Moreover, most research focuses on data that is easy to get access to, i.e. surveys or large quantitative data-sets, policy documents, or accounts of social professionals or care-providers (Israel et al. 2019; Gilchrist, 2019; Minkler, 2012). This project primarily builds on the accounts of people who are under-represented in studies on state-supported interventions: those who are presumed to be ‘marginalized’, ‘disadvantaged’ or ‘vulnerable’. While most studies in this field focus on one target group, e.g., the isolated elderly (e.g. Machielse, 2011), the disabled (Verplanke et al., 2009), or migrants (Soudy,

2017), the comparative design of multiple case studies allows me to seek similarities and differences between how state-supported community building interventions affect feelings of home of individuals within various target groups.

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The main contribution of this study is threefold. Methodologically, it uses an innovative combination of structuralist-constructionism and intersectionality, thereby offering in-depth insights on the coercive role of social locations in regards to individuals' sense of local belonging and feelings of home. Theoretically, it contributes to current theoretical knowledge by offering new, empirically supported conceptualizations of feelings of home and how such feelings are connected to belonging to a local community, thereby taking into account ways in which various intersections of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class and health shape such feelings. Empirically, it provides new data and fundamental knowledge in regards to how (vulnerable and hard-to-access) individuals experience community building interventions, as well as how these interventions work *on the ground*. Some practical tools and advice can be derived from the empirical findings for policy-makers, urban planners and social workers who aim at enhancing local community life.

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The strength of this ethnographic study also encapsulates its limitations: it focuses on situated practices, feelings and accounts of people living in the cities of Amsterdam and Hoofddorp in the Netherlands. Although the scope of three case studies is by definition limited and generalized inferences are impossible to make, I do believe the study presented here has broader and more general implications. First, the methodological approach, and the triangulation between different types of data and existing international literature on related topics, allows me to make inferences on more general mechanisms and structural aspects at play in state-supported community building interventions, the production of local belonging, and feelings of home. Furthermore, as the Netherlands is an extreme case of state-supported community building interventions since the 1920s, this study can be used as a stepping stone for future research on local community life, belonging and feelings of home in other countries.

Finally, this research project limits itself to scrutinizing the feelings of home that might or might not be affected by building local communities. Many more aspects could have been studied in regards to community building interventions, such as the role of the state or policies involved in, or the social effects on the *longue durée* of such interventions. Ideally, after reading this study and hopefully after having learned many new and fascinating things, the reader will be as puzzled as I am about many aspects. I hope this dissertation will encourage other scholars to (continue to) study citizens who are targeted – for whatever reasons – by state-supported interventions and, with this monograph as a guide, further refine the findings and analyses presented in this study.

## 1.6 OUTLINE OF THE DISSERTATION

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In the three chapters that follow, the three case studies will be presented. Each chapter starts with an introduction of the institutional framework in which the state-supported community building intervention was initiated and established, the underlying assumptions and aims of the intervention, as well as the community building practices involved. Subsequently, the chapters will focus on residents' feelings of home, how they relate to a sense of belonging to a (local) community, and if and how they are affected by being involved by the community building intervention. Each chapter ends with a discussion of the main findings of the case study.

Chapter Two will probe into the feelings of home of people with intellectual and development disabilities, and people with psychiatric problems who were targeted by the pilot project of the 'Neighbors groups.' This case study provided a unique chance, as it was possible to assess feelings of home of individuals with mild intellectual and development disabilities and mental health issues *prior* to as well as *during* the intervention. The second chapter therefore also comprises a section on feelings and experiences of home of targeted residents before they were invited to participate in the intervention. In this chapter, the notion of *amicable familiarity* will be introduced, as it turns out it plays a crucial role for this population group when it comes to feeling at home in their neighborhood.

Chapter Three focuses on the intervention of the ‘Community Restaurant’. After being involved in the community building intervention for more than a decade, members of the in-group have found their ways to defend and sustain the boundaries of their cohesive, local community against racial, ethnic and religious ‘others’. In this chapter, I will introduce three new concepts: subdominant, personal and dominant familiarity. These types of familiarity are based on mutual identification for different reasons among residents, leading to different strengths of belonging to a local community.

Chapter Four is concerned with feelings of home of residents living in two so-called cauliflower neighborhoods, which were deliberately designed to enhance social cohesion and informal encounters among young urban families. This state-supported community building intervention of the 1970s and 1980s still affects the interactions among contemporary residents, materially facilitating some residents to feel deeply at home in their neighborhood, while impeding others from doing so. In this chapter, the focus will be placed on how state-supported community building interventions shape the conditions, categories and boundaries for local inclusion and exclusion. Here, I will coin the concept of dominant familiarity, which refers to the power that can be exerted by a numerical minority group, when they are backed up, facilitated and supported by materially and socially dominant norms and formal institutions.

In the concluding Chapter Five, I will first summarize and compare the main findings of the three case studies. Second, I will discuss the important role of the four different types of familiarity that I have introduced in order to better understand feelings of home in the neighborhood. Finally, I will discuss the social scientific and political implications of these findings, and conclude by putting the findings of this study in a wider theoretical perspective on state-supported professional community building interventions and the production of local community insiders and outsiders.

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**Throughout this monograph, all personal names and names of organizations are anonymized and made fictitious.**





THE  
NEIGHBORS  
GROUP

CHAPTER

**2**

## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

*"I WANT TO HAVE FUN  
LIKE NORMAL PEOPLE DO"*

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It is a Thursday night in August 2016. The Quartermasters have invited me to join the very first meeting of people who are interested in joining the 'Neighbors group' in Amsterdam- West. I am early. Besides Quartermasters Petra and Marion, two energetic young women in their mid-twenties, there are no other people in the café. Petra starts to unroll a pack of paper, and puts some colored pens on the table.

Slowly, the first people start to arrive. The first one who comes in is John, a good- looking man in his early thirties. It doesn't take me long to find out he has difficulties talking coherently. Due to his illness, he explains, he has lost his short-term memory. It takes him only a split second to forget what he was talking about a moment ago. Soon, other people arrive; some in their wheelchairs, some by bike or bus, or on foot.

It strikes me how diverse the small group of people is that has shown interest in joining this project. While the youngest woman is only 21 years old, the oldest man is in his eighties. Not only in regards to gender and age, but also in terms of race, ethnicity, physical and developmental and intellectual ability/disability, the group of just eight members encompasses a nice variety of individuals.

Once the eight prospective members of Neighbors group West have arrived in the café, Marion welcomes everyone by saying the first drinks are on her. The young woman in her wheelchair orders a white wine. "I can't recall the last time I had wine. It's a real party," she says, smiling. Then Marion officially welcomes the group, and tells us about the purpose of being together. In the meantime, Petra writes keywords with the colored pens on the blank papers. 'Doing nice things together,' 'having fun,' 'feeling welcome,' 'going out,' 'relaxing,' 'having dinner,' the papers shout in multiple colors.

After Marion finishes her talk, there is a short go-round to find out the wishes of the participants. "I don't like to sit on a terrace on my own. I feel so lonely, so ashamed. But I do want to sit outside in the sun, and have fun like normal people do. Perhaps we can do such things together some-

times?" Dolly asks. The others nod. "It's all on you," Marion emphasizes, "in this Neighbors group, you're in control. So, we need your ideas for an activity or a place to go. And we can help you organize."

The official part is over. We sit and drink. Not much is being said. Some of the participants utter a wish for an activity, while the others nod or stay silent. After a while, some start to leave. Marion promises that she will get in touch with them again. The young man and the young woman in her wheelchair are still silently sipping their wines. Geoff, the oldest man, says he should also leave, because he still has to cycle to the other end of the city. "See you next time!" Marion calls after him. The young man and woman are the last to leave the bar. Both Petra and Marion are smiling radiantly. With such a great turnout and so many new plans for activities, the first meeting has been a success, they say.

[Research Diary, August 26, 2016].

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The intervention at the core of this ethnographic study is what is known as the 'Neighbors groups' project. In 2016, the pilot project was initiated by four social organizations in Amsterdam, with the aim of helping clients with intellectual and development disabilities, psychiatric issues or post-traumatic stress syndrome to build a local support network of their own. This chapter deals with the feelings of home of people with intellectual and development disabilities, and people with psychiatric problems who were targeted by the Neighbors groups intervention. As will become clear, a sense of belonging to a local community and the strong feelings of home that might result from it are far from self-evident for the respondents in this case study – let alone easy to enhance from the top-down.

In what follows, first an outline will be provided of the institutional framework within which the state-supported community building intervention was initiated and established, the underlying assumptions and aims of the intervention, as well as the community-building practices and strategies involved. Subsequently, the chapter focuses on the feelings of home of respondents *prior* to the intervention. Third, it maps out if and how participation in the community-building intervention increased their sense of local belonging, and subsequently whether, and in what way, their feelings of home were affected by it. As elaborated upon in Chapter One, a sense of (local) belonging must theoretically be considered a prerequisite for feel-

ings of home, alongside other aspects such as safety, control and familiarity (see section 1.4). Hence, this section looks into how being included or excluded in the newly established local community leads to a sense of belonging and subsequently affects the individual's home feelings. In the concluding section, I will shortly summarize the main findings and discuss *the paradoxical role of familiarity* when it comes to the establishment of a sense of local belonging, and how this affects feelings of home.

## 2.2 THE INTERVENTION

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### Institutional Framework

The community-building project 'Neighbors groups' was established in response to the recently established Dutch Social Support Act (*Wet maatschappelijke ondersteuning*, 2007/2015, hereafter SSA). This act obliges 'vulnerable' citizens in need of structural support to reach out to 'the community', before turning to welfare state arrangements. As part of a comprehensive welfare state retrenchment, the Dutch government uses the SSA to help and encourage vulnerable citizens: 1. to stay at home as long as possible; 2. to become independent of state-supported professional help; and 3. to organize their own informal care network (Klerk, Gilsing and Timmermans, 2010).

Along with the decline of the welfare state, and the accompanying new obligations of and expectations with regard to vulnerable citizens, a cultural transformation can also be traced. In his annual speech to the government and the people, the Dutch King spoke of a transition toward a new 'participation' society, consisting of self-sufficient and self-confident citizens:

*"Hand in hand with the need to reduce the deficit of the Government, goes the classic welfare state that gradually turns into a participation society. Everyone who is capable is now asked to take responsibility for his or her own life and surroundings. When people themselves start to shape their future, they not only add value to their own lives, but also to society as a whole. This way, Dutch people remain working together to build a strong country of self-confident people"*

(Rijksoverheid, 2013).

In other words, within the framework of the current welfare state retrenchments, people are not only encouraged to organize their own care network and become less dependent on welfare state arrangements, but they also have to add value to their lives and society as a whole. Tonkens, Grootegoed and Duyvendak (2015) have argued that "reform of the welfare state is about more than changing rights and duties. Reforms tell citizens what they are worth, how they are valued and judged, and how they are supposed to *feel* about the new arrangements" (407).

Following this line of thought, the Dutch government expresses the normative discourse, mediated by the King's speech and embedded in new policy programs such as the SSA, that 'vulnerable' citizens should no longer *feel* weak, unable to take any responsibility for their own lives or feeling like they are not adding value to society, but rather perceive of themselves as strong, responsible and self-reliant citizens. It is clear that, underlying this policy discourse, being dependent on welfare state arrangements is depicted as morally bad and a sign of bad citizenship, while being dependent on 'the community' is seen as a sign of autonomy, strength and empowerment (cf. Bos, Wekker and Duyvendak, 2013).

In response to this political and cultural turn, four social organizations in Amsterdam, professionally concerned with residents with people with intellectual and development disabilities and psychiatric problems, collectively sounded the alarm. As a matter of urgency, they wrote a letter to the local municipality to draw attention to the fact that it was difficult – if not impossible – for their clients to participate in mainstream society without professional support. Reaching out to 'the community' for help is not self-evident for people who have never been part of or are afraid of being part of a community. Moreover, the organizations argued, it could not be considered 'normal' or self-evident that, if there were a community to reach out to, the community would be willing or able to include and support people with severe and/or structural problems. Taking care of others on an informal and structural basis is not as 'customary' as the government attempts to make citizens believe (Grootegoed, Barneveld and Duyvendak, 2014).

Based on their experiences as 'street-level organizations' (cf. Brodtkin, 2011), the social professionals argued that the new SSA could increase exclusion and social isolation of the target group, instead of improving their societal inclusion and participation in accordance with the government's stated aim. In order for the SSA to work in practice and to support vulnerable

citizens to adapt to the new reality of a declining welfare state, they called for the institutionalization of a solid social basic infrastructure for their target group in Amsterdam's neighborhoods.

With the agreement and financial support of the municipality, the pilot project 'Neighbors groups' started and was rolled out across four residential areas in Amsterdam, between August 2016 and June 2017. A sequel of the state-supported project was established in September 2017.

### **Underlying Aims and Assumptions**

One of the core objectives of the Neighbors groups project was to bring clients of different social organizations together, starting with those who had registered themselves on a waiting list for a buddy – i.e. a voluntary friend.

The four social organizations provided different buddy programs, focused on people with intellectual and development disabilities, addiction, psychiatric problems, or experiences with domestic violence or human trafficking.<sup>7</sup> The large numbers of clients who had registered themselves for a specific buddy program was seen as indicative of clients' increasing feelings of loneliness and social isolation. "The buddy projects are highly popular nowadays," one of the social professionals told me, "but it takes about six months before we can find a volunteer to support them. In the meantime, clients can be really, really lonely."

Recent research has indeed shown that 20% of the people with disabilities and long-term health issues in the Netherlands do not have a private network of friends or family members to fall back on (Campen, Van Vonk, and Van Tilburg, 2018). The popularity of the buddy programs, as well as the long waiting lists, thus reflect a larger problem: residents who are vulnerable due to their intellectual and development disabilities, psychiatric problems, or other personal issues become even more vulnerable due to lack of sufficient informal and intimate relationships (Jespersen et al., 2019; Wyngaerden et al., 2019). By implementing the social intervention of the Neighbors groups, with the financial support of the Municipality of Amsterdam, the social organizations could already start to help clients find a social network of their own.

<sup>7</sup> <https://buddynetwerk.nl/organisatie/onze-geschiedenis/>; <https://www.deregenboog.org/eenzaamheid>

Interestingly, the social intervention of the Neighbors groups did not aim to build sustainable relationships between the 'vulnerable' and the so-called 'able-bodied,' as proposed in the SSA (2007/2015). Instead, it focused on creating a community of people with a background of struggling with an intellectual and development disability, psychiatric issues or post-traumatic stress syndrome. This strategy stemmed from the social workers' experiences that their clients are most often deeply mistrustful toward people without such issues.

This perspective chimes with social science findings showing how sustainable and supportive relationships between 'able-bodied' and 'vulnerable' residents are not self-evident or easy to organize (Bredewold and Kruiswijk, 2013; Bredewold, Tonkens and Trappenburg, 2013; Verhoeven, 2013). Despite the explicitly formulated, normative imperative of the Dutch government (Rijksoverheid, 2013; Wmo 2015) that it should be seen as only 'normal' for 'strong' citizens to help and support vulnerable people in 'their community', in practice it turns out that vulnerable people hardly ask for or receive informal help from the 'able-bodied'. People with disabilities and structural health issues prefer to reach out to and support others 'like themselves' (Linders, 2010). Based on the experiences of the social professionals, the Neighbors groups project was thus designed to strengthen the ties among peers and to encourage mutual support and a sense of community among themselves.

Another objective of the social organizations was to build "a solid, local basic infrastructure for vulnerable residents in the neighborhood."<sup>8</sup> This way, the target group would become familiar with fellow residents 'like themselves', as well as with neighborhood centers and semi-public spaces where they could feel safe and protected among themselves. As discussed in Chapter One, social science research shows that urban dwellers navigate and 'socially survive' in dense urban settings through repetitive circulations of narratives about 'us' and 'them' (Hansen and Verkaaik, 2009:16). Moreover, the intersection between (the vulnerable) body and space produces shared kinds of subjective experience of the city, resulting in a sense of shared identity (Fitzgerald, Rose and Singh, 2016: 152-155). In sum, by familiarizing residents with different types of vulnerabilities with each other and the neighborhood, it was assumed that the targeted individuals would

<sup>8</sup> Retrieved from 'Motion N' (2016), the submission letter that was sent to the Municipality of Amsterdam by the four social organizations.



gain a sense of belonging to a community of their own, and ultimately start to feel at home in this place.

The third and final objective of the social organizations was to encourage their clients to slowly become empowered, self-supportive and self-confident about taking care of themselves and each other. Based on their prior experiences with community-building activities, the organizers expected the (mental) health conditions of participants to improve once they became embedded in a local community. A sense of belonging to a local community would help them to better cope with stress and anxiety (see also Fitzgerald, Rose and Singh, 2016).

In summary, closely connected to the empowering discourse that underpins welfare-state reforms in the Netherlands and other Western European countries (Kampen, Verhoeven and Verplanke, 2013; Kisby, 2010), this community-building project aimed at empowering ‘vulnerable’ residents to make themselves at home in mainstream society through becoming part of a self-reliant community of people with shared social locations, based on their disability or mental health issues.

### **Community-building Practices**

In practice, a Neighbors group consists of several small circles of people. During the period of the pilot project, between August 2016 and May 2017, 34 active participants gathered in small groups of 5 to 8 people living in the same residential area. Based on their shared interests, different activities were deployed. While one Neighbors group loved cooking and dining together in a community center, another group enjoyed visiting a museum or the movies.

The activities conducted by the Neighbors groups were loosely guided by the so-called Quartermasters, Marion and Petra. In social science literature, Quartermasters are described as professional ‘trailblazers’ or ‘precursors’ who pave the way in a neighborhood or city for “a welcoming, inclusive society” (Janssen, 2014) for people with psychiatric issues or intellectual disabilities. Doortje Kal (2011:31) describes the practices of Quartermasters as follows:

*“The field operations of Quartermasters (in Dutch: Kwartiermakers) are concerned with creating the conditions for people with a psychiatric background, or others who suffer from exclusion, to*

*participate and belong. The terms participation and belonging – central goals of the Social Support Act (WMO) – are in essence about the opportunity to contribute in a way people themselves consider relevant for a meaningful life.”*

In a similar vein, the Quartermasters of the community-building project under scrutiny described the basic principles of the Neighbors groups as follows:

*“The Neighbors groups are about building a nice life with people around you, without putting the emphasis on the limitations and the support participants need. Their problems are not ignored, but people themselves decide what they want to share about their personal circumstances. That is what shapes the open atmosphere in the Neighbors groups, and the feeling of being welcome.”*

Quartermasters are thus trained to create urban spaces for “otherness” (Kal, 2011: 34) and support vulnerable residents to take action and do meaningful things together. Kal calls this creating “niches in welfare and voluntary work, [...] in which a sense of self-worth [of vulnerable citizens] is fed” (Ibid.).

Very different from the community-building intervention that I scrutinize in Chapter Three, the professional community organizers in this case hardly took any initiative for activities. Apart from questions like, “shall we make a shopping list?” or “does anyone have an idea?” the Quartermasters barely influenced the content and form of the Neighbors groups gatherings. Instead, they made sure the participants were in control over what, how, and at what pace things were organized.

At the beginning of the pilot project, I regularly observed gatherings with 10-12 people sitting silently together. Sometimes, a few of them would play a game together, someone was reading a bible, while some other people were looking at their mobile phones or listening to music with their headphones on. No effort was made by anyone to turn the activity into something more collective. Literally, being able to sit and be with others in the same space was the most valued aspect for my respondents. In a later stage, activities developed into more lively, humorous, sometimes even noisy gatherings as participants began to feel more at ease amongst each other.

Paving the way to ‘welcoming spaces’ in the practice of the Neighbors groups project meant carving out spaces where vulnerable residents could be themselves, safe and in control of what happened and how. This idea aligns with the concept of ‘safe spaces’, elaborated upon by feminist, LGBT+ and critical race scholars since the 1990s (e.g., Lewis et al., 2015; Fox and Ore, 2010; Campbell et al., 2004; Valentine, 1997). Safe spaces are meant for those who share similar experiences of risk and harassment in private and/or public space. For example, in her book *Making Space: Lesbian Separatist Communities*, Valentine (1997) argues control of space is essential, “because it would give women the freedom to articulate a lesbian feminist identity, to create new ways of living and to work out new ways of relating to the environment” (111). At the same time, safe spaces aim to raise visibility for members and increase awareness of their issues and the presence of discrimination in mainstream culture (Fox and Ore, 2010). In that sense, paving the way toward a welcoming and inclusive society must be seen as a three-step process. That is to say, creating an exclusive, safe space – such as the Neighbors groups – and an increased awareness are the two stepping stones to the final goal: a welcoming and inclusive society in which anyone, regardless of their type of ‘difference’, can feel safe and ‘ontologically secure’ (Giddens, 1991).

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After the pilot phase of the intervention, from September 2017 on, one of the social organizations involved was able to continue the project, with an extended subsidy from the Municipality of Amsterdam. In this slightly redesigned version of the Neighbors groups project, three core members of the different Neighbors groups were asked to become local volunteers, and thereby replaced the professional Quartermasters. Thus, a year after the start of the interventions, members of the newly established Neighbors groups became responsible for organizing and supporting themselves, according to their own needs and wishes.

At the end of my research period, in October 2018, three Neighbors groups that had emerged from the pilot phase of the intervention still existed. The groups of about 8 members each, across three different residential areas in Amsterdam, were completely self-sufficient, in control of their own agenda and pursuing activities paid from the small budget they put together themselves.

Before we move on to the sense of belonging that was produced through participation in the Neighbors group intervention, and the feelings of home it aroused for those who did take the step to participating, let us take a step back in time. In the following section, we will look into the accounts of respondents of their feelings of home prior to the moment they were asked to participate in the intervention. Moreover, the section below provides insight into the motives and decision of those who decided to participate, and into the reasons why the majority of my respondents decided not to participate in the Neighbors groups at all. For the latter, the intervention did not affect their feelings of home, as things largely remained the same while they stayed put inside their homes.

## 2.3 FEELINGS OF HOME PRIOR TO THE INTERVENTION

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*“Inside my house, I feel safe. But not outside. Since I moved, I have my own front door. That works better for me. No one can bother me now. I don’t trust any neighbors. Because, in my life I’ve experienced too many bad things ... Neighbors start to hang out with you, and in the end they take advantage of you, of your disability. No, I don’t like neighbors. I know who they are, I have seen them passing by, and I have spoken to some of them. But I will never let them into my house. First, let them prove that I am worthwhile (laat ze eerst bewijzen dat ik waardig ben).”*

(Interview Willy, 12-10-2016).

Willy was one of the fourteen people who were willing to let me into their lives during the period of the research project, between August 2016 and May 2018. Like the other core respondents,<sup>9</sup> Willy had registered himself for one of the buddy programs of the four social organizations – in his

<sup>9</sup> I use ‘core respondents’ to refer to the fourteen individuals who had registered for the one of the buddy programs and whom I visited regularly in their private homes between 2016 and 2018. During my research project, I met over thirty other participants of the community-building intervention, whom I will call ‘participants’ in what follows.

case, the buddy program for people with intellectual and development disabilities. The fourteen core respondents I was able to follow during this ethnographic case study had all registered for one of the buddy programs more than 6 months prior to my research. Two Quartermasters were appointed to reach out to each of them (and many others) to join the Neighbors groups within a few weeks. I was able to visit them at their homes or in public spaces (based on their preference and personal situation) before they were contacted by the Quartermasters.

### **Home as a Safe Haven**

When I first visited Willy, he was clearly not prepared for a visitor. His curtains were closed during daytime, and the darkness inside his house struck me. Clothes were strewn all around his small two-room apartment. He apologized and told me to move the clothes on the couch aside, so I could take a seat. Willy settled down behind his desk, which was packed with computer and musical devices, piles of DVDs and CDs, as well as a medium-sized fish tank full of tiny, shiny fish. Willy apologized for his weak and unstable voice because, as he explained, he hadn't been using it for a while. In his agenda, he pointed out when he had last talked to someone: almost two weeks ago, during the bi-monthly phone call with his personal supervisor from the organization Philadelphia.<sup>10</sup> He clearly had forgotten that I had talked to him on the phone only two days ago.

It was still a few weeks before he would be approached by the Quartermasters to take part in the community-building intervention of the Neighbors group. He had not expected anyone to visit him. He was always 'home alone', Willy said while winking, to make sure I would get the reference to the eponymous movie.

In order to emphasize that I was not a social professional or the buddy he had been waiting for, I repeated what we had discussed during our short phone call, who I was, what I came for, what the research consisted of, and the topic I wanted to talk to him about. It seemed like Willy could not care less. "I just like the company," he said with a shrug. When I told him he could tell me anything, but he did not have to discuss things he did not

want to, he answered that he was an open book, and that he didn't have anything to hide. I asked him what topic he wanted to discuss first. "Neighbors," Willy firmly stated.

Willy very badly wanted to talk about his 'annoying neighbors'. He explained to me that he keeps the curtains shut because of those neighbors. The sounds, the lights, the smoke neighbors produce arouse a strong anxiety in Willy. Over the last decade, he had moved several times because of this, but he now knew they were the same everywhere: neighbors cannot be trusted, they will definitively take advantage of him and treat him like he is not worth anything. Therefore, Willy is doomed to stay inside the house, as he confided. He does not want to be inside all the time, but he's forced to do so, he says, because outside 'neighbors' dwell, bullying him when they get the chance. When I asked him whether he felt at home inside his house, he responded by saying he did not even know what 'home' meant: "because, in the end, I am still alone."

Thus, while consciously withdrawing from the outside world, Willy craved for social contact and intimacy. Fortunately, at the time, Willy received some weekly professional help at home – which, according to him, was not really necessary, as he managed to live by himself very well. But, it was the regular social contact with his professional helpers that helped him make it through the week. In contrast to social contact with neighbors, professional helpers can be sent away and fired, Willy explained to me. That's why he was better capable of dealing with them. He had already sent away several helpers and care-givers, simply because they did not accept him like he is, and forced him to change. "This is my house," he explained, "and here, people have to comply to my rules."

Hence, in contact with professional care-givers who help him at home, Willy feels in control, whereas with 'neighbors', who seem to be anywhere out there in public space, he feels fully subjected to them. But, while a sense of safety and control is indispensable to make Willy's private space a safe haven, he still does not feel at home, due to a lack of social embeddedness and intimate connectedness with others.

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<sup>10</sup> Philadelphia is a social organization that offers supervision and protected ways of independent living for the people with intellectual and development disabilities and psychiatric patients.

Similar accounts were given by other core respondents, such as Priscilla:

*“I really need a friend: someone to talk to and hang out with. On my own, I’m not going outside. ... Outside, that means, foreigners... Being attacked by criminals. You can see it on television all the time ... They are everywhere on the streets. So. ... I’m not going out by myself. And he [points at Sjeff, her partner who has mild intellectual and development disabilities] doesn’t want to go out either. There are a lot of Turks and Moroccans living in this neighborhood. I mean, I know them all. When they were young, they would shout after me, very nasty things. They would call me ‘foreigner.’ Or ‘retard,’ ‘hare-lip,’ ‘four eyes,’ because of my glasses, you know. Those were the things they said to me. That’s why I keep my distance, you know. Because I know them. I just don’t like... foreigners, to be honest. So my friend should be just normal Dutch.”*

(Interview Priscilla, September 14, 2016).

For most of my core respondents, moving beyond the protective boundaries of the private home into public space is a fearful endeavor, because of ‘neighbors,’ ‘foreigners’ or simply ‘human beings’ (as mentioned by core respondents Ronja and Martin) roaming the streets. To them, public spaces are by definition unsafe; places where one is out of control and subjected to the incomprehensible ways and conduct of others. For both Willy and Priscilla, their social withdrawal does not mean they do not crave for social contact, though. They just cannot think of a strategy to get in touch with trustworthy people, without being subjected to a hostile world.

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Martin and Ronja also consciously hide inside their houses to protect themselves from the outside world. However, they do not long for any social contact anymore. “I have lost all faith in other people. And that... that... scar is very deep. And the more you lose faith in mankind, the more you are confronted with the fact you just have to do it all by yourself,” Martin explained to me.

Ronja, diagnosed with a personality disorder, but doing pretty well in her own judgment, explained how she had learned not to trust anyone anymore. She now lives with her 9-year-old son and dog, and chooses not to

work, to live on social welfare and to stay inside the house all day while her son is in school. Her son is not allowed to bring friends over to the home, as she is very protective of her private space:

*“I was always striving for long-term, profound relationships, with employers, with other people, whoever. I don’t do that anymore. I’m doing only for myself now. And for my child, that’s it. ... it’s because of how human beings are. Wherever there are people, there is trouble.”*

The fact that Martin and Ronja had registered for a buddy program several months ago was now seen as a mistake by both of them. Martin explained to me:

*“Those buddy projects are great. Compared to social workers, buddies really do a great job, they bring some shared humanity, some meaning into your life, you know. But, a buddy also, at the end of the day, will tell you ‘you have to do it yourself.’ So, I started to think about having a buddy, but, and this is quite personal, those people you’re dealing with, they... also have very problematic... erm... situations. And to feel all that energy... And, some of them want to tell you all about it! About all the misery in their lives: ‘Oh, and I experienced this and that...!’ And that’s exactly what I try to keep out of my life. I don’t need that. I have enough misery myself. I don’t need all the misery of others as well. It makes me very depressed.”*

In order to protect himself from external interference, Martin had disabled his doorbell and telephone. No one can enter his private world: “Here, I am the captain of my own ship.” However, he said that he did like to talk to someone like me, making clear his doors weren’t hermetically sealed for friendly encounters. Similarly, Ronja stayed inside her house as much as possible, keeping the door locked for outsiders – letting me in was a huge exception of her basic rule, she confided in me.

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In line with Willy and Priscilla, who after a lifetime of bad experiences with ‘normal’ people, had decided not to trust any ‘neighbors’ or ‘foreigners’, Ronja and Martin simply concluded that all human beings should be

avoided at any time. Thus, staying inside the house and not trusting anyone was a well-informed decision; inside the house they were in control, whereas outside the private sphere they would be exposed to the twisted whim of others. Obviously, the fact they let me in – a researcher who was interested in their story – indicates they did not completely cut off the possibility of social encounters and personal talk.

In the accounts of core respondents, the importance of *home as a safe haven*, in which a sense of control, protection against external interference and personal safety is guaranteed, played a core role. However, their narratives never account for strong *feelings of home*, as they all felt they were lacking a sense of belonging to someone, or some social environment. By having become familiar to the ways with which other people can harm them, mistreat and abuse them, they deeply feared losing control and safety by becoming socially attached (again) to others.

While some of my respondents thus turned out to be relatively satisfied since they were able to control their own lives, and organize their private spaces according to their own needs and wishes, some other core respondents showed how devastating it is when one's private home does not provide a safe haven.

### **Home as a Hell**

When I first met Bert, he lived with his mother. He had been an alcoholic for years and was recently abandoned by his wife, and put out on the street. After he came back from the rehab facility where he had stayed for seven months, Bert found himself completely isolated. Friendships don't last for long when one is in crisis, Bert knows now. The only way not to end up on the streets was by staying in his parental home, where his mother still lives. Being a man in his late fifties, now living again with his mother was a real burden to him:

*“Sometimes I feel like screaming. Inside... Inside, I'm very lonesome... Inside, I can sometimes... But I have to accept things the way they are. ... There is nothing more important than to have a real home. A place where you can go to bed when it pleases you, and stay in bed as long as you like. That would be such a relief, compared to where I sleep now. To have a place of my own, where I can do whatever I like. Very important. The biggest fight with*

*my mother is that she tries to be economical and never turns the heater up above 19 degrees Celsius. For me, that's way too cold. I am always cold now. I have to live with that from now on; my mother does not take me seriously. That is so frustrating. In my own home, I could be as warm as I needed.”*

(Interview Bert, September 18, 2016).

Control, autonomy, warmth and being taken seriously were synonyms for Bert's idea of home, but hard to find for 'a homeless man'. Bert described himself as homeless, despite the fact that he was again living in his parental home, because as an adult he was dependent on his mother once more. Being treated as a child and not in charge of the heater or his own bedtime made him feel miserable – craving for a place of his own which he could control and shape according to his own needs and wishes.

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In Chitra's case, her husband had locked her inside the house for four years. During that period she had persistently been abused – physically, sexually and mentally. Her husband had threatened to kill her if she did not subject herself to all his sexual fantasies and obsessions. She had lived in a hell, she confided in me, “in the midst of the fire”. One day, fortunately, two Iranian friends of her husband had witnessed how he had forced her to have sex with him. The friends figured out a ruse to get her out of the house and took her to the police station. She was immediately placed in a women's shelter (*'blijf van mijn lijf huis'*) in Amsterdam. This is what she told me about her idea of home the first time I visited her:

*“A real home for me is... my home, my own apartment, my own little place. I don't know, but I really need it. With my personal stuff. Before, when I still lived at home with my husband, I thought, I am alone, nobody protects me, I must accept everything that happens to me. Because he's a man, I am a woman, I'm powerless, I cannot do anything. Because I believed these things, I accepted everything. But in my own home, I'm free. When the weather is windy, I will loosen my hair and let the wind blow. Yes, I'm free. I'm a woman, I'm not booker. I'm a normal woman. My body is healed now. For four years, I was shut down. It's like I was asleep, in a deep sleep. But now, I am awake.”*

(Interview Chitra, November 2, 2016).

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Both the accounts of Bert and Chitra show what feminist scholars have also pointed out: private space or the family home should not be automatically equated with ‘home’. While the family home can be a real home for one person, it can be hell for another. Mary Douglas (1991: 287) has called this “the tyranny of home”. She argues that home is “a kind of space” filled with tensions, gender and generational inequality, oppression and violence.

For core respondents like Bert and Chitra, who felt more threatened inside than outside the private sphere, navigating through public space was challenging, but moreover seen as an opportunity to become ‘normal’ again. Since their vulnerability does not have a structural, but rather a *situational* character, both Bert and Chitra had a memory of themselves as being socially and mentally capable of having friends and intimate relationships. They felt confident of being capable of feeling deeply at home again, once they had a place to call their own. From there, they could start exploring their new living environment, get to know people, familiarize themselves with organizations, shops and jobs in the area, and start to feel like a real person again. Or, as Chitra said: “Once I have my home, in the near future I hope, I think I need more friends. Because now my world is very small.” Bert described his vision of the future in similar terms:

*“First and foremost for me is to have a place of my own. That’s where I can start building from. Once I get an address, I can also start to apply for jobs. And then, of course I’m not made of stone, I would like to have a girlfriend again. I am not looking for a relationship right now, but I do need some company.”*

Taking into account the core attributes for a ‘real home’ – safety, control, familiarity, and belonging (for an elaboration, see Chapter One) – it becomes clear that the first attributes are organized extremely well by some of the core respondents: they have taken extreme measures to keep themselves safe and in control by completely shutting out the outside world: staying inside all day, closing curtains, locking doors, disabling doorbells and telephones. Other core respondents have had harder times, or were only recently able to find safety and control, since the real threat came from within the private sphere. All of them indicated personal *safety and control in private space* as indispensable to feeling at home in their own place.

### **Public Familiarity: Wall or Bridge to Feelings of Home**

In contrast to what the social science literature says about public familiarity as a condition to start to feel at home in one’s neighborhood (e.g., Blokland-Potters, 2006; Tonkiss, 2005; Jacobs, 1989[1961]; Fischer, 1982), my ethnographic material shows that public familiarity – i.e. the visual recognition of other residents (‘familiar strangers’) in public space – can actually lead to the opposite: the obstruction of feelings of home. As we have seen, vulnerable residents like Willy and Priscilla, who are visibly ‘deviant’ from the mainstream due to their intellectual and development disability and physical appearance, or like Ronja and Martin who feel incapable of dealing with too much stress due to their psychiatric issues, are well aware that they are not safe, not in control and certainly do not belong to the local community because they are publically familiar with their fellow residents. Knowing their whereabouts, and ‘rubbing shoulders’ (Blokland and Schulze, 2017) with them in public space, arouses feelings of discomfort, insecurity and anxiety instead of the rosy sense of belonging the literature accounts for.

This is an important finding. Public familiarity can bring about a *sense of security and control* (Hage, 1997), but only for those who: 1. are considered ‘normal’ in the eyes of other residents; and 2. perceive themselves as capable of dealing with social encounters in public space. (Visibly) vulnerable residents, on the other hand, might conclude their personal safety and autonomy is not secured in public space, *because* they are familiar with the physical and social environment.

While most literature on feelings of home deals with the comfortable experience of being safe, secure and in control, feminist scholars have pointed out how easily those feelings can be undermined for those who lack the physical, symbolic, and/or economic power to be safe and in control of space (Porteous and Smith, 2001; Yuval Davis, 2011; Baxter and Brickell, 2014; Verplanke et al., 2009). Accordingly, Mary Douglas (1991: 287) has emphasized how tensions, gender and generational inequality, oppression, and violence in the domestic sphere can obstruct feelings of home. In a similar vein, scholars have described how the household, but also the community, the neighborhood, or the nation-state must be conceived as an arena of power, insecurity, and conflict where feelings of home are highly contested (Stichter and Parpart, 2019; Tunåker, 2015; Hochschild and Machung, 2012; Ignatieff, 2010).

Following from these conceptions, feelings of home only emerge for those for whom this power struggle has been successful, and who have gained the control to appropriate space according to one's own needs, tastes and 'law', safeguarded from outsiders. In turn, someone who loses control over her/his own space, autonomy and personal integrity, also loses feelings of safety and belonging, and thus one's feelings of home.

As I learned, visible deviancies of the body and mind define to a large extent whether public familiarity will lead to an increase or a loss of a person's feeling of home in a place. From an intersectional perspective, this insight is even more important, as it implies that dominant theoretical notions in social science literature do not – or, at least, insufficiently – take into account the experiences of those who do not live up to dominant social norms and mainstream standards, based on their individual social location in terms of (mental) health, but also intersections of gender, race, ethnicity and other visible bodily attributes. Hence, from an intersectional point of view, public familiarity serves either as a wall or a bridge to feelings of home, as it can either positively or negatively affect an individual's sense of safety, control and belonging.

This insight leads me to coining a new type of familiarity in section 2.4.

### **Community: To Belong Or Not To Belong**

For all fourteen core respondents, talking about community life and a sense of belonging (or not belonging) aroused strong emotions. A common feature in all the baseline interviews was the fact that being part of an affective community of family and friends, peers or fellow residents is by no means self-evident for any of my core respondents; they had either lost their family and social relationships due to their personal circumstances, had consciously withdrawn from the social network they were once part of, or they had never experienced a sense of community in their lives.

For some of the core respondents, like Willy and Priscilla, their wish to be embedded in an affective and supportive community was inextricably linked to their idea of 'home'. Willy, despite being safe and in control in his private home-as-haven, said he did not *feel* at home because there was no one around: "When you don't have any family, only two friends who live

<sup>11</sup> Here, Willy refers to the main character of the lonely boy in the classical book *Sans Famille* ("Without Family") by Hector Malot.

far away, no girlfriend, well, then you really feel like Remi.<sup>11</sup> Well, and that is, erm... When that lasts for 365 days a year, it becomes a bit unpleasant [laughs a little]."

Willy, as he explained further, had never been part of a community of family or friends in his life:

*"I have a real messed up family. Erm... my parents broke with the family when I was young. We constantly moved from one place to another, and that's why I lost all contact with my family, due to my parents. My parents were twisted [sighs]. And my sisters, I haven't seen them in forty years. They are brainwashed by my parents in such a way that they still hate and despise me, or whatever it's called. [...] When I was eleven, my parents put me in a children's home. I didn't want to live at home any more, and my parents didn't want to take care of me."*

Two things come to the fore in Willy's account with regard to community life: first, while he lacks a basic trust in the people he lives amongst ('neighbors'), and consciously withdraws himself from them, he deeply longs for social relationships and being embedded in a community. The lack of being embedded in some form of community life causes deep feelings of loneliness – indicating a gap between the desired and actual situation in which he finds himself (cf. Steptoe et al, 2013; Machielse, 2011).

Second, an important discursive aspect that comes to the fore in Willy's quotes, as well as in utterings of other respondents, is the use of the more general 'you' form, instead of the first person pronoun ('I'), to describe a *personal situation*. As pointed out in critical narrative analysis and discursive psychology (Scharff, 2008; Emerson and Frosch, 2004), using the second pronoun in a personal account indicates a "canonical narrative". A canonical narrative is considered as an internalized collective idea about what normal behavior is (and should be) in certain circumstances and contexts. With a canonical narrative, "culture speaks itself through the individual's story" (Riesman, 1993 quoted by Emerson and Frosch, 2004: 24). In the quote above, Willy phrases the context of his loneliness as follows: "then *you* really feel like Remi". Following the insights of critical narrative analysis and discursive psychology, this suggests that Willy wishes to emphasize

that everyone would and should feel lonely in his circumstances. By using the word ‘you’ to paint the picture of his loneliness, he stresses the fact that this is not personal; on the contrary, anyone in his circumstances would suffer like he does. Ergo, no one should be lonely like him.

When I asked Willy if he would consider to participate in the activities of a local community of people with intellectual and development disabilities like him, he quickly replied: “I would certainly be willing to try that. I want to try it all.”

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Martin struck me as the opposite of Willy when I first met him. Sitting cross-legged on the couch, rolling and chain-smoking his joints in a tidy, well-cleaned apartment, Martin explained he had decided to focus on himself from now on. Perhaps in a few years, when his life was more stable, he could allow himself to have social contacts again. But first, he needed to fully recover from his severe depression; therefore, he chose social isolation and to be left in peace.

Since his wife had left ten years ago, and wrongly accused him of sexually abusing their 5-year-old daughter, Martin’s life had totally fallen apart. Although he had never been very socially active, he was now completely alone for the first time in his life. Due to the divorce and the court case his ex-wife had initiated (and lost) against him, he was now totally devoid of all contact with his two children, their common friends, and his in-laws. Some of his old friends kept in touch, despite the allegations against him of committing sexual abuse, but, as Martin learned, no one could really help him to cope with the dark reality of his shattered life.

*“I’m at a point in my life where... where it’s not relevant anymore to discuss things with someone else. I have been forced to solve my own problems to such an extent, that... I can solve anything myself now. [...] The faith in my own strength... the extent to which I rely on my own strength is directly related to the loss of faith in other people. [...] I don’t go out, why would I? Here, in my own home, I can smoke pot all day. At night, I watch my DVDs. Here, I’m the captain of my own ship and I enjoy it this way.”*

When I asked Martin if he would be interested in participating in a local

support network with other people in vulnerable situations like him, he promptly rejected the idea.

*“My problem is... it’s a bit personal, but... the way I was hit by others, so to speak, makes it hard for me to deal with groups of people. When there are too many people in the room, I can’t breathe... I start to panic. Then, I just have to leave. So, from that perspective, it is a very bad idea for me to participate in such a group.”*

Thus, instead of actively trying to fight his social isolation, Martin had sufficient reasons and a strong motivation to maintain his situation as such and avoid social contacts with too many people. Different than Willy, Martin did not experience a gap between the actual number of social relationships he had and his needs. He did not feel lonely at all. Social isolation was exactly what he had longed for. Being able to survive alone was what made him feel strong. However, for the future, he hoped he would be able to get in closer touch with his children and best friend again. Perhaps even love would come his way, to make him a complete human being again.

Hence, although Martin and Willy appeared to be two opposites when it comes to their appreciation of living all by themselves, they both indicated the need for social intimacy in order to feel complete and fully at home (again).

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So my findings were that the objective lack of a support network or embeddedness in a wider community were not necessarily considered problematic by all core respondents. Whether it became a problem largely depended on the perceived gap between the actual and desired number of relations and social activities (Steptoe et al., 2013; Machielse, 2011). In other words, while all core respondents reported they were alone and did not foster strong feelings of home in their lives, they did not necessarily feel lonely. It was the *experience of a gap* between what they needed, wanted and wished for and what they actually had, that eventually shaped their decision to participate or not in the social intervention of the Neighbors groups.

In practice, this means that only two out of fourteen core respondents participated in the community-building intervention of the Neighbors group: Willy and Bert. All core respondents were targeted by the Quartermasters of the intervention, but most of them did not wish to become embedded



in a local community, due to feelings of anxiety and fear for groups, a sense of distrust and insecurity, or simply because they were satisfied with their social isolation at the moment and wished to keep it that way.

While Willy was prepared “to try anything” – despite his fear of ‘neighbors’ – to counter his feelings of loneliness, Bert felt he could use the local social network to get out of his mother’s house, where he felt trapped and miserable. Hence, the Neighbors groups meant a way out for both men, but from opposite points of departure: respectively, their home-as- haven and home-as-hell.

For most of my respondents, the fact that they did not know any other participants caused a major obstacle to join the Neighbors group. Based on their previous experiences with ‘strangers’, twelve of fourteen core respondents thus never participated in the community- building intervention. I believe it is fair to say that the two core respondents who did participate in the Neighbors groups (Willy and Bert) were the most desperate to break out of their solitude, in order to try to bridge the experienced gap between the number and quality of social relationships and activities they needed and actually had. All the other core respondents were satisfied with the ways in which they had organized their private lives and – despite their objective social isolation – did not aim at increasing the number or quality of their social relations.

At the same time, none of my core respondents claimed to feel ‘really’ at home, simply because they did not feel to belong to anyone, or to a community. It had taken them an incredible amount of effort to organize a place of their own, in which they felt safe, and in control of their own lives. This was perceived by them as precious gift, never to be taken for granted, and certainly not to risk losing by getting socially and emotionally attached to someone. Although their situation was not ‘normal’, as many of them explicitly confided, they did not see how they could act or become normal. As they carried with them experiences of abusive violent homes, of being abandoned by parents and put into (psychiatric) institutions, of being bullied by neighbors, of never having been able to make friends or engage in intimate relationships, core respondents reported a basic sense of ‘homelessness’. They felt ontologically unsafe, insecure, isolated and deviant. For all of them, to feel at home was all but self-evident.

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In the meantime, while I was visiting individual respondents, asking them about their feelings of home and their wish to become part of a local community, the intervention itself had already started. The Quartermasters had tapped into existing local groups of people with intellectual and development disabilities or psychiatric problems, which had already been implemented over the last decade by two of the social organizations also involved in the Neighbors groups project. Most of the participants of the Neighbors groups, therefore, turned out to already know each other. Excited about the fact that they could become embedded in yet another local community made them eager to also participate in the Neighbors groups project.

It took some time before Willy and Bert also started to participate in the regular meetings of the Neighbors groups. Being all by themselves, and not yet embedded in an existing local group like most other participants of the Neighbors groups, it took some effort and lots of courage for both of them to join the Neighbors group for the first time.

## 2.4 FEELINGS OF HOME THROUGH PARTICIPATION

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I have received a message from Quartermaster Marion. She was able to visit Willy at his home. She had to meet with him several times before he was willing to participate in the Neighbors group, but yesterday he joined the Christmas dinner. Willy liked it, she wrote. At first he did not dare to say anything, but in the end he made a small joke and the others had laughed.

[Research Diary, December 22, 2016].

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A few weeks after Willy had joined the Neighbors group for Christmas dinner, I observed how Willy brought a suitcase with a DVD player and five of his favorite movies to another Neighbors group meeting. He didn’t speak at all, but Marion introduced the night as ‘Willy’s film night’. Bert was also present. He had already joined Alexander, David and Marion at a pub quiz

the week before, which they had won. Bert was clearly having a great time, laughing out loud with Alexander and David. The twelve people present that night all had brought some beverages or snacks, which made up a nice buffet. Marion presented the films that were selected by Willy. The group unanimously voted for *E.T.* and watched the film together in total silence. When the film had ended, Willy immediately packed his suitcase and left, while mumbling “we can do this again sometime.” Bert stayed for another hour, helping Alexander, David and Marion to clean up, while making jokes and small talk.

It was fascinating to observe the differences between the ways in which my core respondents, Willy and Bert, dealt with participating in the Neighbors groups intervention. For Willy, it was the first time he was actively involved in a social network, whereas Bert was clearly used to socializing with others. For Willy, it had taken a lot of effort and courage to leave his home-as-haven and step into a straightforwardly hazardous world, in which he knew he could be bullied and taken advantage of. Bert felt completely at ease in this ‘outside world’, because, as he told me, it enabled him to escape the eyes and judgment of his mother. The Neighbors group was his new home, he said, while waiting for a private home of his own.

While Bert had quite easily managed to connect with Alexander and David, two men in their thirties and forties dealing with psychiatric issues like he was, Willy purely focused on Quartermaster Marion. “Marion is my linchpin,” Willy explained to me. “Without her I would never come.” Willy had a hard time making social contact with the other participants. Instead, he kept close to Marion, who was the only one who talked to him and supported him to shape the Neighbors groups meetings according to his own needs.

### **Welcoming Spaces**

Compared to the interventions that will be presented in Chapter 3 and 4, the Neighbors groups were very open to ‘difference’, not only in terms of vulnerability, but also in regards to, among other aspects, age, gender, race, ethnicity and religion. The ages of participants ranged between 23 and 78, and the groups consisted of Muslims, Jehovah’s Witnesses, avid atheists, of black, brown and white people, of highly educated people and people without any education. The only common denominator seemed to be they all had issues due to their intellectual and development disability or psychiatric issues.

Everyone who wished to join the group, or who was introduced by someone else, was welcome and automatically assumed by the others to be a person ‘like us’. No questions were asked with regards to personal background, disabilities, or psychiatric problems one had. Rather, new members were welcomed with an air of indifference. The unspoken, but commonly accepted rule was that no one needed to justify the fact that they were joining the group, or to account for their (possible deviant) behavior, appearance or mood.

This particular attitude of *gentle indifference* also affected my research; people were easy to get access to. I was not seen as an ‘intruder’, but rather as someone who just felt like joining their collective activities. They clearly assumed I had intellectual and development disability issues as well, just like they all did. I experienced the thin line between those who are considered ‘vulnerable’ and the ‘able-bodied’ – like me. During the course of the research period, it became harder for me to describe my core respondents as ‘vulnerable’ and myself as ‘able-bodied’, since there turned out to be more similarities than differences in how we participated in the Neighbors groups: we all contributed in our own capacity and whenever I was not able to do or fix something, or to win a game, someone else would. This is why the participants conceived of me as being vulnerable in my own way. This attitude made me feel very much accepted and at ease with this group of strikingly knowledgeable people who were highly experienced and capable of dealing with difference.

The main binding factor between all participants was that they all felt vulnerable in dealing with and socially ‘surviving’ in mainstream society – a shared and embodied experience that accounted for a sense of collective identity and togetherness (cf. Fitzgerald, Rose and Singh, 2016), despite their huge internal differences.

### **Being Normal**

When asked about their sense of belonging to the Neighbors group, participants mostly referred to the comfortable feeling they had of being ‘normal’ among their peers. The unspoken, but commonly accepted rule that no one needed to justify the fact that they were joining the group, or to account for their (possibly deviant) behavior, appearance or mood, brought about an atmosphere of mutual acceptance and ease. One of the regular participants of the first hour, Sybren (34), explained to me: “The advantage

of this group of people is you don't have to explain anything to them. With family or friends, you always have to explain things. These people don't judge you, they don't ask you anything. It's just cozy (*gezellig*)."

Participants indicated they had to work very hard to be taken seriously and be respected by 'the outside world'. One participant said: "people always want to show me how inferior I am; that my life is not a normal life." Becoming embedded in the Neighbors groups meant becoming part of a social context in which participants considered themselves full and competent members and were, in return, treated as such. They actually had the feeling they belonged to this particular community.

### **Amicable familiarity**

Social scientists have made an effort to understand why and when humans are perceived as 'normal' within a certain social context (e.g. Kal, 2011: 33; Goffman, 1980[1963]; Garfinkel, 1996). These studies have also shown in what circumstances people identify and present themselves as 'normal'. In his work *Stigma; notes on a spoiled identity*, Goffman (1980[1963]) shows how human beings with visible disabilities as well as other 'deviant attributes', such as a certain skin color, religion or sexuality, are not able to become 'recognized' as a full member of the community. Their appearance, behavior and attitude does not align with accepted, dominant norms. These people are, consequently, penalized through informal sanctions – they become well aware that their behavior and skills do not comply with what is perceived as 'normal'. Despite their efforts to show they do have something to contribute and should be considered as belonging to society, their stigma impedes their full participation and integration.

For most participants, the Neighbors groups provided an important 'safe space'; a place accommodated to their situation, in which expectations regarding their skills and capacities were not too high, but certainly not too low either. The basic premise that none of the participants were fully 'normal' in the eyes of mainstream society made their sense of belonging to the Neighbors groups even stronger. Some of them indicated they felt more 'at home' with the other participants than with their own family members.

As touched upon above, public familiarity – i.e. visually recognizing other residents in public space – did not provide a sense of local belonging to my respondents, as they felt very vulnerable due to their mental, social,

cognitive or bodily difference. As I found, however, the community-building practices of the Neighbors groups brought about a different type of familiarity that actually aroused a sense of local belonging among them. This type of familiarity is what I will call 'amicable familiarity'. Building on a previous study in collaboration with Jan Willem Duyvendak (2015; 2016), in which we explored the dual meaning of 'familiarity' (i.e. recognizing something/someone and amicability), I define amicable familiarity as a kind of familiarity that occurs between residents who, through regular shared practices in a safe space, (start to) perceive each other as 'normal' and who start to treat each other as if they were friends. It involves mutual recognition without feeling threatened or insecure, leading not so much to deep personal attachments but rather to more superficial, comfortable mutual acceptance and respect.<sup>12</sup>

Where my respondents felt deeply unsafe and insecure in public space, in the semi-public and safe space of the Neighbors groups they were approached in a friendly manner by other members. This aroused not only a collective sense of belonging, but also an experience of being safe and in control within the given setting, which enhanced individuals' feelings of home – at least for the time being, before they had to go back into mainstream society.

### **Mechanisms of Inclusion and Exclusion**

Although in the first stage of the establishment of the new Neighbors groups the atmosphere seemed very inclusive and open to anyone who felt like joining, the groups gained a more exclusionary character along the way. As it turned out, the longer participants stuck together, the more homogeneous the sub-groups became, as they distinguished themselves along lines of IQ level and social skills. For those few who were not capable of cognitively and socially keeping up with the others, there seemed to be no other option than to withdraw from the community. Willy was hurt deeply by the fact that, even in a group meant for vulnerable residents, he was still not capable of participating like a 'normal' person: "And here I am, still alone," he said to me during my last visit to his private home.

<sup>12</sup> It is important to highlight here that for the majority of residents who are perceived as normal in public space, public familiarity equals amicable familiarity: they are generally treated in a friendly and respectable way by fellow residents. However, for those who are not self-evidently safe in public space due to their bodily appearance (including disability, gender, race, age and sexuality), amicable familiarity can more easily be brought about in safe and exclusionary spaces where they are perceived as normal.

Willy stopped joining the Neighbors group after participating in activities several times. For him, socializing was too difficult anyway. He said, “I can’t stand all the stress of being together with others, it’s too busy for me.” And in regards to the Neighbors group: “I couldn’t follow the others. They were laughing all the time, and I didn’t know why. It was such a clique.” With the clique, I found out, Willy referred to Alexander, David and Bert who, with their cognitive intelligence, were capable of making small talk and cracking jokes much easier than Willy.

The three established Neighbors groups, which were sustained throughout the full period of my research project between 2016 and 2018, eventually consisted only of those people who were very capable of social mingling, despite their intellectual and development disabilities and psychiatric issues. Over time, the diverse array of vulnerabilities that had made the group of participants in the pilot phase of the intervention so heterogeneous became more and more homogeneous. Along the way, the groups organically divided themselves, based on similar levels of vulnerability, intelligence and social skills. Those having a hard time to connect to others, like Willy, did not manage to keep up with the rest and left the Neighbors group. The Neighbors groups, in an unexpected way, thus became quite homogeneous and exclusionary in the end; thereby further strengthening the feelings of home and belonging to the local community of some, while impeding those of others.

## 2.5 DISCUSSION

### THE PRIVILEGE OF BEING PERCEIVED AS NORMAL

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This chapter has dealt with feelings of home of ‘vulnerable residents’, struggling with intellectual and development disabilities, psychiatric problems, addiction or post-traumatic stress syndrome due to domestic violence. The intervention at stake here was the so-called Neighbors groups project, initiated by four social organizations with the financial support of the Municipality of Amsterdam. It was the aim of the intervention to support

vulnerable residents to feel (more) at home in their neighborhood by organizing their own support network. They were encouraged to be in charge of their own ‘Neighbors group’, to decide for themselves what activities to employ, how, when, and with whom.

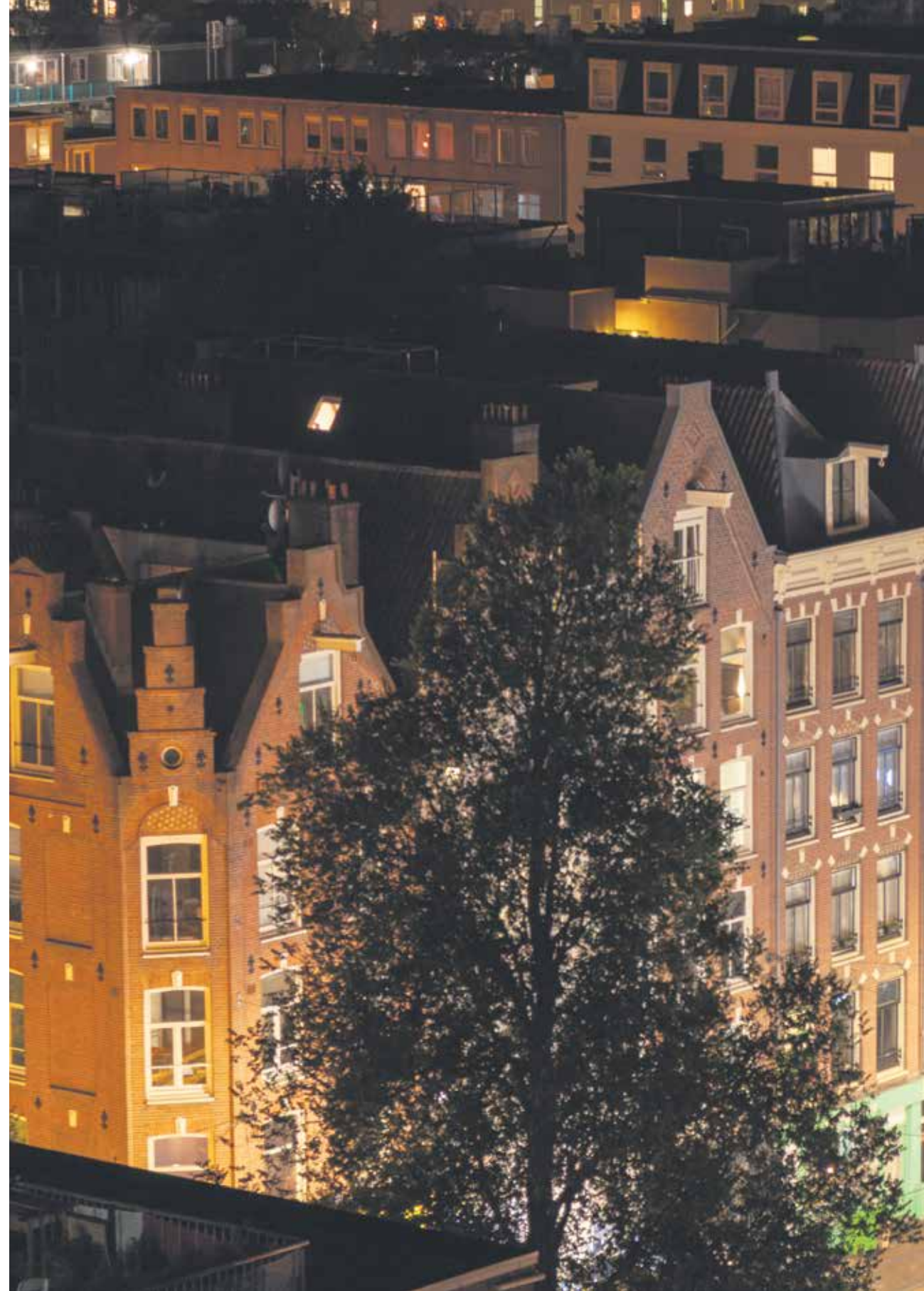
For the targeted individuals, participating in the new local community was by no means self-evident. Actually, most of my respondents choose not to participate at all and decided to remain withdrawn inside their self-established ‘home-as-safe-haven’. They prioritized personal safety and security, familiarity with and control over their own private place, over becoming embedded in a community and becoming socially attached to others. Moving out of their private houses into public space, and moreover participating in social encounters, was seen as straightforwardly frightening and felt unsafe to most of them. The main motive not to participate in the Neighbors group was therefore the assumption and belief that whenever they moved through public space and encountered people who grouped together, they would be harassed, bullied and excluded.

An important finding of the material presented in this chapter is that, in contrast to other social science findings, public familiarity with familiar strangers in one’s residential area can lead to a loss of local belonging rather than an increased sense of it. In the case of visibly ‘deviant’ persons, who are not perceived as normal by mainstream society, a sense of safety, control and belonging is obstructed through being publically familiar with the social environment. As a result, their general feeling of home is undermined.

As I found, it is *amicable familiarity* – i.e. being approached by familiar strangers in a friendly and respectable manner – that enables people to gain a sense of safety and control amongst fellow residents. Whereas public familiarity is sufficient for people perceived as ‘normal’ in the eyes of fellow residents to get a sense of local belonging, for those who are not perceived as such, regular collective practices in a safe and exclusionary space can provide a comfortable setting in which they too are approached as normal and respectable. This way, community-building practices can positively affect a sense of local belonging and feelings of home of vulnerable residents.

Bringing into play an intersectional approach – thus, taking into account residents various social locations based on markers such as gender, race, health, sexuality, class – has helped to better understand the limits of current social science studies regarding feelings of local belonging and home,

especially when it comes to those who do not self-evidently belong to the dominant population group. Different positionalities shape different pathways, obstructions and opportunities to belong to a local community and to feel at home; a perspective that is arguably still under-explored in mainstream sociology. As the material and analysis in this chapter have shown, normative ideas of who can be ‘recognized’ as a full member of the local community, based on one’s appearance and behavior, results in the exclusion of those who are not perceived as normal. Their social stigma impedes their full participation and the opportunity to belong to the dominant local community. For the vulnerable population groups under scrutiny here, the creation of safe, exclusionary spaces turned out to be indispensable to make them feel socially embedded and more at home in their neighborhood.





THE  
COMMUNITY  
RESTAU  
RANT

CHAPTER

**3**

## 3.1 INTRODUCTION

### BRIDGING THE GAP<sup>13</sup>

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This chapter scrutinizes how feelings of home are reproduced and sustained among the ‘insiders’ of an established, state-supported, professionally built, local community restaurant. While Chapter Two focused on feelings of home of residents prior to the community-building intervention, and how those feelings were affected once they started participating in the new local community, this chapter scrutinizes more in-depth the ways in which an already established local community affects the feelings of home of members of an in-group. It thereby looks into how a sense of belonging to the community restaurant was created through the intervention, as well as into the micro-mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion at play among regular visitors of the restaurant.

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As outlined in Chapter One, the community-building intervention under scrutiny in this chapter takes place in a local community center – Home of the Hood (*Huis van de Wijk*) – where the social professionals involved organize a pop-up community restaurant in the main hall three times a week. The main purpose of the restaurant is to bridge ethnic and cultural differences between various population groups that live in the residential area, with a strong emphasis on helping elderly, white native Dutch residents adjust to the increased diversity in their once predominantly white, working-class neighborhood.

The area in which the community restaurant is located, and where I conducted my fieldwork in 2006 and again in 2014/2015, has undergone some major demographic changes over the last four decades. Large numbers of immigrant groups from the former Dutch colonies in the Caribbean, as well as so-called ‘guest workers’ from Morocco and Turkey who arrived during the 1950s and 1960s, have settled in the neighborhood, in large part because of its cheap housing. In addition, in the past two decades new groups of immigrants from Eastern Europe, the Middle East, as well as

<sup>13</sup> This chapter builds on previously published work by the author: Wekker, F. (2017), and Wekker, F. (2019)

from different African countries have arrived in the area. Both the older and newer waves of immigration are internally diverse in terms of legal statuses, migration channels, class, gender, sexuality and age, contributing to a contemporary demographic situation of ‘super-diversity’ (Vertovec, 2007). Given the concentration of immigrants and their offspring, as well as increasing levels of poverty, unemployment, crime, domestic violence, school drop-outs and feelings of insecurity among residents (VROM, 2007, 2009; Wittebrood, Permentier and Pinkster, 2011), this neighborhood has raised concerns among and attracted the attention of policymakers and social welfare organizations.

The community-building intervention at the core of this chapter aims to enhance mutual integration and social cohesion among residents who differ along the lines of ethnicity, country of origin, race and religion. One of the objectives of the social workers, supported by public finances, is to integrate and help individuals from the former majority group in the residential area – white, working-class ‘natives’ of Dutch descent – adjust to the new super-diverse reality in their neighborhood. Aware of the sentiments of the former majority group, many of them claiming that: “they do no longer feel at home in their own neighborhood”, the community-building initiative tries to establish mutual adaptation and integration within this majority–minority setting.<sup>14</sup>

When I first visited the community restaurant in 2006, the initiative had just started. I had learned about the restaurant organization’s aims to reach out to a plurality of residents and their community-building activities to bridge differences between residents with different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. I was curious to learn more about it and attended a few dinners and activities. At that time, 20 to 30 visitors engaged in the dinners that were held three times a week: a loose group of individuals, who stayed aloof and sometimes even avoided making contact with each other or me during the meals. The composition of the group of visitors struck me: it was predominantly white, working class, over 50, and native Dutch. Since I knew from my talks with the restaurant manager and the social professionals involved that the aim was to attract an ethnically, racially and culturally diverse group of residents, I figured it might take some time before the professionals were able to do so.

<sup>14</sup> Majority-minority settings refer to urban settings where no single ethnic group dominates the public or semi-public sphere through sheer numbers (e.g., Crul, 2016; Spoonley, 2015; Phillips,

However, eight years later, in 2014, when I went back to the restaurant the homogeneity of the visitors in terms of age, race, class and ethnicity was still salient. The regular visitors were still mostly elderly, white working-class people of native Dutch descent – many of them not even living in this specific neighborhood, but rather in adjacent or even more distant areas. At the same time, although the goals of the social organization to build an ethnically diverse local community had not been reached (yet), another objective clearly had been achieved: a strong, cohesive community of ‘restaurant friends’ – as regular visitors called each other – had emerged over the years. Many of the same visitors from 2006 were still present in 2014 and had become fully embedded in the professionally-built community. While the number of regular visitors since 2006 had increased to about forty, the homogeneous ethnic, racial and cultural composition of the group had remained strikingly stable, when taking into account the demographically super-diverse features of the area.

At the same time, the restaurant management had made many well-organized and persistent attempts over the intervening years to reach out to a plurality of residents. They had organized many “ethnically diverse activities” (as they were called by the restaurant manager) around the dinners – e.g., Moroccan nights, a Brazilian choir, Surinamese meals – aiming to attract residents of ethnic minority backgrounds. However, these inhabitants did not join the community restaurant on a regular basis and hardly participated during the “normal nights”. I wondered how the state-supported community-building attempts related to the cohesiveness among the group of regular visitors – whom I will call ‘the insiders’ – as well as to the salient boundaries of the community, marked by ethnicity, race and culture. How had the community of white, native Dutch visitors sustained and reproduced itself, despite the attempts of the restaurant manager to help them integrate with the local majority of non-white, non-native Dutch residents? And how did this community affect or (re)produce feelings of home of the in-group?

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In what follows, I set the stage by further elaborating upon the institutional framework within which the intervention was implemented, the underlying principles and aims of the community-building intervention, and the community-building practices and strategies involved. I then draw on my ethnographic findings to document the micro-mechanisms at play

among members of the already established in-group to reproduce and sustain their sense of belonging to the local community, and the ways in which this affected their home feeling in the neighborhood. Finally, I will give some attention to the accounts of the designated outsiders of the local community: regular visitors who are perceived, and most often perceive themselves, as belonging to the local racial and ethnic out-group. Doing so entails an analysis of the intersections of class, race and ethnicity, as well as gender and sexuality.

Unlike the case study presented in Chapter Two, where I was able to assess the (lack of) feeling at home of respondents *prior* to the community-building intervention, this case study starts from the point where the community was *already established*, built and continued to be guided by social professionals. Methodologically, this implies that this chapter does not provide any individual baseline accounts of respondents on their feelings of home before they got embedded in the community. Instead of a comparative analysis of personal accounts over time, this chapter focuses on the question of how an already existing sense of belonging to the professionally-built local community (re)produced and sustained feelings of home among insiders.

## 3.2 THE INTERVENTION

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### **Institutional Framework**

In 2006, the year in which the community restaurant under scrutiny opened, the implementation of a new, all-encompassing policy program had just started, called the Empowered Neighborhoods Policy (*Krachtwijkenbeleid*). The then department of Housing, Neighborhoods and Integration (*Wonen, Wijken en Integratie*) had designated forty neighborhoods across the Netherlands where the policy program would be rolled out. These ‘Empowered Neighborhoods’ were each characterized by a large concentration of migrants and their offspring, accumulating problems due to impoverishment, mass unemployment, high rates of criminality, large numbers of school dropouts, increasing domestic violence, general anti-social behavior of youths, an alarming lack of social cohesion and feelings of



insecurity among residents (Wittebrood, Permentier and Pinkster, 2011; VROM, 2007). One of these designated neighborhoods was the residential area in which the restaurant of our concern is situated.

An important aspect of the policy program was its focus on community building and the creation of ‘empowered’ local networks. Former Minister of Integration and Housing Ella Vogelaar allocated a sum of 95 million euros to neighborhood initiatives that would enhance cooperation and cohesion among neighbors. In order to encourage (groups of) residents to display self-sufficiency and responsibility, activities such as neighborhood gardening, computer lessons, street barbecues and neighborhood dinners were generously subsidized, and facilitated by local social organizations.

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The community restaurant under scrutiny is part of a national social organization made up of more than 30 restaurants across the country. The restaurants are mainly located in “deprived areas” and aim to counter loneliness and isolation among (elderly) residents. However, above all, they attempt to bind people of all sections of the population to contribute to a livable community, by cooking and dining together on a regular basis. By doing so, it is believed, the neighborhood will become a better place to live, social cohesion and social control will be enhanced, and residents will know where and how to find help and support if needed.

The dinners cost seven euros, or four euros for those living below subsistence level. The latter cost applied to the vast majority of the visitors, which made it possible for me to assess the disadvantaged socio-economic position of most visitors. On a weekly basis, local social organizations, local professionals, and, for example, bank employees visit the restaurant. They provide lectures and information on a variety of topics, such as “how to manage your budget,” “how to follow a proper diet,” “the local police force,” and—of specific interest within the context of this case study—“migrants and the multicultural society.” Besides offering residents an inexpensive, wholesome meal and informative activities, the neighborhood restaurant also provides internships for students and work placements for volunteers as well as for people who are part of a naturalization, reintegration, or rehabilitation program.

Due to economic crises and an enduring public and political criticism with regard to the costly endeavor of the Empowered Neighborhood Policy, the entire program was ended prematurely in 2010. Yet, the Empowered Neighborhoods Policy did have some belated effects: between 2011 and 2013, livability in Amsterdam increased, and residents felt safer on the streets at night and were more positive about their personal futures (Kan and Van der Veer, 2013: 9).

However, improvements did not occur in all designated areas. By the time the policy program was aborted, the residential area in which the neighborhood restaurant is located was proclaimed to be the ‘worst neighborhood of Amsterdam to grow up in’ by the Verwey Jonker Institute (Steketee, Tierolf and Mak, 2012), due to extremely high rates of unemployment, poverty, child abuse, youth criminality, school drop-out levels and very low scores on social cohesion and livability, when compared to similar neighborhoods in Amsterdam and throughout the Netherlands (Steketee et al., 2012: 25; Kan and Van der Veer, 2013; Van Ankeren et al., 2010).

In response, the Municipality of Amsterdam decided to design its own ‘Amsterdam Focus District’ program (*‘De Amsterdamse wijkaanpak’*). The objective was to improve the livability in those districts that were still considered disadvantaged, by – among other means – strengthening informal networks among residents and stimulating residential participation (Haccoû, 2011: 16). By the time I started revisiting the community restaurant, the neighborhood was proclaimed ‘Focus Neighborhood of 2014’ by the Municipality of Amsterdam, in a more focused attempt to improve social life in this particular residential area (Municipality of Amsterdam, 2016).

The national social initiative of which the community restaurant under scrutiny is part, is still generously supported by municipalities, as well as large insurance companies, private banks, and local social organizations. In Amsterdam, a regular group of between thirty and fifty people still attends the three-course dinners three times a week at the neighborhood restaurant. Based on the regular number of people attending the dinners, the fact that the initiative had been running for eight years and the financial support that is continuously being re-generated, one could call the community restaurant a success.

As will be shown below, the underlying principles and practices of the community restaurant should be seen in the light of the well-established tradition of Dutch social engineering (for a historical overview, see section 1.2.2).

### **Underlying Aims and Assumptions**

The implementation and ongoing presence of the community restaurant in this working class area, since 2006, must be seen in light of decades of social interventions initiated by the Dutch national government and pursued by municipalities, social organizations, and civil society, with the aim of countering the negative social effects of urban life and a perceived lack of livability in the given residential area. The aim of the community restaurant is two-fold: first, it aims to bring isolated, impoverished residents together to regularly offer them a wholesome meal, and help them to create their own social network upon which they can fall back when in need of help and support. Second, it attempts to bridge ethnic, cultural and racial differences between the predominantly white, native Dutch group of regular visitors and residents with migrant backgrounds, in order to enhance social cohesion and strengthen the local community by reducing mutual fear and prejudices.

These aims are strived for using various strategies, ranging from offering workshops on how to control one's limited budget and how to deal with cultural differences, to special nights that should help to familiarize white, native Dutch visitors with residents with migrant backgrounds. The attempts of the professional community builders more generally focus on improving the lifestyles, conduct, ways of thinking and health of white working-class citizens – attempts that are deeply imbued with notions of class, race, ethnicity and cultural hegemony (Bonjour and Duyvendak, 2018; Mepschen, 2016).

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Today, (white) working-class families in Amsterdam are still most often described as anti-social, and many of these families are the focus of (nationally coordinated) social interventions that aim to improve their lives, working habits and moral standards (Kan and Van der Veer, 2013; Wittebrood, Permentier and Pinkster, 2011; VROM, 2007).

According to the restaurant manager, the reason why the professionals involved in the community restaurant chose to focus primarily on white

working-class residents in order to enhance social life and social cohesion in the residential area is that:

*“It is this segment of the population. When you’re so straightforward, when you don’t have any education, when you’re not used to dealing with matters in a profound way, then, at a certain moment you start repeating yourself, you stick to your own account simply to make things understandable. [...] If we didn’t organize activities like these, they wouldn’t get in touch with diversity. [...] The group of visitors we have here, who clearly resist accepting other cultures – because ‘We are living in the Netherlands here, and it’s our country’ – have to learn how to deal with diversity; they have to know the stories behind all those Moroccan families, you know. Because, and that’s what I see, then they start to perceive their neighbors differently, then they start to understand more about the problems that occur in their streets. The street culture in this neighborhood has nothing to do with people “being Moroccan”, but more with the fact that these large families haven’t got enough money to rent big houses and, at the same time, they like to have many children. The moment people start to understand more about these things, they can start to improve street life together. Then no one is bothered by others, and people start to like living here. Then, the fear is gone and that’s of course what we’re all aiming for”*

(Conversation with Robert, restaurant manager, September 3, 2014).

The quotes above reveal, among other things, the assumption of the professional community builder that, by putting white working-class visitors in touch with people of diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds and giving them more of a profound insight into different lifestyles, their knowledge about and acceptance of “others” will increase, and, subsequently, people will start to feel that they belong to the local community together, ultimately resulting in residents feeling at home (again) in their neighborhood.

As elaborated upon in Chapter One, section 1.4, social scientists have shown that belonging is an indispensable condition for human beings to feel at home. Together with a sense of safety, control and familiarity, a sense of belonging can constitute a strong home feeling. Not only from a social science perspective, but also from a policy one, feelings of home are therefore

considered an important basis for well-functioning individuals living together in well-functioning neighborhoods, cities as well as society at large.

### A Discourse of Deprivation

The quotes above also indicate other assumptions of the community organizer: white working-class residents in general are considered to be narrow-minded, intolerant to difference, and in need of education to open up their worldviews; fear of and aversion to “others” should be solved on the side of the white working class and not so much on the side of the “others”. The core assumption of the community organizer was that, by helping white working-class residents open up to difference, social cohesion would be enhanced – thereby implicitly making them responsible for the lack of social cohesion that was being reported. As the following sections will show, the community-building practices and strategies deployed by the restaurant manager and the social workers involved were deeply imbued with these underlying assumptions, as well as pejorative normative notions in regards to the white working class.

One could argue that those assumptions and perceptions might be incidental for the community restaurant under scrutiny. However, such ideas about the ‘deprivation’ of the white working class are deeply ingrained in dominant Western, middle-class discourses. While, on the one hand, the term ‘deprivation’ in social science work is mainly used to address socioeconomic inequalities and the structurally vulnerable position of the poor in an excessive capitalist and neo-liberal society (Minkler, 2012; Swanson, 2001), on the other hand, the term is normatively deployed to depict the poor working class as lacking the ‘right’ working habits, education and moral standards that are needed to be successful in contemporary Western societies – thereby implicitly making the working class responsible for their own deprivation (Smith et al., 2007). Therefore, the discourse of deprivation can also be perceived as a normative cultural repertoire that is used to distinguish between ‘normal’ modes of acting and behaving (i.e., middle-class modes) and deprived ways of doing, thinking and feeling. It emphasizes the deviancies, the abnormality and pathology of working-class people – according to middle-class standards (Dercksen and Verplanke, 2005; Regt, 1995).

This cultural repertoire of deprivation, also reflected in the restaurant manager’s quote above, is clearly presented in ‘The Culture of Poverty’

(Lewis, 1981[1969]), which starts from the vantage point that the working class specifically and other marginalized groups generally, such as African Americans in the United States, ‘have very little sense of history. They [...] know only their own troubles, their own local conditions, their own neighborhood, their own way of life’ (ibid: 317). It is therefore:

*“conceivable that some countries[, where the culture of poverty involves a relatively small segment of the population,] can eliminate the culture of poverty [...] without at first eliminating impoverishment, by changing the value systems and attitudes of the people so they no longer feel helpless and homeless”*

(Lewis, 1981[1969]: 320).

One of the core values of community-building interventions that aim at ‘helping the deprived’ is put forth by Minkler (2012), an American professional community organizer, in her book *Community Organizing and Community Building for Health and Welfare*:

*“[P]rofessionals engaged in community organizing and community building tend to share a worldview characterized by ‘a strong sense of what is just in and for the world’ (Modros and Wilson 1994, 15). [...] [A]nd that involves the embracing of diversity and multiculturalism not as a problem or obstacle to be dealt with but as a rich resource and opportunity to be seized. [...] The value of inclusion rather than exclusion and the embracing of diversity as a means of enriching the social fabric are central to the worldview of practitioners in community health education and social work [...]”*

(Minkler, 2012: 11-12).

Encouraging working-class visitors to incorporate the value of inclusion should thus not be seen as a personal aim of the community builders in the case study, but rather considered a shared and dominant value amongst professional community organizers in the Western world.

It is important, however, to note that here the primary interest is not to debate the intentions and/or aims of community organizers in general, and the community builders of the restaurant in particular, to contribute to a more inclusive society. The discourse of deprivation is related to ways in which working-class people are perceived by middle-class professionals,

and encouraged to “open up their narrow minds” and embrace ethnic and racial differences. In what follows, the ethnographic material shows how this discourse and perception unintentionally generated resistances rather than cooperation of the white working-class visitors to bridge their differences with ethnic, cultural and racial ‘others’.

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In sum, the community-building intervention started from the assumption, as also highlighted by Minkler (2012), that whenever residents in disadvantaged neighborhoods become increasingly familiar with the ethnic and cultural backgrounds of others, mutual trust will increase and neighborhood life will improve for all.

In case of the community restaurant, however, instead of aiming at familiarizing all residents mutually with each other’s ethnic and cultural backgrounds, the community builders focused primarily on white, working-class residents who should become familiar with neighbors with migrant backgrounds, such as “Moroccan families” or “Muslim boys”. Thus, instead of perceiving all residents in this urban setting as ‘mutual strangers’ (Tonkiss, 2005), the proverbial strangers within the framework of these interventions were those with a non-ethnic Dutch background. They were the ones the white, native Dutch residents should become familiar with, and not so much the other way around. As we will see further below, in order to achieve this, ethnic and racial ‘others’ were invited over to the restaurant on “special nights”, in order to help the white working class embrace their ‘differences’.

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Arguably, this partial approach to help white, native Dutch citizens become familiar with ‘others’ is closely related to persistent public, policy and academic discourses in which ‘diversity’ is primarily applied to citizens with a migrant background. White Dutch people are self-evidently considered ‘natives’ without having an ethnicity or race, as they embody dominant norms of *Dutchness* (Slootman and Duyvendak, 2015). In this sense, ‘diversity’ can be assumed not to apply to the white, native Dutch.

When one takes into account that most of the white, native Dutch regular visitors to the neighborhood restaurant did not live in the neighborhood itself, but rather in adjacent districts, while many of the inhabitants with

a Moroccan background were born and raised in this neighborhood, it is striking that the former were considered to be the ‘natives’ of the area in question, while the latter were depicted as the proverbial ‘strangers’.

### **Organized Community-building Practices**

The aims and assumptions mentioned above were brought into practice via various community-building strategies. Besides the practices that were deliberately organized by the professional community builders, there turned out to be a complex range of practices deployed by and among (subgroups of) regular visitors themselves, resulting in strong feelings of home for some, while obstructing those feelings for others.

Three key practices organized by the community builders involved could be distinguished: first, the dinner ritual; second, mixing activities; and third, educational activities.

#### *The Dinner Ritual*

The salient feature of the neighborhood restaurant was its focus on interaction and conversation among *all* visitors. Unlike ordinary restaurants, it was hardly possible to sit and have dinner by yourself or privately with your partner or among friends. The plenary, repeated elements of the dinner made everyone aware of the presence of the others and created a comfortable sense of amicable familiarity among community members.

Dinners at the community restaurant had a ritualistic character, thereby following a fixed procedure each night: once everyone had found a place to sit and had settled down, restaurant manager Robert welcomed the visitors and introduced them to that evening’s volunteers. The volunteers stood in a row, slightly behind the manager, wearing aprons that displayed the restaurant’s logo. The cook of the day was then invited to present the three courses, which typically consisted of soup as a starter, rice, pasta or potatoes with meat or fish and fresh vegetables as the main course, and a dairy product, such as yoghurt or custard with preserved fruit, for dessert. The visitors then gave a round of applause for the volunteers and the cook.

While the volunteers returned to the kitchen to serve the first course, the restaurant manager asked all the visitors to observe a moment of silence. After a short while, the manager wished everyone a nice meal. He subsequently helped the volunteers serve the food. The three courses followed

each other quite swiftly. If there were any activities organized, they would take place between the courses. In contrast to the organized start of the dinners, they ended quite abruptly. Before everyone had finished their deserts, most people had already left the building. Within one and a half hours, the restaurant was empty again, while the volunteers were finishing the dishes and clearing up the tables.

Due to the repetitive character of the dinner procedure, all participants were able to perform the procedure smoothly. As I experienced through participation, the ritual made it possible to become familiar with the “do’s and ‘don’ts” and to quickly feel a part of the restaurant community. At the same time, it was through this ritual that it was easy to distinguish between those who were new to the practice – like me at first – and those who already ‘belonged’.

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Similar to the Neighbors groups intervention, dealt with in Chapter Two, *amicable familiarity* could be observed among visitors of the community restaurant. As elaborated upon in Chapter Two, *amicable familiarity* is a phrase I have coined to describe the friendly and informal way in which residents approach each other through participation in regular neighborhood practices. Amicable familiarity can be defined as a kind of familiarity that occurs between residents who, through regular shared practices, (start to) perceive each other as ‘normal’ and part of the same bounded local community. As a result, they approach each other in a friendly, respectable way, as if they were friends, despite mutual differences in terms of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, age or class. Amicable familiarity involves superficially knowing the people and the place, without feeling threatened by them.<sup>15</sup>

Through participation in the repeated organized practices at the community restaurant, everyone present could easily adjust to the ritual. I also became slowly accepted as part of the restaurant community as I participated with them. After a few weeks, the regular visitors started to open up to me and complimented me on the fact that I joined so actively in the “ways we do things around here”. Becoming familiar with the dinner procedure also meant becoming engaged in the humor, the jokes, the stories and sentiments of the regular visitors. I noticed that the more I became familiar with the restaurant rituals, the faces and behavior of the regular visitors,

<sup>15</sup> Which is not self-evidently the case with public familiarity, as I eluded to in Chapter Two.

the restaurant space and the smaller sub-communities, the more I felt at ease and comfortable amidst all of those ‘strangers’. And notably, other visitors started to feel more comfortable with me, as interactions between us became smoother and expectations of our mutual behavior became more aligned to and through the restaurant procedure.

On a summer night in August, after the visitors had left the restaurant, many stood outside the building of the community center, to chat and enjoy the long, sunny evening. When I left, everyone waved me goodbye, “See you on Wednesday, Fenneke!”, “Have a good night!” I felt overwhelmed with joy and appreciation for ‘my’ fellow restaurant visitors. While walking away from the community center, I caught myself saying out loud to myself: “I belong”.

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I suggest that the ritualized character of the community dinners can be considered as ‘an interaction ritual chain’ (Collins, 2004). In order to successfully create social cohesion and solidarity among individuals, four elements are indispensable, according to Collins: first, individuals need to assemble and experience their *bodily co-presence*. Second, there has to be a clear *barrier to outsiders*. Third, a mutual *focus of attention*, and fourth, a *shared mood* among the individuals are necessary for participants to experience a feeling of membership, emotional energy and shared feelings of morality. It became clear that all four elements were involved to varying degrees in the three key practices observed. Even though the second element – a clear barrier to outsiders – did not formally and materially exist, it turned out that the combination of the interrelated practices did evoke such a barrier.

According to Emile Durkheim (1951[1897], 2008[1912]), whose classical work on social solidarity and cohesion greatly influenced Collins’ theory of Interaction Ritual Chains, society needs rituals and regular meetings in order for individuals to create a moral collectivity. He argued:

“No society can exist that does not feel the need at regular intervals to sustain and reaffirm the collective feelings and ideas that constitute its unity and its personality. Now this moral remaking can be achieved only by means of meetings, assemblies, or congregations in which individuals, brought into close contact, reaffirm in common their common feelings [...]”

(Durkheim 2008[1912]: 322).

Thus, according to Durkheim, without regular meetings such as the collective dinners at the neighborhood restaurant, society would atomize and individuals would fall into a lost state of anomie. Whereas Durkheim focused mostly on the macro level and structural-functionalist aspects of institutionalization and socialization, others such as Randall Collins and Ervin Goffman have focused more on the situational and micro level, to analyze how these values and norms are being constructed and reproduced in and through social interaction. Accordingly, interactions among restaurant visitors show how community-building practices can indeed evoke and reinforce superficial modes of collective thinking and feeling.

#### *Mixing Activities*

During the course of the fieldwork, multiple activities – approximately one activity per week – were organized by the restaurant manager, volunteers and social organizations; these varied from a Brazilian choir and an Iranian storyteller, to a Surinamese Night and a Moroccan Iftar Night. The nights with a particular ‘ethnic’ theme were announced as ‘special nights’, in contrast to the ‘normal nights’ that followed the usual dinner ritual, predominantly attended by white, native Dutch residents. Most of the activities deployed by the community builders aimed at bridging difference between residents by consciously mixing them.

Also on ‘normal nights’, when there were hardly any residents of color or with non-Dutch ethnic backgrounds, the restaurant manager would change and re-set the tables to encourage encounters among regular visitors, and to make them meet new people:

*“Participation is important to me. So, if you don’t want to participate, don’t come for dinner. [...] The moment we say: “Today we’re going to change tables,” everyone is going to sit down at a different table with people they don’t regularly sit down with [...]. When someone responds by saying “I don’t want to sit here or there,” just don’t come. Because you’re obstructing things then. In this restaurant you make a reservation for a meal, not for a particular place to sit. So, one time you can join your regular group, and the other time we do things differently. That’s how we mix people, that’s how the restaurant gets its added value.”*

(Interview Robert, January 16, 2014).

This mixing activity was met with loud complaints as regular visitors preferred to sit at fixed tables, together with their – what they would call – “restaurant friends”. Winny’s account of such an occasion speaks for itself:

*W: “And then our sweet Robert wanted to change us (wilde ons veranderen). He wanted to put different people together. So, he gave us a small piece of paper, one person a blue one, the other a red one and so on. So, I could not sit with The Boys anymore. I said to Robert: “We’re not going to do that”. “Yeah, but you have to get to know other people. We decided to do it like this, so you have to”. Well, then I said: “I’m going home”. And I left the place. And The Boys also left.*

*F: But why were you so reluctant to change tables?*

*W: I’m not coming to dinners for the food only; I’m here for the sociability too. It’s not that I dislike the other people, but it is only that tiny moment during the week that we are able to sit together with our friends. [...] And I know Robert can’t help it, he’s only doing what he’s told by his bosses [...]: people have to mix and get to know each other... But that’s when I stopped coming for a while.”*

(Interview Winny, September 29, 2014).

Pim gave a similar account:

*P: “The people at our table... we’ve become a group, you know. We call each other on birthdays, we bring each other flowers, send postcards. And if anything happens, we help each other out... you know. And he is trying to tear that apart...”*

*F: Robert, you mean?*

*P: Yeah... But that won’t work. He tried it before, but then we became a bit angry...”*

(Interview Pim, October 6, 2014).

While the management and the visitors seemed to have the same goal – creating a cohesive community – it appeared as if the forceful attempts to encourage visitors to mix with others and so broaden their social network had the opposite effect: regular visitors started to resist and became unwilling to participate in the mixing activities.

Other mixing strategies, especially those meant to bridge differences between the regular visitors and residents with migrant backgrounds, also brought about an atmosphere of sheer resistance among the regular visitors. A good example is the ‘special night’ that was organized by the community restaurant in collaboration with a social organization called “New We”. Especially for the event, tables had been put in long rows so the guests – all with migrant backgrounds – could easily mingle with the regular visitors. The organization, which was introduced by a woman with a strong German accent, aims to bridge differences among citizens and create an inclusive society: a new idea of who “we” are. Rather than maintaining ethnic, racial and religious divisions between groups of people, this organization intends to “deploy differences to make society a place for all of us”.

A short movie was presented, in which highly educated Dutch citizens with various ethnic backgrounds made statements regarding an inclusive society: “A society in which ‘the stranger’ enriches us.” The movie concluded with them answering the question: “Who do you consider to be a worthy candidate to be enrolled in the ‘New We Naturalization Program?’” In response, a black woman of Surinamese descent stated before the camera: “All those who signed the petition for the maintenance of Black Pete (*Zwarte Piet*) should follow the New We Naturalization Program straight away”.

Black Pete (*Zwarte Piet*) is the by-now infamous blackface figure in the Dutch tradition of Sinterklaas. Black Pete – the black servant of the white ‘Good Holy Man’ (*de Goedheiligman*) – is performed by white people in blackface, replete with big red lips, golden earrings, and more often than not, displaying comically infantile behavior. While Black Pete has become controversial due to pressure from black Dutch citizens and a report from a United Nations working group, almost two million (out of 16 million) Dutch citizens signed a petition to defend the ‘tradition’ of the blackface Pete. Their main argument – that *Sinterklaas* is a ‘children’s celebration’ and has nothing to do with race or racism – hinges on the lack of conscious racist intent. Critics, however, point out that it is not the intent, but the construct and impact of the blackface figure that makes it racist (Coenders and Chauvin, 2017; Wekker, G. 2016; Duyvendak, 2013).

From the perspective of many white, native Dutch visitors of the community restaurant, however, it is the “attack on Black Pete” that is deemed controversial. After the woman of color on the screen had made her statement about how all of those in favor of the blackface figure of Black Pete

should immediately adjust to the new intercultural reality and follow a Naturalization Program,<sup>16</sup> the atmosphere in the community restaurant changed dramatically.

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A bombshell dropped at my table. This is going too far. Frits, who always laughs, turns red. He has steam coming out of his ears. “Why are they always being so difficult!? Children don’t have any problems with it! They can’t pass their issues onto the children!” Pim explains to me: “I’ve played *Sinterklaas*, I’ve played Black Pete and the children love it. Even when you’re completely painted black, they just come towards you. They’re not afraid”.

“Yes”, a woman at the far end of the table confirms. “The celebration of *Sinterklaas* is fun, all children should be granted the experience of that”. “I can’t believe they are even making a fuss about that”, another woman sighs.

So many discussions are taking place at the same time now that it is hard to follow. On my right hand side, a lady says to me: “Well, I think it’s all rubbish. It’s a children’s celebration and it should stay like that. But... yeah... I’m not colored, so I don’t know what kind of experiences these people have.”

[Research Diary, September 3, 2014].

What particularly struck me during this event was the strong outburst of emotions and the consensus on the issue of Black Pete: “Black Pete is not racist and *they* [black people] should stop making a fuss about it”. It occurred to me this was surely not the kind of consensus the social organization ‘New We’ had wanted to achieve. Instead of bridging differences and increasing mutual understanding, the movie had aroused a strong sense of distinctiveness among my respondents. According to them, “those colored people” did not understand a thing about Black Pete and Sinterklaas; “they” did not share “our traditions and culture”, so why should “we” be naturalized, instead of them? Hence, the presentation evoked a stark racial and ethnic division between ‘natives’ and ‘migrants’, instead of bridging them.

<sup>16</sup> Following a Naturalization Program in the Netherlands is obligatory for all immigrants who aim at obtaining Dutch citizenship. Suggesting native Dutch people should follow such a program was therefore seen by my respondents as the world turned upside down.

*“At dinner we always do something. That varies from a dance show or someone making music, to something educational such as “how to manage my financial budget” [...] We always think of doing something nice during dinner, in order to complement and widen people’s worldviews.”*

(Interview Robert, October 8, 2014).

During the course of the fieldwork, several activities – approximately one per week – were organized by the restaurant manager, volunteers, and social organizations. On two occasions, new employees of a Dutch bank (one of the main sponsors of the community restaurant) helped at the restaurant as part of their induction week. This experience would enable bank employees “to learn about life in these kind of neighborhoods,” according to Robert. The bank employees had to help cook, set up the tables, serve dinner, “mingle” with the visitors, start conversations with them, and finally, do the dishes and clean the restaurant. A bank employee said:

*“We are obliged to do one day of volunteering in order to learn how to deal with people. For me, that’s easy because I love the people (het volk), I love the stories of the people. And I’m used to working with them. But you see, those two employees standing over there? They don’t like it...at all.”*

(Conversation with bank employee, August 27, 2014).

A few times, volunteers working at the restaurant organized small games – “say a number below twenty” – where people could win small prizes, such as candles, sweets, or Christmas lights. On one occasion, a welfare organization came to talk about wholesome food and a healthy lifestyle. Another time, a police officer came to discuss criminal behavior and the importance of surveillance.

Although the social professionals tried their best to organize appealing and useful activities for the regular visitors, the latter most often experienced them as imposed efforts to change them. They were very well aware that the activities were a core aspect of the community restaurant though, as Pim’s (56) account shows: “You see, these activities are just part of it. We have to do it, because otherwise they won’t get their funding. But it can be quite irritating sometimes.”

One day, a social organization came by to educate the regular visitors about a healthy diet, presumably because the working class suffers disproportionately from obese and health issues. “It is important not to gain too much weight, to eat fresh vegetables and fruit regularly and to go to bed on time,” the social worker explained in his short lecture. Jan (87), a visitor who survived the Dutch Hunger Winter during World War II, whispered to some other visitors: “I ate rat, I ate cat, I ate raw sugar beet, and they come here to tell me how to survive? How old do they want me to be?” His neighbor responded by rolling his eyes. Another visitor demonstratively turned off his hearing aid, trying to take a nap during the lecture. When the social worker sat back down at my table, after having given his lecture, he said to his colleagues: “I could see them thinking, again some dude who comes telling me I should do it all differently” (*“Ik zag ze denken, weer zo’n knakker die komt vertellen dat ik het allemaal anders moet doen”*). According to the remarks of Jan and the blank faces of the other visitors, he had formed an accurate impression.

I found that visitors were very conscious of the fact that they were collectively perceived as ‘deprived’ and ‘in need of help.’ The discourse of deprivation that was deployed by Robert and other community organizers involved at the community restaurant was clearly felt and sometimes even incorporated by the visitors. However, as I witnessed on many occasions and as respondents increasingly trusted me, this did not mean that visitors passively accepted this paternalizing attitude of middle-class social workers:

*“Everyone should live their own life, and nobody can tell me how I should live mine... No, I don’t have to do anything. I really don’t. Sometimes I do need help, but that does not mean I have to do what the professionals say. It’s up to me to decide.”*

(Interview Winny, September 29, 2014).

When talking to smaller groups of visitors, all of them emphasized, one way or another, that they did not wish to be told how to improve their lives by the restaurant manager and the social organizations that appeared during the organized activities. Their major issue was “Who are they to tell me how to live my life?” In short, the legitimacy of these educational attempts was regularly questioned among visitors, and on some occasions leading to sheer collective resistance of the visitors to actively participate in activities.



Skeggs (1997) has argued that such attempts of resistance must be seen as a way to establish respectability, which is generally ‘a concern of the working classes who are seen as unrespectable due to a history of being represented as dangerous, polluting and pathological’ (Skeggs, 1997, cited by Scharff, 2008: 335).

The resistance toward the attempts of the management to “improve their conduct and ways of thinking” was clearly related to the visitors’ reluctance to accept the idea that they were seen as “deprived” and “unsocial” by middle- and upper-class people. As one of my respondents stated:

*“In this ’hood, we live together, you know [...]. We take care of each other, and we take care of our own stuff. So, you don’t have to call the police, as they wouldn’t come anyway; they know we solve our own problems here. So, when you’re a rich yuppie, don’t start complaining about people who park their car on your sidewalk, because you can expect a blast in your face. You just have to adapt. Everyone is out on the street, sitting in their front yards. But these yuppies, they retreat into their backyards as soon as they get home. And then they say we’re unsocial. I think these yuppies are just socially retarded. When you have to work at these people’s homes, doing some carpentry or something, you don’t get anything, no coffee, nothing. But when you come to the places of poor people, you get all kinds of things, coffee, cookies, and more. Those rich people only care about themselves. And then they call us unsocial.”*

(Conversation with Alex, August 21, 2014).

Alex, like many other respondents, described working-class people as one community, in opposition to ‘those rich people’. Even though they might differ on the basis of other social signifiers, such as gender or age, their shared social location as working-class individuals brought about a sense of community among visitors. Their mutual recognition of being seen as deprived, in need of help, and unsocial, was brought to the fore in many conversations among visitors and in relation to me, in their eyes clearly a middle-class person in need of some education on how ‘the working class’ differed from ‘rich people’ like me.

In sum, a set of community-building practices were initiated and organized by the professionals involved in the community-building intervention, with the attempt to: 1. Help visitors adjust to the restaurant’s norms and procedures; 2. Encourage them to mix with other visitors and, more specifically, become familiar with residents with migrant backgrounds, and 3. Educate them with regard to, among other things, budget control, a healthy lifestyle and safety. As was shown above, the dinner ritual, where every single participant played their part in joining the dinner in a regulated way, brought about an *amicable type of familiarity*, which allowed visitors to perceive each other as possible friends instead of strangers. It aroused a sense of belonging to the local community, which made visitors, including me, feel at ease amongst each other. The other types of activities (mixing and educational activities) created an atmosphere of resistance among the white working-class visitors, who clearly felt they were perceived as problematic, narrow-minded and deprived in the eyes of the social professionals involved.

As will be shown below, this collective resistance turned out to be an important, but unintended asset of community building, as visitors started to realize they belonged to the same category of ‘the deprived’. This collective sense of belonging in turn resulted in strong claims to the right to feel at home in this neighborhood and Dutch society at large, based on their shared traits of being white, native Dutch.

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Before we deal more in-depth with the type of familiarity that occurred amongst visitors, due to their shared subdominant position in relation to the community builders, I will first introduce yet another type of practices and dynamics that could be observed at the community restaurant: the unorganized practices deployed by visitors to include some in, and exclude others from, subgroups of ‘restaurant friends’.

### 3.3 "BIRDS OF A FEATHER FLOCK TOGETHER"

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In the dining hall, five tables for eight people each are nicely set up. Apparently, most people have fixed places; they walk straight to 'their' tables. I decide to sit down at a table with five elderly women, among them the only elderly woman of color in the restaurant. One elderly man is welcomed by the women and sits down next to me. When another elderly man asks permission to take the last seat, one woman replies: "No, that place is occupied". Another woman swiftly puts her bag on the last empty chair. The man moves slowly to another table. The chair stays unoccupied for the rest of the evening.

[Research Diary, August 19, 2014].

After visiting the community restaurant a couple of times, it became apparent that several visitors had shaped their own sub-communities of – as they called each other – "restaurant friends". These groups would always sit together at the same table, making sure all seats were reserved for "them". Among members of these groups, a strong sense of belonging to the local community occurred, resulting in comfortable feelings of home of individual visitors. Being a member of a group of fixed tablemates made them feel safe, in control, and deeply familiar with and amongst each other.

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The women of Our Little Club, as they constantly call themselves, are busy exchanging practical items and information, such as which bus to take to the restaurant, how to fold a napkin, "Did everyone receive the community center's journal?" and "Who is joining the choir next Thursday?". While Piet is eating his meal in silence, the women are making jokes, making fun of each other and are laughing out loud amongst themselves. They help each other counting the fee for dinner, they share flyers for some neighborhood activities in other community centers, and, when they finally stop eating, they secretly help each other put their leftovers in small plastic boxes, which are swiftly slid into their handbags.

[Research Diary, August 19, 2014].

As the vignettes above indicate, being a member of a group of restaurant

friends involved sharing simple, informal practices of care and attention. Through these practices, every single member was provided with all the information, leftovers and items they needed. Furthermore, these groups carefully erected barriers to outsiders – a condition for social cohesion and solidarity, according to Collins (2004). These immaterial but very present barriers made it hard to find a seat at their table as an outsider, which I was in the first stage of my fieldwork.

#### The sub-communities

First, as mentioned above, there was a table with elderly women (aged 70 and older) who called themselves "Our Little Club". There was only one man, Piet (79), who was sometimes allowed to sit at "their" table. All other men were systematically rejected and abandoned. "We don't really know them", one woman explained. "We only know them by face, but not by their names".

The second sub-community of visitors called itself the "Cozy Table". Or, in the words of Annemiek (45): "We are really the cozy table. We give each other flowers when one of us has a birthday. Then, we'll give Pim or Frits a euro each, and they will get us a bunch of flowers." This group of visitors distinguished itself in terms of their loud laughter, animated discussions, and engaged and energetic atmosphere. Their table was always crowded, and it seemed as if everyone wanted to take part in this small group. Oftentimes, one could witness how other visitors were refused because all the chairs at the table were already occupied or reserved. For me, also, it took several times and more than one rejection before I managed to sit down at the Cozy Table. A place was available for me only when the restaurant manager decided to re-set the tables and allow more people to sit together. Later, when I gained their trust, it was easier to arrange a place for myself at the Cozy Table; the visitors would just move their chairs to the side and allow me to put an extra chair in between them.

The key figures – or gatekeepers – of the Cozy Table turned out to be Pim (56) and Frits (67), a homosexual couple called "The Boys". Pim and Frits talked and laughed easily and were able to establish a strong sense of sociability and togetherness at the given table. The other regular visitors at the Cozy Table were all white Dutch, middle-aged women (between 45 and 63 years old), two of them physically disabled. During the course of my research, two other white Dutch men – the only young man (31) with intellectual and developmental disabilities in the restaurant, and an older

man (67) with a hearing impairment – were “adopted” by the Cozy Table “Because they had a fight at their own table, and they would have stopped joining the dinners otherwise”, as Pim explained.

The table where the fight had taken place was the third and only sub-group of visitors that I did not initially dare to sit with, although I did eventually. At this table, which I call the “Beer Table”, six white Dutch men (between 31 and 67 years old, originally including the two men who were later adopted by the Cozy Table) drank many beers and ate their meals in complete silence. The only woman sitting at the table was an old, white Dutch woman (around 80 years old) called “Granny” by the others. Granny, in contrast to the men at her table, was never silent; she shouted at the other visitors and the restaurant manager and used discriminatory language against volunteers, some of them were from an ethnic minority background.

I was confronted with my own prejudices and morality here, since I considered the visitors at this particular table very “rough” looking. Some of them had an unkempt appearance, as if they never washed their hair or their clothes. Some had red noses, red faces and, in my view, an aggressive look due to their abundant use of alcohol. One visitor at the Beer Table was constantly physically shaking. Most of all, however, the old woman, Granny, seemed to be blatantly dangerous. It was two weeks before I dared to ask if I could sit down at their table, and I did so only because Granny was not there that night. None of the men reacted to my request. One of them turned his head away from me. I sat down anyway and they just acted as if I was not there, avoiding any eye contact or conversation.

A few weeks later, Granny had not shown up at the restaurant on several occasions. I was told that there had been a fight; Granny had said so many nasty things about the man with the hearing impairment, who was called “Uncle Joop”, that restaurant manager Robert had called Granny on the phone and told her that she was no longer welcome. Apparently, Granny had taken his complaints seriously since I never saw her again at the restaurant. Uncle Joop and the man with intellectual and developmental disabilities were now sitting at the Cozy Table. The shaking man and the man who had turned his head away from me turned out to be brothers and now sat apart from the others. The two other men who had “belonged” to the Beer Table attended the dinners only irregularly from that moment on, sitting by themselves at another table. The Beer Table, thus, had fallen apart since Granny had been kicked out of the restaurant.

### Gender, Sexuality and Age at Play

Based on personal experiences and personal identification among table-mates, members of the smaller sub-communities not only felt safe amongst themselves in the sense that they knew what was expected of them and what could be expected of others, but they moreover felt they were physically safe amongst each other. The account of a middle-aged woman who was always keen on sitting with The Boys, the homosexual couple at the Cozy Table, made it very clear:

*“I’m here for my own good: for my own fun, and for the people I care about. Especially for The Boys, they’re just... I can be myself with them. Why? Because they are married to each other. I don’t have to think about what they’re going to say to me, don’t have to be aware if they are going to do something silly... don’t have to think “Oh God, what does he want from me?” No. Because they are two men who belong together. And yeah, they’re really important to me, because they are sweet men.”*

(Interview Winny, September 29, 2014).

Without exception, all the single women at the restaurant community whom I interviewed during the course of fieldwork had histories with abusive and alcoholic husbands. Over time, their spouses had left them or had died, mostly due to their addiction. They attended the dinners only to meet other single women or “sweet” (read: homosexual) men.

On the other hand, at least five of the men interviewed were explicitly seeking sexual affairs with the single women of the neighborhood restaurant. At a certain point, Piet, who had been the only man allowed to sit down at the table of Our Little Club, had been sitting alone for some weeks. When I asked him why, Piet sighed:

*“I think I am going to look for a different restaurant. I shall be honest with you: I’m hunting for women. And that’s why I think this place is boring, rusty, inveterate. Because there’s nobody. That’s why I’m looking for other places to eat, simply to meet a nice woman. One I can take home with me. Because now I come home, and I’m all by myself again.”*

(Conversation with Piet, October 1, 2014).

As Piet had found out, the women of Our Little Club were not interested

in his sexual advances, and had therefore no longer allowed him to sit at their table.

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Gender and sexuality turned out to play a crucial role in the composition of the sub-communities and the barriers that were created to outsiders. As already indicated in Chapter Two, the intersection between (the vulnerable) body and space produced shared kinds of subjective experiences that resulted in a sense of shared identity among community members (Fitzgerald, Rose and Singh, 2016: 152-155).

Moreover, the intersection between gender, sexuality and age also turned out to play a role in the sustainment of the sub-communities: while Our Little Club consisted of elderly, single women only, the Cozy Table only had middle-aged members, female and male, who were not interested in having a sexual relationship with other visitors. The Beer Table originally consisted of young and middle-aged men, tied together by the elderly woman called ‘Granny’ – which implies she was not seen as a potential sexual partner, but more as an older family member.

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With regard to the communal ties that had emerged between the tablemates at the “fixed” tables and the divisions that were made based on gender, sexuality, and age, it is somewhat unsurprising that many visitors strongly disapproved of the mixing activities that were imposed upon them by the community builders as an attempt to broaden their social networks.

### **Floating tablemates**

Besides the sub-communities that were established among some groups of regular visitors, there were a few other tables at the restaurant with men and women who belonged to no particular table and/or wished to change tables regularly. Among them were the three visitors of Surinamese and Antillean/Surinamese descent, besides the woman from Surinamese descent who was part of Our Little Club (“I did not come to the Netherlands to stick to Surinamese people,” she once said to me).

One day, during dinner, I recorded my conversation with Annie and Johan who were not part of a sub-community:

*F: “Do you have a group of people who you regularly sit with?”*

*A: No, not at the moment.*

*[...]*

*J: Well... no.*

*A: No, he hasn’t one either. We’re the floating tablemates (zwevende tafelenoten), so to speak...*

*J: Yeah, these other tables...birds of a feather flock together, huh.*

*F: Don’t you have the same feathers then?*

*J: I’m not sure. [...] When you like talking together, you sit together. That’s just the way it is. But since my girlfriend died last year, I don’t flock together with anyone anymore. Not regularly at least.”*

(Recorded conversation with two regular visitors, Annie and Johan, September 10, 2014).

I could see that it was hard for Annie, Johan and others to gain access to one of the three “fixed” tables. Also, since these “floating tablemates” did not seem to wish to become part of these groups, they usually sat on their own at different tables among an ever-changing combination of regular and non-regular visitors.

The questions that come to mind when taking a closer look into the sub-communities that had emerged over time at the community restaurant is why some regular visitors were included in smaller sub-communities, while others were rejected or not willing to become part of those. When and how does a sub-community emerge, sustain itself or fall apart? And how do boundaries between insiders and outsiders come into being?

First, let us take a look at how the sub-communities had initially emerged. How had these sub-communities come into being? I learned that most visitors had at first attended the restaurant on their own and were not part of any specific group before they started attending the organized dinners. How had these individuals become part of a group of “restaurant friends”?

According to all research respondents, becoming part of a certain group depended on where they sat on their first visit:

A: “I can still see myself entering the place for the first time. I was really frightened. I had been neglecting myself, not eating well, so my doctor had said to me: you have to go to the neighborhood restaurant and get some wholesome food there. But I didn’t dare to go in. I had this scooter, you know, because my legs always hurt...

F: And when you went in, how did you choose where to sit down?

A: It was Winny, who also had a scooter. She shouted: “Hey, come sit over here with your scooter!” And then I just stayed with them.”

(Interview Annemiek, September 22, 2014).

Winny continues:

“So, Annemiek and I were already sitting at the cozy table. And then I knew someone, and she knew someone and that person sits down with us. And that person brings someone else and at a certain point you have a group.”

(Interview Winny, September 29, 2014).

The young man with developmental and intellectual disabilities gave me a similar account of the way he had “found” his table, i.e. the Beer Table, before his group fell apart due to the fight with Granny:

V: “I just sat down at this table. And these people always sit together, so now I am also “of this table.”

F: Do you ever change tables? Do you ever join another group?

V: No.

F: Why not?

V: Well, after a while you start having contact, you know. You start talking a bit.

F: But don’t you feel like meeting other people at the restaurant sometimes?

V: No.”

(Interview Vincent, September 17, 2014).

Or, as Pim explained:

P: “People always tend to flock together. Of course it’s no problem when other people sit with us, we like that as well. It’s not like we ignore people who normally do not sit with us. For example,

Uncle Joop... he is new to our table. I asked him to come and sit with us, and he likes it very much. It was just bad luck that he ended up at the wrong table in the first place.

F: So you say, it is just a coincidence that Uncle Joop ended up at the “wrong table”?

P: Yeah, in the first instance, yeah, sure... You just sit down and then people don’t dare to, to... walk to another table anymore. They’re stuck, so to speak. So I said, “come sit with us.” Well, he loves it because we always make fun of things. It’s very cozy at our table.

F: Have you all become friends?

P: Well, we are friends, but we don’t visit each other at home. And that’s fine.”

(Interview Pim, October 6, 2014).

The quotes above show how individual persons who first participated in the regular activities randomly chose other participants to sit with. Through joining the organized activities and sitting at the same table, a sense of familiarity emerged that already bonded individuals to the extent that they felt they could not easily walk out of this table setting anymore – *as if* they were friends. In other words, amicable familiarity brings about a sense of belonging that is not (yet) based on personal identification, but already tends to be binding to some extent.

When an individual participant found her/himself sitting at the ‘wrong’ table, it was apparently hard to leave one’s initial group and find another table – as if they abandoned their friends, which they not really were in this phase of familiarity. While amicable familiarity can thus bring about a comfortable sense of belonging, you can also easily get stuck with others you do not really like. Moving to another table would make uncomfortably explicit that this type of familiarity only refers to the friendship, but does not involve the emotional and personal attachment that comes with real friendships. Unless someone intervened – like Pim, who had invited Uncle Joop over to his table, or like the restaurant manager who had forced Granny to leave thereby enabling members of the Beer Table to disperse and find ‘better’ tables – it turned out to be hard for individuals to change tables themselves.

### Cultural, racial and ethnic outsiders

Besides the micro-mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion at play between different table communities, individuals who were ‘stuck at the wrong table’, and the ‘floating tablemates’, there was yet another more general mechanism of inclusion and exclusion at play, based on cultural, racial and ethnic differences.

When I asked Mitchell (53), the only man of color who regularly visited the community restaurant, how he liked the discussions at the table, he confided in me:

*M: “Well, I feel excluded here... and, erm, furthermore, I notice that... erm... I’m excluded from contacts... having contact with other people is difficult here...”*

*F: What do you think is the reason for that?*

*M: It’s my own shortcoming...*

*F: Why?*

*M: I’m not able... I’m not able to put myself in their shoes. That’s why.*

*F: Is their world so different from yours, then?*

*M: Yes, that’s how I feel. F: What’s the difference? Silence.*

*M: I don’t know... It’s really a different culture, you know.*

*F: You mean, it’s because they’re Dutch?*

*M: Yeab. Yeab. I was born in the Antilles and my parents are from Surinam, so... Yeab, but I just... I just accept it as it is, you know?*

*That’s what I’m good at. Yeab... That’s what I’m good at.”*

(Interview Mitchell, September 29, 2014).

Despite having visited the restaurant regularly for five years now, and joining in all the organized activities and dinner practices, Mitchell does not perceive himself as part of this restaurant community but instead feels excluded from “contact”. Apparently, joining in collective practices is not sufficient to become part of a community, as was also shown further above. Although Mitchell was amicably familiar with other participants, he did not feel he belonged to their wider community of white, native Dutch residents.

During fieldwork, it was revealed to me that many white, native Dutch visitors – regardless of the table community they were part of – systematically demonized non-white communities who, in their view, should adapt to *them* (i.e., white Dutch cultural standards) and Western society at large, rather than the other way around. “Foreigners” and “allochthons” (*allochtonen*) were largely perceived and described as “less human” due to their assumed “bad morality.” Discussing, talking, making jokes, and gossiping about these so-called ethnic and racial others played a major role during the neighborhood dinners, as it inspired a sense of togetherness, coziness, and common agreement among visitors.

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“What do you all think about the American that has been beheaded by IS? Your opinions please” Bob asks. It turned out to be the start of a vivid conversation. “I think it’s in their blood. These people from the East, they just *have* to kill”. “Yeah, I know. They’ve been a bloodthirsty bunch of people for as long as I can remember”, one of the women responds. Another woman says she can’t believe that these people are religious. “This is completely unknown”, she says. And Bob states loudly: “World War III will start in the East”. An old Surinamese lady, whom I see for the first time today, starts to offer a detailed explanation on how IS gets its weapons, and why the Jews should never have gone to Israel. “I think”, the other woman responds, “it’s all the same: Israelites and Palestinians, one bunch of bloodthirsty people.” Everyone nods their approval and Bob shouts: “Kill them all, I say!”

[Research Diary, August 25, 2014].

I found that every visitor – even those who did not belong to a fixed table, who were new to the restaurant, and the visitors of color who explicitly identified themselves as ‘culturally Dutch’ – could become part of the overarching restaurant community as long as they agreed and confirmed the shared racialized/ethnicized norms and opinions.

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When the new man says something about the mosque that’s going to be built in Amsterdam, Bob starts shouting: “Shut all the mosques down! Shut them all down and send all the Muslims back to their own country!”. “In your dreams”, the new man responds. “No”, Bob says. “That’s what should be done”. “But that’s not going to happen”, the new man says. “We

will get riots everywhere”. “You’re right,” Bob agrees, “there are too many of them here”. “Yes”, the new man says. “In Groningen, Islamic people can be counted on one hand only, but in the large cities, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht, Amersfoort, The Hague, there are way too many of them”. “It’s true”, Bob says. “I worked as a Dutch language teacher and I’ve watched it very closely... You don’t want to know how sneakily it happens, how Islam is slowly creeping into our society and taking over this place. That’s really what’s happening right now”. “Yes”, the new man says. “Sometimes I think that I’m lucky that I won’t have to experience all that... I’m too old to see that happen. But I’m trembling at the thought of my daughter and grandchildren”. “I won’t have to see that happen either, fortunately”, Bob sighs, “but you do...”. He suddenly turns to me.

“Oh yes”, the new man nods. “You are definitely going to experience that...” They both start to shake their heads compassionately, and they look at me for some, seemingly everlasting, moments. I try, cheerfully: “Well, I’m not that frightened. Actually, I’m quite curious about what will happen in the future”. The two men just look at me with their dreary faces. “Yes, you are going to experience all of that...” the new man repeats.

Suddenly, I start to worry about the future and my children’s future as well. I notice how it works; how this conversation affects me. It is a tiny, but undefined feeling: what if these two elderly Dutch men, who both experienced World War II, who both have many life experiences and who are looking at me compassionately for all the horrible things I will have to go through during my life... what if they are right? What if they see what I’m not able to see yet, with my naive head and heart, as a person who has never experienced war or violence?

So I become scared. The concerns and fears of the men take hold of me. Bob’s continuous repetition of “Muslims are dangerous” and the unceasing approval of the other visitors, regardless of the combination of people I sit down to eat with (albeit that the discussions are mostly initiated by Bob), start to have an effect on me.

I begin to understand that one can become scared as hell by hearing the word “Islam” only, when every single person in one’s social environment, people whom you trust, repeat things like this all the time; this is especially the case with people with a certain status such as Bob, who was a teacher and knows how to convince people. After a few months of attending the

neighborhood restaurant regularly, I notice I have to fight my own negative imaginations and fantasies with regard to Muslims. And I feel really bad about it...

[Research Diary, September 1, 2014].

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Regardless of the table I sat at and its combination of tablemates, during my multiple visits to the community restaurant, the “threat of foreigners and allochthons” turned out to be of great concern to all visitors. As is clear in the vignette above, new visitors who endorsed the sense of collective fear of ethnic, religious and racial outsiders could easily become part of the overarching restaurant community, because they were immediately recognized as part of the dominant – and supposedly threatened – racial and ethnic group. To become embedded in a sub-community of restaurant friends might have been a little harder, due to their self-defined barriers to other visitors, but becoming part of the larger community was easy – as long as one shared, felt and confirmed the collective fear and anxiety about strangers threatening ‘our country’.

Strong narrative of ‘us’ and ‘them’ were deployed to express the deep collective sense of moral righteousness of ‘the Dutch’:

*“We, the Dutch people aren’t aggressive. [...] But when I say something to a Moroccan, I’m drawn into a fight immediately. That’s just not right [...]. And there are more of these people than we might think. It’s not just two neighbors, it’s half of the neighborhood! [...] And we don’t go out onto the streets to fight for our own space, you know. [...] I mean, Hitler slaughtered a whole bunch of people, and... well, that’s not the way to do it, of course... I guess, we just have to live with it.*

*[...] But it’s obvious that the government has been very unfair with us. You could read in the newspapers: new policemen were being recruited and they preferred, here we go again... allochthons (allochtonen). Talking about discrimination!”*

(Interview Piet, October 1, 2014).

When Piet was asked directly whether he had ever experienced a fight with a neighbor of Moroccan descent or faced a job refusal because of his Dutch

background, he answered “No.” He did not have any Moroccan neighbors himself, he said. It was just the idea of “allochthons” taking over that “haunted” him (“*het bebeerst mijn leven*”). Therefore, his fears and concerns were not based on concrete, direct threats but instead on the subjective assumption that ethnic minorities would come to take what he perceives to be his: Dutch national space.

What happened to me was arguably what happens to many regular visitors of the neighborhood restaurant: it became hard to distinguish between real and imagined threats. Through the repetition and reaffirmation of the same discourse, the same words, and the same fears, and concerns each evening, the threat had become real in the minds and discussions of the visitors. Yet there were few ethnic minority visitors present at the restaurant, and sometimes even none in their living environments who actually threatened them. The fear, which was tangible in all conversations, was constructed and established through the reiterated discursive practices at the dinner tables.

Moreover, the compassion and concerns for other restaurant visitors aroused a warm feeling of togetherness. The construction of a shared imaginary enemy, who is haunting “our” (national) space and creeping into “our” Dutch society, brought about a comforting idea of knowing who “we” – the good people – are, by identifying the “others”, i.e. the evil ones.

Interestingly, although the table conversations were loaded with feelings of fear and anxiety in regards to outsiders, a sense of collective *safety*, *control* and even a kind of mutual *affection* were brought into being at the same time. During those conversations, the atmosphere became very ‘home-like’, as if we were close friends or family members sharing our concerns and mutual interests. Here, at the community restaurant, ‘we’ were amongst ourselves, in a place ruled by ‘our law’ (cf. Hage, 1997).

Moreover, I was struck by how visitors tried to include me in their conversations, although they had already mentioned my “nice little color” or asked me “what kind” I was (“*wat voor soort ben jij?*”), referring to my brown skin as a person of mixed race. Similar to the instance described in the vignette above, where two white, native Dutch elderly men showed their concern for my future, respondents now and then actively tried to engage with me as a person of color. They actively attempted to show that they were not “racists” and are in fact aware that skin color might affect the experiences of people of color, such as I, as the reflective utterance of the woman who said that

she does not know how people of color experienced Black Pete indicated. They put across the idea that I could become one of them, that my color was not a criterion to become either accepted or rejected by their community.<sup>17</sup> To be included into the ‘Dutch’ restaurant community, the crucial element seemed to be whether or not I would conform to their opinion regarding the supposed threat of the ‘anti- Black Pete movement’, ‘negroes’, ‘foreigners’, ‘Islam’ and ‘Moroccans’. These issues turned out to be non-negotiable when it came to becoming part of this particular restaurant community.

### **Ethnic Leveraging**

The mechanism I could observe at the community restaurant, where one ethnic group compares itself ‘against the backdrop of the ‘other’ (Martin, 2009: 93-4), with the purpose of distancing and delegitimizing another group, is known as *ethnic leveraging* (Bertossi, 2014; Winter, 2013). In other words, it refers to the perception of some groups as being particularly problematic, while simultaneously elevating other groups (Balkenhol, Mepschen & Duyvendak, 2016).

This operation of ethnic leveraging is especially important for understanding and analyzing the comments of the visitors of the restaurant, since they themselves are routinely presented and approached as “particularly problematic” by the community builders, due to their working-class backgrounds, presumed deprived lifestyles and “narrow” perspectives. By experiencing the construction of a constitutive outside, through sharing the thoughts, fears and concerns of the restaurant community, one becomes part of it. Those, like myself, who are able to distance themselves from these fearful, white nationalist notions—as perpetuated by the regular restaurant visitors—do not face danger, stigmatization, or threats in their private lives, due to their socially advantaged positions, for instance as being part of the middle-class and/or highly educated, as well as white.

As Pain (2001) shows in her work on “Gender, race, age and fear in the city”, “experiences of danger in private space affect feelings of security in public at an individual and societal level” (900). She argues further that “crimes such as domestic violence, acquaintance violence and elder abuse [...] have

<sup>17</sup> I noticed other people of Surinamese or Antillean descent were approached in similar ways – I assume, because Surinam and the Dutch Antilles have been part of the Dutch Kingdom for centuries, and are therefore easily perceptible as ‘culturally Dutch’.



a role to play in the construction of fear” (ibid., 899). Whereas many of the research respondents have faced – or are still facing – serious threats and dangers in their private lives, and these can be directly linked to their social and economic positions, they become more susceptible to fear at a societal level than someone who is not facing the same threats in their personal environments. Therefore, these fears and concerns found a warm breeding ground in the neighborhood restaurant, arousing a strong sense of being among “people like us.”

As was discussed further above, visitors could become very eager when it came to defending themselves against the social implications underpinning the organized activities at the neighborhood restaurant. Whereas the management believed that “their lives should be improved” and they should be taught about “diversity”, the visitors repeatedly claimed that they did not need that kind of education. Furthermore, the underlying assumption that *their* behavior could (and should) eventually improve neighborhood life – as well as society as a whole – evoked passionate resistance; instead, they claimed it was Muslims, “foreigners” and black people who should be held accountable for the decline of their neighborhood(s) and Dutch society.

Visitors felt supported by and drew heavily upon a populist, white nationalist discourse, especially embodied by Geert Wilders, the leader of the Dutch Party for Freedom (PVV), . They regularly expressed that it is notably Moroccans and/or Muslims who give rise to most, if not all, contemporary “problems” in Western societies, and that it is “natural” for black people to be violent. This populist rhetoric is also articulated graphically in the quotes above from the restaurant visitors.

Hence, by passing on the stigma of “being particularly problematic” to ethnic and racial others, the visitors attempted to elevate themselves as a group, utilizing the only two *non-stigmatized* attributes they have in common with the dominant white middle class: they are white, and perceived to be indigenous to the Netherlands (i.e. Dutch). Their fear of being degraded and approached as inferior within their ‘own’ (national) space results in a strong xenophobic and racist discourse about ethnic and racial others.

### **Discourses of Tolerance and White Nationalism**

In his book *White Nation: Fantasies of White supremacy in a Multicultural Society*, Hage (2000) sheds light on how it is possible that, while professional

community organizers deploy a strong discourse of tolerance and initiate numerous activities to bridge ‘ethnic and racial differences’, the constitutive boundaries of the overarching community – and Western society at large – remain defined on the basis of whiteness. Hage (2000: 28) distinguishes two discourses with regard to ‘ethnic and racial others’: first, he points to the dominant ‘discourse of tolerance’, which is associated with the state-sponsored multiculturalism that emerged in the early 1970s (ibid.: 82). This discourse emphasizes the enrichment of diversity and yields the call to see “the added value” of migrant cultures (ibid.: 121). The discourse of tolerance is easily applicable to community organizing practices, as reflected in the accounts of the restaurant manager and the work of Minkler (2012).

Second, Hage mentions a ‘white nationalist discourse’, which conveys a dimension of:

*“[T]erritorial and, more generally, spatial power, [...] which assume[s], first, an image of a national space; secondly, an image of the nationalist himself or herself as masters of this national space and, thirdly, an image of the ‘ethnic/racial other’ as a mere object within this space.”*

(Hage, 2000: 28).

As Hage makes clear, both discourses draw upon ‘the conviction that [white multiculturalists as much as white nationalists] are [...] masters of national space, and that it [is] up to them to decide who [can] stay in and who ought to be kept out of that space’ (ibid: 17). Thus, the discourse of tolerance – similar to the white nationalist discourse, albeit via ‘politically correct’ means – re-establishes power relations between white citizens and ‘non-white or ethnic others’ within an imagined national space. The effect of both discourses, in spite of the good intentions of multiculturalists such as the community organizers in our case, is that members of ethnic minority communities are presented as passive objects to be managed, instead of subjects or citizens who also shape and (have the right to) master and own national space.

Hence, while the community organizers carefully distinguish themselves from the restaurant visitors, who are depicted as “deprived” and in need of help to open up their worldviews, one could argue the tolerant attitude of the community organizers draws upon the same cultural repertoire as the white nationalist attitude of their participants; both parties consider

themselves the rightful masters of Dutch space, who can either decide to welcome or exclude “strangers”.<sup>18</sup> Both discourses of tolerance and white nationalism reveal a sense of control, although the discourse of tolerance deployed by the community builders starts from trust and openness to “strangers”, while the white nationalist utterances of my respondents emerge from distrust and rejection of “strangers”. However, both angles draw upon the conviction that one has the right to decide who should be included and who should not. This sense of righteous control over Dutch national and local space, both by the community organizers and visitors, is inextricably linked to white supremacist feelings of home and belonging.

### 3.4 DIFFERENT TYPES OF FAMILIARITY

#### VARIOUS STRENGTHS OF HOME FEELINGS

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During the course of my research project, four types of communities could be discerned that were established through different types of familiarity; sometimes in their own right, sometimes overlapping.

The first type of community consisted of *all* regular visitors, including the few people of color, who were bonded together through participation in the dinner ritual. The *amicable familiarity* that emerged among them produced superficial social ties sufficient for all visitors, regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, age or sexuality, to feel a sense of belonging and a light feeling of home: comfortable and safe within the walls of the dinner hall, under the guidance of the professional community builders.

The second type of community that I could distinguish was based on a mutual recognition among all white, working-class visitors, based on the fact that they were collectively subjected to mixing and educational activities by the middle-class professionals, clearly designed to change their

<sup>18</sup> A similar line of thought is elaborately described by Fanon (2008[1952]), in his book *Black Skins, White Masks*. Here, he outlines how the “French Negro” can never become equal to the white French, because the latter is still in power to either welcome or reject him.

behaviors and worldviews. This mutual recognition of being perceived as ‘deprived’ and in need of education, as well as collectively knowing by heart the experience of being inferior to and dominated by others, is what I will call *subdominant familiarity*. This type of familiarity can bring about a strong sense of belonging in members of a certain population category, but does not necessarily lead to increased feelings of home, because feeling at home also implies being safe and in control within a given setting.

In the case of the community restaurant, however, visitors turned their subdominant familiarity into a silent act of resistance against the forceful attempts of the community builders to change them and – as the latter would frame it – “improve the lives of the working class”. Through their mutual recognition the visitors were able to collectively regain some control over the community-building activities, as they forced the community builders to take their interests and needs into account. As a result, their feelings of home enhanced, which made them feel more respected, safe and in control than without the empowering presence of the other working-class visitors. Subdominant familiarity, however, does not necessarily lead to collective resistance, empowerment and enhanced feelings of home. In Chapter Four, it is shown how subdominant familiarity instead leads to a confirmation of being collectively inferior and out of control in a certain social and physical setting.

Third, the smaller sub-communities were established on the basis of *personal familiarity* between members, sharing similar life experiences, interests, hobbies or lifestyles. As shown above, personal familiarity is also related to shared intersections of gender, sexuality and age. Here, a sense of belonging to a sub-community based on personal familiarity led to strong feelings of home, as members felt safe, in control and protected against outsiders.

The fourth type of community I could distinguish was built upon what I call *dominant familiarity*. This involves the mutual recognition of those who consider themselves part of the dominant population group in a national or local setting. In the case of the community restaurant, the dominant position was based on notions of white supremacy within Dutch national space, turning white, native Dutch visitors and professional community builders into self-appointed superiors over racial and ethnic others. As Chapter Four will show, dominant familiarity does not necessarily have to be related to social markers such as race, ethnicity, or gender. What causes the dominant position of certain categories of residents depends on the

social and physical setting in which people find themselves, turning one and the same individual into a member of the subdominant group in one setting, while creating a dominant position in the other.

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A few conceptual implications are important to highlight here: first, subdominant and dominant familiarity are not related to, respectively, minority and majority groups per se, in the numerical sense of the words. Dependent on the institutional setting, the subdominant group can contain the numerical majority, as we have seen in the case of the working-class visitors at the community restaurant, where they outnumber the handful of middle-class professionals who are in institutional control. Similar circumstances could be observed in the factories around the turn of the 20th century, where the exploited factory workers largely outnumbered the exploiters, or on the plantations where enslaved black people had the numerical majority over the white plantation owners. While hegemonic structures serve and sustain those in power, the majority can remain institutionally powerless despite their strength in numbers (LaCapra, 2018).

Second, (sub-)dominant familiarity can obviously also be related to various signifiers, such as class, race, ethnicity and/or culture, but also the institutional dominance of the ‘able-bodied’, heterosexuals, adults, or the highly educated in society. In addition to the importance in social science of recognizing the wide variety of signifiers that can turn people’s social position into a subdominant or dominant one, intersections of these signifiers must be taken into account as well. The combination of some social signifiers can marginalize the already marginalized even more – as in the case of Mitchell, who might have felt subdominant familiarity with other working-class visitors, but was further marginalized due to the color of his skin and migrant background. In this case, the intersection of race, ethnicity and class made it impossible for Mitchell to belong to the community restaurant, whereas the same intersection for the white native Dutch people provided them a dominant position within this ‘Dutch restaurant’. An intersectional approach allows us to understand how one individual can be in a subdominant position based on some signifiers, while being in a dominant position based on others. Where the white working-class visitors still had some leverage to be seen as respectable insiders – based on their racial, ethnic and cultural position – working class visitors of color had none, and so felt doubly marginalized.

Hence, a sense of belonging to a local community is more easily established for some than for others, dependent on the institutional context one finds oneself in. As a result, some intersections give individuals not only a leeway to feel familiar to others and belong, but also to be in control and safe, while other intersections impede individuals from having those conditions to feel at home.

### 3.5 DISCUSSION

## COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT THROUGH ETHNIC LEVERAGING

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This chapter has scrutinized how feelings of home of visitors to a professionally-built community restaurant were produced and sustained through both organized and unorganized practices and discourses. It has specifically focused on the dynamics and mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion at play between different categories of visitors, as well as between them and the community organizers.

The community restaurant intervention was implemented in 2006, within the institutional framework of the ‘Empowered Neighborhoods’ Policy Program (*Krachtwijkenbeleid*). It aimed at building an inclusive local community, by means of improving the lifestyles, conduct, and worldviews of white working-class citizens. One of the main strategies to establish an ethnically and racially heterogeneous community was to ‘teach the white working class diversity’.

The already established restaurant community, however, turned out to be predominantly white, native Dutch – even after 9 years of forceful attempts of the community builders and social workers involved to open up the community to residents with ethnic minority backgrounds. This chapter has scrutinized what practices, discourses and mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion at play sustained the boundaries of the established restaurant community.

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In this chapter, I have argued that various types of sub-communities within the community restaurant were brought about through different types of familiarity. Besides *public familiarity* and *amicable familiarity*, already introduced in Chapters One and Two, respectively, I have introduced three other types of familiarity in this chapter: *sub-dominant familiarity*, *personal familiarity* and *dominant familiarity*. Each of them emerged through different sets of practices that allowed visitors to mutually recognize and identify with each other. As I have attempted to show, these different types of familiarity bring about a sense of belonging, related to shared structural social positions, lifestyles or normative ideas. In some cases, this sense of belonging to a specific category of visitors also led to a sense of control and safety, resulting in increased feelings of home.

The organized activities of the community professionals were partly met with great compliance by the visitors, and partly with great skepticism and resistance. The dinner ritual brought about a nice sense of amicable familiarity, which I have defined as a type of familiarity – moving beyond the more superficial type of public familiarity – that occurs between residents who, through regular shared practices, (start to) perceive each other as ‘normal’ and part of the same local community. This general friendliness and respectability allowed for internal heterogeneity of the community, in terms of age, gender, race, ethnicity, health, class, and sexuality. Other activities, such as the mixing and educational activities, aroused an atmosphere of strong resistance among the white working-class visitors, as they became more and more aware that the community professionals aimed at changing and “improving” their behavior, lifestyle and worldviews. Although unintentionally, the subdominant familiarity that emerged – defined as the mutual recognition of being part of an institutionally marginalized category of people – brought about a strong sense of belonging amongst the visitors. They became aware of being collectively subjected to the law of ‘others’, which – in the case of the community restaurant, at least – led to actions of resistance and obstruction, in order to establish respectability and fight assumptions of being perceived as ‘dangerous, polluting and pathological’ (Skeggs, 1997).

Besides the professionally organized activities, unorganized practices amongst visitors generated a third type of familiarity, namely *personal familiarity*. Here, through personal recognition and social identification – based on personal backgrounds, experiences, but also shared social locations such as gender, sexuality and age – participants became deeply attached to each

other. Group members referred to the saying ‘birds of a feather flock together’ to explain why some participants were more closely connected than others. Through personal familiarity, a sense of safety, control and mutual affection came about, which led to strong feelings of home among group members. In order to sustain the in-group, members also actively erected barriers to outsiders, and protected their group against intruders and external threats – such as against the mixing activities organized by the community organizers in order to make visitors meet new people in the restaurant. Finally, a sub-community based on shared ideas of white supremacy was established at the community restaurant. Here, the fourth type of familiarity came into play: *dominant familiarity*. This type involves the mutual recognition of those who consider themselves part of the dominant group in a national or local setting. Through dominant familiarity, a shared sense of control and rightful ownership over (an imagined) national or local space is brought about, thereby erecting intentional and unintentional barriers to outsiders. As was shown, repetitive collective narratives of ‘us’ and ‘them’ brought about a sense of safety and control that, combined with a strong sense of belonging to the morally just community, enhanced feelings of home among white, native Dutch visitors.

### **State-supported Exclusion**

At the same time as praising attempts to build local communities that bridge ethnic, racial and cultural differences between residents, this chapter has shown how forceful community-building attempts to ‘teach the white working class diversity’ can evoke unintended and opposite outcomes. Elaborating on the work of Skeggs (1997) and Scharff (2008), who have focused on ways in which working-class citizens show their accountability, and attempt to establish respectability according to middle-class norms, this research has shown how in an attempt to claim and establish respectability, and resist the underlying assumptions of having a ‘bad morality’, white working-class residents started to erect insurmountable barriers to ethnic and racial others.

Through a process of ethnic leveraging – i.e. valorizing one’s own ethnic group with the purpose of delegitimizing another ethnic group or groups – the white working class started to feel empowered, legitimized and showed solidarity as a group, thereby collectively resisting the charges of the middle-class professionals that they are the dangerous, polluting and pathological. Instead of embracing ethnic, religious and racial differences, these dif-

ferences were seized upon as a means to pass on this stigmatizing discourse of deprivation, as I have conceptualized it, to ethnic and racial others.

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The pitfall of attempts to build inclusive local communities, therefore, is that community-building interventions and professional middle-class community organizers can unwittingly facilitate this process of ethnic leveraging and exclusion. The normative assumptions underlying the community-building practices, which assume that the white working class is unable to contribute positively to society and neighborhood life without the help, education and intervention of middle-class professionals, have shaped the institutional parameters for the intervention. Resistance by the working class against these accusations translate into the closing of ranks and the erections of barriers – especially toward citizens who are represented as the ‘enrichment of society’ by middle-class professionals, i.e. ethnic and racial ‘others’.

Another important implication is the fact that ethnic and racial ‘others’ play merely a minor and passive part in the process of inclusive community building. Instead of starting from a vantage point that integration and collective life is a mutual process, the main focus in these kinds of state-supported interventions is the worldviews, perspectives and conduct of the white working class. They are supposed to become familiar with ethnic and racial differences, and they should embrace ethnic and racial others. The same expectations are not demanded of migrant communities and/or ethnic minority citizens.

Pursuing the work of Said (1994[1979]) and Hage (2000), this case study has revealed, firstly, ethnic and racial others remain an abstract, faceless category of passive objects rather than active agents who individually and sometimes collectively co-master national and public spaces and co-create public life with white, ethnic ‘natives’. Secondly, ethnic and racial difference is presented as something only ‘others’ have. Such differences can then easily become essentialized, i.e., treated as something static, as essentially and thus eternally different and therefore only applicable to so-called outsiders. The representation of ethnic and racial others as ‘strangers’ with whom the ‘native’ Dutch should become familiar, in order to improve social cohesion, reveals a one-sided approach to social integration. This approach undermines the dynamic, ever-changing, inter-relational character of culture

and social boundaries. Arguably, building inclusive communities starts – aside from good intentions – with the awareness and reflexivity of the power relations at play in community-building processes, especially when initiated from the top down.

Taking into account the numerous intersections of class, education, ethnicity, race, gender, sexuality and age that constitute people’s social positions, and that shape their daily realities, is of crucial importance when we aim to understand why sincere attempts to build inclusive local communities can be undermined by the builders’ own premises. Community organizers’ pejorative and persistently negative perceptions of the white working class, combined with superior feelings of white supremacy regarding people of color and/or with a migrant background, can reproduce existing mechanisms of exclusion and indirectly create barriers among fellow residents, rather than bridging them.





THE  
CAULI  
FLOWER  
NEIGHBOR  
HOODS

CHAPTER

**4**

## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

### BACK TO THE HUMAN MEASURE<sup>19</sup>

The ethnographic case study presented in this chapter explores (the lack of) feelings of home of residents living in a deliberately designed neighborhood meant to shape a local community. The physical urban community-building intervention of the Cauliflower Neighborhood was established in the 1970s and 1980s throughout the Netherlands. As this chapter will show, the aims and assumptions underlying this particular urban design of the past still affect the social dynamics among residents today.

Whereas Chapter Two focused on feelings of home of participants of a new community-building intervention in its starting phase, and Chapter Three on the members of an already established local community after a decade of professional community building, this chapter is concerned with the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion at play in a *well-established* local community. It looks into how an urban intervention in the physical environment – a residential area deliberately planned, designed and established four decades ago to enhance local community life – shapes and affects the experiences of home of contemporary residents.

This chapter deals with a different form of community-building intervention than the previous ones. While the other two case studies were concerned with *social* community-building interventions, through *direct* interference by social professionals, the study presented here deals with a *physical* community-building intervention through *indirect* interference by urban planners and designers. All three interventions, however, must be considered strategies of state-supported social engineering (see Chapter One), with the same core objective: to improve local community life among residential groups that are deemed marginalized, disadvantaged or vulnerable.

The community-building intervention at the heart of this ethnographic study is the penultimate example of Dutch urban planning and design of

the 1970s and 1980s: the so-called cauliflower neighborhood (*bloemkoolwijk*). Between 2010 and 2012, I conducted fieldwork in two cauliflower neighborhoods in the city of Hoofddorp: Bornholm and Overbos. The term ‘cauliflower neighborhood’, in reference to the typically and traditionally Dutch vegetable, was deployed by city planners in the 1970s to denote the popular “tree” or “cauliflower” structure of the new neighborhood design, with its small “crops” of family dwellings built around small, shared yards – the *woonerven* (Ubink and Van der Steeg, 2011).

*“Nowhere in the world have I seen an instance of urban planning quite like the [Dutch] woonerf, a variant of the pedestrian-friendly “cul-de-sac” – deliberately designed, that is”*

(Carel Weeber, Dutch engineering professor and architect, cited by De Vletter, 2004: 59).

The Dutch cauliflower neighborhood design is a variant of the French cul-de-sac. Literally, the “bottom of a sack,” it is essentially a dead-end street. In French, but also in English and German medieval cities, “natural” cul-de-sacs emerged from unplanned urban extensions (Cozens and Hillier, 2008). Although the cul-de-sac became widely associated with unhealthy living conditions and social fragmentation during the nineteenth century, the well-designed suburban cul-de-sac became very popular among urban planners in Western countries from the 1960s on. The Dutch variant of the suburban cul-de-sac distinguishes itself by the meandering nature of the urban layout, the wide architectural variety, and the interconnectedness of the multiple small yards through cycling and pedestrian zones. The low-traffic area should provide a safe, quiet and rural living environment for urban dwellers (Vletter, 2004).

Since the 1980s, a substantial part of the body of social science research dealing with the suburban cul-de-sac design has highlighted the social advantages of the specific layout. Strong neighborhood ties and attachment among neighbors (Brown and Werner, 1985), the absence of negative externalities of traffic (such as noise, dirt, and fumes) (Asabere, 1990), increased safety (Hillier, 2004), and a low burglary risk (Johnson and Bowers, 2010) are only some of the emphasized research results. Although cauliflower neighborhoods in the Netherlands were differently designed than the more orderly, uniform suburban cul-de-sacs in other Western countries, such as the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia, similar advantages were reported for the Dutch variant (Constandse and Schonk, 1984; Kloprogge, 1975).

<sup>19</sup> This chapter builds on previously published material by the author: Wekker, F. (2016)



Initially, cauliflower neighborhoods were very popular among white, native Dutch, middle-class families. The child-friendly living environment, with its safe, inwardly focused yards, the multiple playgrounds and leisurely green spaces in between and around the yards, brought about a sense of communal familiarity – i.e. familiarity based on personal identification and clear boundaries to the outside world (see an elaboration of the definition in Chapter Three) – and safety amongst fellow residents. Reportedly, an “intense informal social contact ... through social calls and street parties” marked the social atmosphere in cauliflower neighborhoods in the early 1980s (Constandse and Schonk, 1984: 128, my translation).

Today, though, the opposite is the case: an increasing lack of cohesiveness and community spirit dominates contemporary social life, notably in these specific residential areas that were deliberately planned and built to facilitate community life (Vletter, 2004; Housing Corporation Ymere, 2009; Municipality of Haarlemmermeer, 2007, 2013; Ubink and Van der Steeg, 2011: 58).

Research shows that compared to contemporary neighborhoods with other architectural layouts, most cauliflower neighborhoods (88 %) across the Netherlands score below the Dutch average on aspects of “social cohesion” and “feelings of security” (Ubink and Van der Steeg, 2011: 58). Reportedly, current interaction between residents of urban yard neighborhoods is characterized by indifference and even hostility (Ubink and Van der Steeg, 2011: 119) rather than the “cozy” and affective social interaction initially reported by scholars in the 1970s and 1980s (Constandse and Schonk, 1984; Kloprogge, 1975). The decline of social cohesion and the popularity of the cauliflower neighborhoods have alarmed municipalities, local housing corporations and social organizations.

Criticism with regard to cauliflower neighborhoods mostly focuses on the design of the cul-de-sac. First, the meandering nature of the Dutch variant makes orientation difficult for residents and visitors, who struggle to find their way through the dead-end and turn-around streets. Second, the layout of these neighborhoods makes it hard to distinguish between the front and back of the homes, and thereby between private, collective, and public space (Nio, Jutten and Lofvers, 2011: 7). Moreover, a process of “downgrading” has been reported due to a decrease of average income and educational level of residents of cauliflower neighborhoods across the Netherlands. Housing corporations and housing estates, as well as municipalities, share a strong concern that the previously advantaged suburban cul-de-sacs will

become the disadvantaged neighborhoods of the future (Municipality of Haarlemmermeer, 2013, 2007; Ubink and Van der Steeg, 2011: 58; Nio, Jutten and Lofvers, 2011; Housing Corporation Ymere, 2009; Vletter, 2004).

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This chapter first examines the institutional framework, the underlying principles and aims, as well as the strategies of the urban community-building intervention of the 1970s and 1980s. Second, it ethnographically maps out ways the dynamics between contemporary residents of two cauliflower neighborhoods, Bornholm and Overbos in the Dutch city of Hoofddorp, focused on feelings of home of and among residents. Finally, it lays bare the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion at play in the everyday practices of and social interactions between residents. It thereby keeps a close eye on the outsiders that constitute the boundaries of the well-established local community of insiders.

## 4.2 THE INTERVENTION

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### **Institutional Framework**

The 1970s and 1980s marked a turning point in urban planning and architecture in the Netherlands. In these two decades one million houses were built in new residential areas on the fringes of Dutch cities, based upon the ideals of social cohesion and collectivity among residents. In response to the modernist urban planning of the 1950s and 1960s, characterized by large uniform housing blocks, broad streets and large open public spaces (De Jonge, 1960; Vletter, 2004), a new physical planning policy was established in the early 1970s that aimed to restore “human beings as the measure of all things” (Vletter, 2004; Ubink and Van der Steeg, 2011).

### **Underlying Aims and Assumptions**

The core aim of the physical intervention under scrutiny here was to enhance social bonding and feelings of belonging among young urban families through design of the physical environment.

The cauliflower neighborhoods were deliberately designed to counter the “impersonal” and “detached” social atmosphere that dominated relationships among neighboring families living in modernist housing blocks in Dutch cities in the 1950s and 1960s, and to restore Dutch urban family life – considered to be the primary sphere in which the “modern urban dweller” could find shelter and intimacy.

The ideals underpinning the cauliflower neighborhood design reflect the concerns of social scientists around the turn of the 19th century (elaborated upon in Chapter One), lamenting the loss of collectivity (Durkheim 2014[1893]; Wirth 2005[1938]), *gemeinschaft* (Tönnies 2001[1887]) and even the mental sanity of urban dwellers (Simmel 2002[1903]). Building on similar principles outlined by Wirth (2005[1938]: 35), who argued that living in the city deprives human beings of “the spontaneous self-expression, the morale, and the sense of participation that comes with living in an integrated society,” the cauliflower neighborhood design was meant to facilitate and foster integration and participation of urban families.

The underlying assumption of the physical community-building intervention under scrutiny is that integrated society and urban society are opposites, and therefore cauliflower neighborhoods should restore (rural) community life in an urban context to bring human beings back to ‘their nature’. Hence, the physical community-building intervention examined here must be considered an “anti-urban” rather than an “urban” intervention (cf. Young, 2011: 236).

#### *Reinforcing the Idea of the Neighborhood Unit*

A key concept in Dutch architecture of the 1970s was the idea of the “neighborhood unit” (Ubink & Van der Steeg; 2011, Vletter, 2004). First employed by the American scholar Clarence Perry (1939), this entails the idea of “a true sense of collectivity” among urban dwellers, by creating distinctive neighborhoods, each with its own character and “social-cultural” atmosphere (Jonge, 1960: 37).

Although condemned for its “social failure” by later generations, modernist architects and urban planners of the 1950s and 1960s had also cherished this idea of a cohesive neighborhood unit. They had expected that the heterogeneous urban population would get more socially involved, by living together under equal circumstances in large and uniform housing blocks. The massive, high-rise housing blocks constructed in the 1950s and 1960s,

though, turned out to increase individualization instead of a “sense of community” (Ibid.).

*“Dutch, German, English and American researchers have shown, independently of one another, that living closely together in high-rise construction blocks leads to a reserved attitude towards one’s neighbors. [...] There is evidence that intense contact between residents is possible when families live in single-family houses, within a socially homogeneous population.”*

(Jonge, 1960: 117).

According to De Jonge (1960) and other contemporaries (e.g., Hageraats, 1958), living in flats and in socially heterogeneous neighborhoods would lead to individualization and isolation of urban families.

In the 1970s, the idea of the neighborhood unit was fully re-invented by urban planners and architects. The ‘cozy’ residential areas that were erected between 1970 and 1989 were deliberately planned and designed for the purpose of encouraging a sense of collectivity, familiarity and belonging (Vletter, 2004; Ubink & Van der Steeg, 2011). Based on “lessons of the past,” low-rise, single-family houses and small-scale public spaces should now provide for the social encounters and bonding that was lacking in post-war housing estates.

#### **Community-building Strategies**

The elementary level of interpersonal space, many architects and urban planners now argued, should encourage encounters and interaction between families (Jonge, 1960; Vletter, 2004). To establish such interpersonal spaces, a new type of architecture and urban design should be created based on the “human measure”. In the words of the Dutch architect Aldo van Eyk (1962, cited by De Vletter, 2004: 41), such human measure implied creating urban spaces which were “simultaneously large and small, much and little, close and far away, simple and complex, orderly and chaotic, constant and variable, open and closed”.

Based on these principles, an urban planning policy was developed and institutionalized by the social-democratic administration of the Den Uyl cabinet (1973–1977). Light traffic zones and speed limits of 15 kilometers per hour on the “main roads” would allow young families to live in safety

and peace. *Cul-de-sacs* (*woonerven*) were constructed to stage “spontaneous” encounters between neighbors, to encourage residents’ self-expression and identification with the built environment (Ubink and Van der Steeg, 2011: 22). ‘Urban yards’ were at the core of what Dutch architecture at the time wanted to achieve: community and cohesion, safety, and a sense of belonging for urban families.

*“The cul-de-sac was an organizing principle for the new housing estates ... It provided an inward focus for small groups of dwellings ... It also recalled, even in its Dutch name (woonerf) [urban yard], a rural tradition recaptured within an urban context”.*

(Betsky, cited by De Vletter, 2004: 12-15).

#### *Bornholm and Overbos*

The cauliflower neighborhoods of Bornholm and Overbos, where the ethnographic research took place, were respectively constructed in 1979 and 1984. Bornholm and Overbos are among the last cauliflower neighborhoods built in the Netherlands, and both names refer to farms originally located there.

Due to the economic crisis of the 1980s, Overbos slightly differs from Bornholm; sharp budget cuts resulted in the construction of fewer yards, less architectural variety, a higher concentration of multi-family social housing flats, and more high-traffic areas. Nevertheless, the design is still considered to be cauliflower-like due to the “crops” of dwellings with their inward focus around the small yards (Ubink and Van der Steeg, 2011).

The municipality of Haarlemmermeer, of which Hoofddorp is a part, considers both neighborhoods as one delimited area within the city of Hoofddorp. The neighborhoods currently house almost 20,000 residents.

#### **The Cauliflower Neighborhoods Today**

As highlighted above, cauliflower neighborhoods such as Bornholm and Overbos under scrutiny here were primarily designed to provide a safe, quiet and sociable living environment for urban families. The urban planners and architects of the time put effort into creating neighborhoods according to their assumptions of what would attract such families.

#### *From Nuclear to Non-nuclear Households*

In the early 1980s, the new green and child-friendly suburbs attracted large numbers of young, middle-class, white native Dutch families. At the time, 56 % of the households in Bornholm consisted of parents with children. Sixty percent of the residents were under the age of 30, 38 % were between 25 and 34, and only 0.06 % were 65 or older (Sociografisch Bureau, 1983: 22). Today, “only” 36 % of Bornholm and Overbos households are nuclear families (two parents plus children). Single-parent families make up 7 % of households, but no less than 56 % of households are adults without children or (elderly) singles (Municipality of Haarlemmermeer, 2013: 139). Hence, the composition of the population of the cauliflower neighborhoods of the past has reversed, from 56 % nuclear families in the 1980s to 56 % non-nuclear households in 2013.

Bornholm and Overbos have followed the national trend of rapidly constructed housing estates “suffering” from the young-family-to-empty-nest demographical cycle. The children of the 1970s have grown up and left their parental homes, while the adults of the time have become the (single) elderly. Moreover, the ethnically homogeneous composition of the population has changed rapidly over the years due to the influx of immigrants into these neighborhoods (Ubink and Van der Steeg, 2011).

#### *Emancipation, Migration, Individualization*

As elaborated upon further above, the ambitions of Dutch policy-makers, urban planners, and architects of the 1970s were to prevent the social ills that plagued the post-war housing estates. Today, the same processes of isolation and social withdrawal among resident families have descended on the “cozily” designed cauliflower neighborhoods. Besides some specific factors connected to the specific design of these residential areas (as touched upon above), there are also more general processes that seem to play a role in the social aloofness among residents in (sub)urban areas.

As many scholars have argued, global processes of emancipation, migration, and individualization have left their traces on social life in (sub)urban neighborhoods (Permentier, Kullberg and Van Noije, 2013; Ubink and Van der Steeg, 2011; Wittebrood, Permentier and Pinkster, 2011). Also in Bornholm and Overbos, these three processes seem to have played a core role in the decline of social cohesion and the lack of community life that is nowadays reported (Municipality of Haarlemmermeer, 2013).

In the 1970s, as Kloprogge (1975) describes in his social science study into the social dynamics in cauliflower neighborhoods, particularly women with children played a core role in establishing and sustaining a strong community spirit in these residential areas. While their husbands earned a living, these housewives were attached to their homes and neighborhood (Kloprogge, 1975), interacting and socializing on a daily basis. However, in the 1980s, more and more Dutch women found paid jobs. As a result, most urban yards turned quiet during the working day, transforming them into “weekend estates” inhabited by people who no longer relied on the assistance of their neighbors (Constandse and Schonk, 1984; Ubink and Van der Steeg, 2011: 122). Now that most male and female residents work away from home, they mostly socialize outside of the neighborhood as well. Since the socio-spatial orientation of residents has dissipated over time, social bonding among them seems to have subsequently vanished.

Regarding processes of migration, it has been argued that the influx of immigrants into cauliflower neighborhoods across the Netherlands is also a cause for the aloofness between residents in these specific residential areas (Ubink and Van der Steeg, 2011): the increasing diversity of cultural backgrounds and lifestyles tends to make residents feel insecure about behavioral standards and norms, which leads to avoidance of social contact with supposed “strangers” (Ibid: 122).

Finally, referring to processes of individualization, the Municipality of Haarlemmermeer attributes the social detachment between today’s residents to individualism (Municipality of Haarlemmermeer, 2013: 81). Neighbors are no longer dependent on each other for informal support and social encounters. Based on quantitative research carried out by the local housing corporation Ymere (2007), as well as its own research (2009), the Municipality of Haarlemmermeer has concluded the core principle of the cauliflower neighborhood design, the *woonerf*, no longer suits contemporary residents:

*“Individualistic residents – who have grown averse to the enforced coziness of the urban yard – are literally drawing boundaries between their own individual sphere and that of others. Shacks, fences and parked cars function to separate the outside world from one’s own intimate sphere.”*

(Municipality of Haarlemmermeer, 2013: 81,  
my translation).

The alarming lack of social cohesion, livability and security in Bornholm and Overbos, as reported by the municipality and local housing corporation, has on the one hand pushed contemporary residents to move to adjacent neighborhoods with an urban layout that allows for more distance and privacy between households. On the other hand, new residents no longer choose to live in the cauliflower neighborhoods, but predominantly opt for the modern residential areas a few blocks away.

In sum, whereas the urban community-building intervention of the past had initially resulted in the emergence of an ethnically homogeneous, family-centered, cauliflower neighborhood community, characterized by collectivity and intense social engagement among neighbors, three decades later, the promise of collectivity that underpinned the design of Bornholm and Overbos has been shattered. Apparently, global processes of emancipation, migration, and individualization can scarcely be “counter-balanced” by an urban community-building intervention from the past.

## 4.3 FEELINGS OF HOME IN THE CAULIFLOWER NEIGHBORHOODS

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Finding one’s way through a cauliflower neighborhood is not an easy endeavor. I am trying to find the address where I am expected to have an interview with Mart and Timo, two brothers who were born and raised in Overbos. They are willing to show me around the neighborhood and share with me their experiences and memories of growing up in a cauliflower neighborhood. But, I can’t find their house. After wandering for half an hour through the labyrinth of interconnected urban yards with their little playgrounds, one popping up after the other, sometimes well-hidden behind a large green strip, I begin to fear I will miss my appointment with the brothers. And, perhaps worse, that I won’t be able to find my way back to the car. I had to park it at the entrance of the “woonerf”, marked by a sign indicating playing children and pedestrians determine the speed here.

There is no way to rush; no option to take a short route. The layout of the cauliflower neighborhood ‘forces’ me to enter multiple yards at a slow

walking pace. Now, I seem to have found the right ‘street’ – if one can call the urban yards ‘streets’ – where I am supposed to be. But it turns out to consist of several yards connected to each other by tiny paths. Moreover, the numbers of the houses don’t add up. It is as if every yard has its own logic of numbering its houses. How on earth do postmen find the addresses here to deliver their papers? Where the \*...\* am I?

Every now and then, I bump into a resident. At first, I say ‘hi’ to everyone I encounter. I feel that’s the way to do it here, in this village-like setting where it is hard to avoid others, but no one looks me in the eye or bothers to say anything back to me. All right, that behavior is familiar to me, having lived in the city of Amsterdam for over two decades now. Apparently, these urban yards are still *urban*. People clearly avoid me.

Since it is 2 pm, I figure children are still in school. I can imagine them flooding the little playgrounds in the urban yards in an hour from now, breaking the silence that is covering the neighborhood.

Twenty-five minutes after I parked my car at the entrance of the *woonerf*, I finally find the right address. I am so late, and I feel ashamed. Timo opens the door, and when I start apologizing he laughs out loud: “No worries. No one from outside the neighborhood can find our house the first time. You made it quickly compared to others!”

[Research Diary, September 13, 2010].

### Being Out of Place

As promised, Timo and his brother Mart showed me around the neighborhood of Overbos, guiding me through the green strips, the playgrounds, the parks, the school where they had spent their youth. Growing up here for them must have been like living in paradise, as I could tell from their sparkling eyes and radiant smiles while reliving their childhood adventures. Reminiscing their childhood, the brothers also expressed feelings of loss. Mart said:

*“I miss the old days. We used to build huts everywhere. We would play “war” with other huts, that was fun. It’s all changed. And I know that’s not fair to say, because I have just outgrown the place, I guess.”*

(Mart, 18, Overbos).

Nowadays, as Mart and Timo reported, there is “nothing to do” for them in Bornholm and Overbos, except hanging around in the playgrounds – which are clearly not meant for them but for younger children. When I asked Mart if he was planning to move to another place, he responded by saying he would like to live in a “real” city like Amsterdam. But due to financial constraints, he had no choice but to stay and live with his parents in Overbos. “Obviously, I would rather leave.” His brother added:

*“It’s mainly because of the neighbors. They start complaining as soon as I start playing drums. These houses are so noisy, you know. But I want to play. I just hate the meddling of all these people here”.*

(Timo, 16, Overbos).

As the accounts of Mart and Timo show, while both still feel strongly attached to the physical environment of their youth, they no longer feel they ‘belong’ to the place. They could clearly show to me how *woonerven* – with the houses placed around a playground and the windows looking out on it – are ideal for keeping an eye on young children playing outside. On the other hand, the spatial design makes it difficult for youngsters to find unguarded spaces where they can do as they please. While adult residents clearly express their annoyance to youngsters regarding their presence in the yards, hanging around in the playgrounds that are clearly meant for children – by calling the police, shouting out of the window, requesting the youngsters to leave the yard – these expressions of social control account for an experience of being out of place for respondents in their late teens – a sense of loss of a space that once was ‘naturally’ theirs.

Indeed, many of my adult respondents mentioned the playgrounds are not meant for youngsters, confirming the accounts of being out of place of my younger respondents:

*“These youths sit on the slide. They leave their bottles in the sandbox. Every morning I clean up all the glass and broken pieces, because later that day children will play there. It’s really annoying. These youths should find their own place”.*

(Lilianne, 52, Bornholm).

Residents were consciously aware of who the neighborhoods were designed for, and actively negotiating these underlying principles. While youths

tried to appropriate space according to their needs and lifestyles, adults – even those without children, like Lilianne – made an effort to restore the status quo and safeguard the urban yards for children, who should be able to play freely and safely, just like the generations of children have done before them.

I found that it is not only youths that feel out of place in contemporary cauliflower neighborhoods. During the course of my fieldwork, many other categories of respondents – the majority even – also had a sense of not belonging to the place, of not being able to connect to fellow residents or to express themselves the way they wanted. At the same time, during the course of my fieldwork, it became clear that some other categories of respondents were fully embedded and immersed in smaller local communities around the urban yards. What invisible but insurmountable boundaries marked the categories of those who belonged to the group of “insiders” and those who were designated to stay “outsiders” in the setting of the cauliflower neighborhoods?

### The Established and the Outsiders

In *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, Erving Goffman (1980[1963]) wrote:

*“Social settings establish the categories of persons likely to be encountered there. The routines of social intercourse in established settings allow us to deal with anticipated others without special attention or thought. When a stranger comes into our presence, then, first appearances are likely to enable us to anticipate his category and attributes, his “social identity”.*

(Goffman, 1980: 2).

In a similar vein, Norbert Elias and John L. Scotson (1994) showed in their influential work *The Established and the Outsiders* how an established community is able to create standards for ‘normal behavior’ through the density of their networks. Through existing social relationships, residents can constitute and reproduce ideas about what types of behavior and which people are appropriate in the established setting, and which are not. Newcomers would not dispose of these existing social relations and are, thus, not in the position to influence or recreate these standards. Elias and Scotson (1994) argue that outsiders do start to identify with their deviant status,

which seems to confirm the ideas of ‘normalcy’ of the established group. As the empirical material presented below shows, this was definitely the case with my respondents, who were designated to the category of “outsiders”. Interestingly enough, in the cauliflower neighborhoods of Bornholm and Overbos, however, it is not the newcomer per se who is in the position of outsider.

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Following Goffman, Elias and Scotson, I argue that cauliflower neighborhoods are *materialized and deliberately constructed ‘social settings’* which – once established – create categories of ‘normal’ persons and ‘deviant’ ones, based on the social and personal attributes they carry with them in this particular setting. This approach is very helpful to understanding why certain categories of respondents I worked with did not ‘fit’ in the rural and traditional Dutch setting of the cauliflower neighborhoods, and will probably never do so. As the empirical material shows, personal attributes are weighed up by the established residents and judged either ‘normal’ or not. It took me a while, however, to comprehend why certain respondents gave such cheerful accounts of full inclusion and social embeddedness in the local community, while others felt so clearly excluded from social contact.

One of the first residents I interviewed and accompanied on his walks through the neighborhood of Bornholm was William, a man in his early sixties, born and raised in Ethiopia. He told me he felt like a stranger among his neighbors, even after ten years of residence. He reported how fellow residents ignored him and turned their heads away when he passed by – similar to the experiences I had during my first walk through the neighborhood, when I desperately tried to find the address of my interviewees. Furthermore, William confided, no neighbor had ever accepted his invitation to come over for a cup of coffee. He shared some despairing thoughts with me:

*“You start to think “am I not good enough, not sociable enough?” You really start doubting yourself. Yeah, and then after a while you start to feel so isolated. And down, you know. How can I improve myself? What did I do wrong? It’s really hard to get used to it, to adapt here. I can’t help it. I’m a sociable guy. I need to talk to people”.*

(William, 61, Bornholm).

As William explained, he had actually chosen to rent a house around a *woonerf* (urban yard) because it had reminded him of the *kraal* (corral) – a number of huts grouped in a circle or crescent – in the Ethiopian village he had lived in before. But, the promise of community life he saw reflected in the design of the urban yards turned out to have little to do with the social setting in which he found himself. It is the contrast between village life in Ethiopia and Bornholm, and the unfulfilled expectation of the type of social embeddedness he would find in the cauliflower neighborhood, that makes life in Bornholm so difficult for him:

*“I have lived in Bornholm for ten years now, and I don’t even know the name of my neighbor. In Ethiopia, that would be impossible, it would be a shame. And I do feel ashamed about it. I don’t know the people I live amongst.”*

Whereas William had hoped to find the social solidarity and proximity associated with village life, he instead faces a typical urban and detached social atmosphere (cf. Simmel, 2002[1903]; Wirth, 2005[1938]).

The self-conscious awareness of William of being out of place is what Jarret Zigon (2007) has called a “moral breakdown” (137). He describes it as a situation in which “the [...] subject no longer dwells in the comfort of the familiar, unreflective being-in-the-world, but rather stands uncomfortably and uncannily in the situation-at-hand” (Zigon 2007: 138).

Many of my informants reported such a moral breakdown. They found themselves unable, even after many years of residency, to become familiar with the detached social behavior of neighbors. As William reported, he experienced his inability to adapt to the social environment in Bornholm as a personal failure. However, I suggest it is a social one. Within this particular social setting, he is one of the unfortunate individuals who does not fit naturally in the established “categories of persons likely to be encountered there” (Goffman, 1980[1963]: 2). But why? Why William, who had tried so hard to become part of a local community?

Other informants who were not born and raised in the Netherlands gave similar accounts of feeling like a stranger. A Turkish woman told me:

*“No one ever said “hi” to me on het pleintje (the little urban yard). So one day I figured I had to start myself. I brought a homemade*

*cake for my neighbors. The man opened the door and just stood there. Then he said he was not keen on taking food from strangers. I wished I could just vanish at that moment”.*

(Aisha, 32, Bornholm).

At first, when I heard these accounts of foreign-born respondents, as well as taking into consideration my own experiences during my walks in the neighborhood as a person of Surinamese descent, I thought racism and xenophobia would explain the aloofness of white, “native Dutch” residents. I figured that in such an intentionally designed, traditional Dutch social setting, immigrants and their descendants would inherently belong to the category of “outsiders.” Statements made by some of my white, native Dutch respondents confirmed this, for example Annie’s: “I think we all long for the past. Because the neighborhood is not a village anymore. It’s all import now, you see.” (Annie, 82, Overbos). Or Joop’s statement:

*“In the beginning life was fine here, because only normal people lived in this block. You know, people that behave normal. Now it’s all Surinamese people. Or not Surinamese, Antillean people ... Surinamese people are, in general, very nice. But those Moroccan people... I know I’m not supposed to say this, but they’re just not that proper”.*

(Joop, 84, Overbos).

Based on these accounts, as well as on the scholarly insights presented above on how processes of migration have negatively affected social relationships between residents with different ethnic backgrounds in cauliflower neighborhoods (Ubink and Van Steeg, 2011), one might think the loss of feelings of home among white, native Dutch respondents is connected to such an influx of immigrants, which might have turned the former into an ethnic minority in ‘their own’ neighborhood. Statistics of the Municipality of Haarlemmermeer (allecijfers.nl, 2020) show otherwise: the majority of the residents (71.5% in Bornholm, and 74.7% in Overbos) is still of native Dutch origin. To what extent, then, did racism and xenophobia play a role in the social aloofness among residents?

#### *Being Normal*

As we have seen above, Joop mentioned specific ethnic groups when describing which neighbors he considered “normal” (native Dutch), “almost normal” (Surinamese people), and “not normal” (Antillean and Moroccan

people). When I asked Joop to elaborate on what he meant by “normal people,” he explained:

*For example, a couple with children that used to live at the end of the street. They would sit outside in the summertime. And they would ask me to drink coffee with them. That was nice. I miss that. I really miss that. I used to invite people for coffee, but they never invited me back. That's what I miss the most, having people around, the sociability.*

Joop, himself a widower and father of an adult son, obviously associated this kind of “normal” behavior – being sociable and inviting someone over for a cup of coffee – primarily with “native Dutch people.” His nostalgic description reveals longing for a lost, and predominantly Dutch, neighborhood life – family life as it had been in the early years in Bornholm and Overbos. Joop’s remarks not only show how he had lost contact with family life in the neighborhood by becoming a single elderly resident, but also how intersections with race and ethnicity come to the fore when talking about (the lack of) belonging.

Although racism and xenophobia might to some extent account for the social aloofness between residents of different ethnic backgrounds (see also Chapter Three), it does not fully explain the contrasting experiences of other ethnic minority residents I interviewed. In fact, many of them did not report experiencing discrimination or social distance in Bornholm and Overbos at all, but instead described a deep sense of belonging to the social community of their *woonerf*, resulting in strong home feelings as their belonging was combined with a deep sense of safety, familiarity and control.<sup>20</sup> Mohammed, a man of Moroccan descent and father of a young family, told me:

*“We're really happy here. My wife and children can go out with their friends. In Morocco that would not have been possible without me guarding them. We have close contacts with our neighbors. If someone asks me for help, I help them. And the other way round ... I will never return to my homeland, because I am rooted here”.*

(Mohammed, 42, Bornholm).

<sup>20</sup> As elaborated upon in Chapter One, belonging to a community is one of four core conditions that establish and sustain feelings of home. Besides belonging, the other conditions to feel at home are safety, familiarity and a sense of control.

Jeanne, a mother of Surinamese descent, presented a similar account:

*“In the beginning, we noticed neighbors looking at us, from behind their curtains. I figured they hadn't seen black people before. But we thought “that will pass.” And it did. Our Dutch neighbor became like a father to us. He made us feel at home. It is home now”.*

(Jeanne, 50, Bornholm).

Fatima, a Turkish mother, said:

*“It's just perfect here. Everything is nearby, the school, the football club, the swimming pool. The kids can play outside on het pleintje. It's really safe here. I won't move to another village before the boys have grown up”.*

(Fatima, 37, Bornholm).

While I first understood William’s and Aisha’s, as well as Annie’s and Joop’s stories as exemplifying the racialized character of social exclusion, I found that race or ethnic background did not completely account for the frosty atmosphere. Even William, who genuinely suffered from the socially detached atmosphere around his *woonerf*, emphasized: “It has nothing to do with skin color. I see some white people doing exactly the same thing: they turn their heads away when they pass some other white person on the street. That’s not normal, is it?” It became clear that, independent of ethnic background or skin color, some people are fully embedded in their social environment while others are completely shut out.

Many white, native Dutch adults gave similar accounts to William’s and Aisha’s. For example Kees (49), a single man, simply told me: “It’s just ‘good morning’ and ‘good night’; that’s all. Neighbors don’t talk to me, and I leave it that way.” Mieke (74), a widow, who has been living in Bornholm since the 1970s, reflected: “It is because we had no children. When I said ‘Hello’ to a neighbor, she would turn her head away. It has always been awful here.” Marianne (43), living with a partner without children, explained how she began keeping aloof from neighbors herself: “You try it once, you try it twice, and after the third time you ignore your neighbors as much as they ignore you.”



### *Physical and Social Insecurity*

Also (single) older residents seem to have a hard time feeling ‘at home’ in their cauliflower neighborhood. As the Municipality of Haarlemmermeer (2013) reports, some older residents experience feeling unsafe due to “the spatial design of these typical *woonerf* neighborhoods: there are too many dreary corners and unclear passages between private and public space” (Municipality of Haarlemmermeer, 2013: 80, my translation).

Indeed, especially single, elderly respondents reported feelings of insecurity and social isolation. When I asked them in focus groups or individually how they liked their neighborhood, many of them would start complaining about the design: “It’s a dead end here. No one just passes by. Sometimes it’s just too quiet, I think. What if something happens to me? Who will notice?” (Nel, 79, Bornholm). The car-free streets indeed created a life-threatening situation when the ambulance could not reach Nel’s house when she had a heart attack. She nearly died.

Other older respondents who lived by themselves described the obstacles they faced when carrying heavy bags with groceries from the bus stop or parking lot to their homes. They explicitly blame the car-free design of the neighborhood for this, because of the impossibility to park the car in front of one’s house to carry groceries inside. Also caregivers and other visitors – as I had experienced myself – had a hard time finding their houses, which made the elderly feel anxious about the isolated location of their homes. As they indicated, elderly residents experience feelings of being lost, isolated, and physically insecure in their cauliflower neighborhood, resulting in a stark sense of having lost their feelings of home.<sup>21</sup>

### *Young Urban Families in charge*

As shown above, different categories of residents – youths, adults of different ethnic backgrounds without children, and elderly people – appear to be “out of place” in the physical environment and social setting of the cauliflower neighborhood. Their lifestyles, their needs and daily practices do not easily fit the layout of the neighborhood, or the social environment in which they find themselves. Let us now take a closer look into how the categories of “insiders” and “outsiders” are defined and sustained in Bornholm and Overbos.

<sup>21</sup> Interestingly enough, none of my eighty respondents reported feeling unsafe due to the potential of being hurt or mugged by others. This might be related to the finding that burglary risk and crime levels are lower in cul-de-sacs (Johnson and Bowers, 2010; Hillier, 2004).

As we have seen above, Joop refined his definition of “normal people” by pointing to a couple with children. This particular definition of “normalcy” was expressed to me in various ways by respondents:

*“We have het pleintje. And it connects, you know. I’m friends with all the kids round here. Our parents have become friends as well. That’s just how it works. And I believe it also depends on how you behave. When you don’t behave normally, people will think “what kind of a person is that? I won’t talk to him.” For example, people around het pleintje who don’t have children, they behave differently ... They, well, they keep their distance”.*

(Ahmed, 12, Bornholm).

In Ahmed’s view, having children is the primary attribute that marks normalcy. It thus defines the boundaries he considers relevant when distinguishing between who belongs to the place and who does not.

As Goffman (1980[1963]) showed – and as has also been highlighted in Chapters Two and Three – belonging to and feeling at home in a physical and social environment implies being perceived as “normal” by others. Being accepted and recognized as “one of us” allows for deep feelings of social embeddedness and belonging. Ahmed’s categorization is confirmed as relevant by the report of the Municipality of Haarlemmermeer (2013):

*“Children tend to be the major force for social bonding between neighbors: parents set up times for the children to meet, invite each other on birthday parties and trips, and ask each other for help. Other types of social interaction, between other categories of residents, barely occurs in Bornholm and Overbos”.*

(Municipality of Haarlemmermeer, 2013: 140, my translation).

### *Personal and Dominant familiarity: The Powerful Role of Mothers*

In Chapter Three, I have introduced two types of familiarity: personal and dominant familiarity. I defined personal familiarity as mutual recognition between residents based on similar life experiences, interests, hobbies or lifestyles, but also on shared intersections of gender, sexuality and age. Dominant familiarity refers to the mutual recognition between those who consider themselves part of the dominant group in a national or local setting, as they are supported by dominant institutional structures, both material

and social. In this case study, it turned out that a combination of personal and dominant familiarity strongly supported mothers to feel and present themselves as ‘naturally’ belonging to a place, thereby exerting full control over public space. Lillianne, who did not have any children, confided in me:

*“I sometimes just close the curtains, during daytime in the middle of the summer. So I won’t have to see these mothers sitting nicely together on bet pleintje. They make very clear their little party is not meant for me. No... I only feel at home inside my own house, not outside.”*

(Lillianne, 52, Bornholm).

Lillianne explicitly names *mothers* sitting in the playgrounds while their children are playing around them. Although global emancipatory processes might have resulted in both female and male residents working during the day, nowhere in Europe do women work as little as in the Netherlands (Emancipatiemonitor, 2018). With 67% of the women aged between 30 and 35 working part time, and mothers spending twice as much time caring for children as their male partners (ibid.), not much of the traditional model of the (heterosexual) nuclear family has changed since the 1970s and 1980s – mothers in the Netherlands are still the major force behind raising children, organizing children’s parties and arranging playdates.

Lillianne, a married woman without children living in a cauliflower neighborhood, is very well aware of being “strange” in this setting. She has a different lifestyle than the women who have so easily appropriated the urban yard to their needs; she has no children to take care of, and she spends most of her time doing voluntary work outside the neighborhood. Despite her attempts in the past, Lillianne is not able to establish a relationship with the other women living around the urban yard. They have a social network of their own, revolving around their young children. To avoid anxiety and distress, Lillianne sees no other option than to withdraw herself from the local community and to stay inside the house as much as possible: closing the curtains, avoiding the sight of the socially interacting mothers.

This ostentatious retreat from community life cannot go unnoticed in a physical setting so evidently designed to produce sociability. It is therefore re-condemned as “strange behavior” by especially the mothers and their children (see Ahmed’s account further above) living around the *pleintjes*. As the Municipality of Haarlemmermeer (2013: 81) reported, residents em-

bedded in a social network through their children are able to “stand tall together” against nuisance in their yards and restore the peace according to their shared norms, while residents without strong social networks seem to be discouraged from using the *woonerven* for their own needs. Not having children – i.e. not being engaged in the practices of daily family life, meeting other parents in the schoolyards, organizing children’s parties and trips together – means having fewer possibilities to access the social network and less power to influence or manipulate its standards.

Hence, in this case study it has become clear how a combination of personal and dominant familiarity can support a very specific category of residents to feel strongly at home in their neighborhood, and retain their central position while their numerical superiority is dwindling.

## 4.4 THE EMPOWERING EFFECT OF MUTUAL RECOGNITION

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This last point, that the “outsiders” already outnumber the “insiders”, is salient: how can we understand the relatively strong feelings of home among young families, while the youths, the elderly, the singles and couples without children outnumber them? Why is there no sense of community and solidarity among the “outsiders”?

As we have seen in Chapter Three, subdominant familiarity – i.e. recognizing each other as belonging to the same marginalized category of people in a certain setting – can result in a collective sense of empowerment and resistance against the status quo. In this specific case of the cauliflower neighborhoods, it is not hard to imagine how single residents without young children could become closely involved with one another, how childless couples would barbecue together in their spacious gardens, or how the elderly gather around the *pleintjes*, sitting and chatting together until sunset. Why do all of the sociable encounters the urban design of the cauliflower neighborhood allows for seem not to apply to the majority of its residents?

Young people, however, do possess the audacity to confiscate the playgrounds and make public space their own. They actually do seem to find a

way and bide their time in small groups in the playgrounds of Bornholm and Overbos – to the chagrin of the other residents, including those who do not have small children. For Lilianne, the presence of youths hanging out and drinking alcohol in the playground means a double confirmation of her weak social position on the *woonerf*. While she fully complies with, and even guards the informal standards of family life that are enforced through the urban design, she does not know how to become part of the social network established around the playground herself. Thereby, she does not feel the power to correct the youngsters who trample the normative standards she wishes to protect, due to her lack of being part of such a social network (see also Municipality of Haarlemmermeer, 2013: 81).

Apparently, the mutual recognition of youngsters as being part of the same group of marginalized individuals in this urban setting does produce a sense of empowerment and resistance among them. Together, they start to appropriate public space according to their own needs and wishes, regardless of the dominant social and physical structures that clearly do not support their lifestyle.

*The difference between the empowered practices of the youngsters and the painful acceptance of being out of place of other categories of residents hides in the fact that the latter do not recognize each other as part of the same marginalized group. In the case of the young people, we can thus indeed speak of subdominant familiarity for mutual recognition is at play and connects them. In the case of the elderly, the childless singles and couples in this setting, however, mutual recognition of their shared marginalized position is lacking, and therefore no subdominant familiarity is established among them. As a result, those individuals experience their lack of social embeddedness as a personal failure instead of an institutional one, eventually leading to a loss of home feelings in their own neighborhood.*

### **Being deprived of the possibility to bond**

One could assume, taking into consideration the processes of emancipation, migration and individualization elaborated upon above, that residents who do not belong to nuclear households might not wish to live closely together with other residents and are not inclined to be involved in residential social life in Bornholm and Overbos. In that case, it would be their individualistic dispositions that account for the cold and detached social atmosphere reported by so many respondents.

During the course of my fieldwork, I grew convinced that detached and hostile social relations between neighbors in Bornholm and Overbos do not so much result from residents' assumed desire to keep their distance, but instead from an urban design that does not allow all residents to equally bond. The physical environment of the cauliflower neighborhood holds the promise of a local community, but instead impedes the majority of contemporary inhabitants to become part of it. I have found that members of non-nuclear households long for a sense of collectivity as much as my other respondents. In fact, many of them moved to Bornholm and Overbos to live in closer proximity to others and with the expectation of finding a strong, social network there. Lilianne told me:

*“In Amsterdam we were used to living quite isolated, so we figured in such a village you will probably be more involved with your neighbors. That’s why we came here in the first place. But now we don’t have any social contact anymore, with anyone”.*

(Lilianne, 52, Bornholm).

Reportedly, Lilianne and her husband did not expect neighbors in the city of Amsterdam to be sociable. It was their desire for more social contact that actually brought them to the “village-like” setting of Bornholm. Despite their efforts to socially bond with fellow residents, Lilianne – like many other respondents – reported an unforeseen but very present form of social exclusion around her *woonerf*.

Notably, the specific design of the cauliflower neighborhood, with its small groups of dwellings, roused ideals and expectations of social bonding. Thus, despite the current, more general tendency in cauliflower neighborhoods of increased social aloofness between urban dwellers, my respondents did not wish to live segregated. At the same time, they seemed unable to bond with the small communities of young families living around the *woonerven*, or with residents who are not part of a nuclear family household, like themselves.

I suggest that the static environment of the cauliflower neighborhoods produces an advantage for contemporary young families to maintain and re-establish their social networks around the *woonerven*, even though their numbers are fading. The playgrounds are still “obviously meant for children.” This implicit norm was even maintained by Lilianne, who cleanses the playground daily before the children living around her yard return

from school. Instead of appropriating public space according to her own needs and lifestyle – which possibly would suit many other members of non-nuclear households as well – Lilianne confirms, through her daily cleansing practices, that the children ‘naturally’ belong to the place and that it is not her call to use the playground for other purposes.

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In a neighborhood so tangibly designed for young nuclear families, social categories of “insiders” and “outsiders” seem almost impossible to change through personal effort, but all the same produce feelings of personal failure. Sooner or later, most of these “outsiders” give up trying to be socially involved. Despite their efforts to adapt and integrate, these residents continued to feel that their behavior is inappropriate – or “not good enough,” in William’s words. It is mainly this category of people who have started to fence off their private space, as has been reported by the Municipality of Haarlemmermeer (2013).

When I asked respondents of non-nuclear households what made it so difficult for them to socialize with residents with lifestyles similar to their own, most of them responded by saying: “I would not know where to meet these people.” Besides the playgrounds, there are no other places where people can sit, talk and meet. There are no cafés and there is no library. “We used to have two discotheques to go to, but now there are always social workers around, subsidized by the municipality. They make you feel like your mother is watching you” (Mart, 18, Overbos). Or, as Eva (41) told me: “We need a place, managed by residents themselves, where we can sit and drink coffee in peace.”

Apparently, the solution to enhance subdominant familiarity among the numerical majority living in the cauliflower neighborhoods lies in providing spaces where children are not the pivotal motivation for social intercourse. However, in a neighborhood so tangibly designed and structured to support young families, the current majority of residents are not provided the possibility to easily bond and appropriate public space according to their needs. I found that the naturalized dominance of young families was so deeply incorporated by all residents, including the designated outsiders of this setting, that the latter would not even consider themselves part of a marginalized *group* in the given setting. Rather, they perceived themselves as individuals who were simply and inevitably out of place.

## 4.5 DISCUSSION

### INSIDERS AND OUTSIDERS BY INSTITUTIONAL DESIGN

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The urban community-building intervention of the 1970s and 1980s, which aimed at restoring the ideals of family life through the urban design of the Dutch cauliflower neighborhoods, turns out to cast its shadow on social dynamics among contemporary residents.

As the ethnographic material above has shown, the physical and deliberately designed social setting of the cauliflower neighborhoods produces specific categories of “insiders” and “outsiders”, based on gender, age and types of household. The lack of social embeddedness and experiences of social exclusion reported by youths, adults without children, as well as the (single) elderly, stand in stark contrast to the accounts of strong feelings of home of young families – primarily produced through the strong local role of mothers with young children. The family-based architecture of the cauliflower neighborhood turns out to ‘naturalize’ the lifestyles of nuclear family households, while it does not provide sufficient possibilities for other categories of contemporary residents – who notably make up the majority of the residential population – to express themselves and appropriate public space accordingly.

Despite the attempts of residents of non-nuclear households to become part of the local communities around their yards, these attempts have not achieved the desired effect, sometimes even after years of trying. Rather, the social constraints exerted by the built environment turn out to undermine their efforts. The state-supported community-building intervention of the past, aiming to increase feelings of home among urban families, has unintentionally resulted in the experience of a loss of home for many contemporary residents of Dutch cauliflower neighborhoods.

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Furthermore, whereas social science research has highlighted the role of processes of emancipation, migration and individualization in the establishment of social distance among urban dwellers (Permentier, Kullberg

and Van Noije, 2013; Ubink and Van der Steeg, 2011; Wittebrood, Permentier and Pinkster, 2011), this case study has shown that: 1. Community life in the cauliflower neighborhoods of Bornholm and Overbos is still highly gendered, and mothers are still the driving force behind sustaining it; 2. Neither the proportion of immigrants, nor racism and xenophobia, account for the social aloofness between residents in these urban settings; 3. Instead of an assumed individualistic disposition, urban dwellers in Bornholm and Overbos strongly wish and try to become part of a local community.

Based on these findings, it is important to reconsider to what extent structural processes such as emancipation, migration and individualization can be understood, and whether and how they play out at the micro level of everyday life. This research shows that social cohesion and community life cannot be reduced to individual motivations, lifestyles or dispositions of urban dwellers only. The physical setting in which human beings find themselves does play a role in how social dynamics and power relations are structured, and which categories of people are enabled to or impeded from deeply feeling at home. This concurs with Saunders and Williams (1988), who have argued it is the “physical setting through which basic forms of social relations and social institutions are constituted and reproduced” (82).

Many social scientists (e.g., Uzzell, Pol and Badenas, 2002; Low and Altman, 1992), however, have pointed out that the physical setting does not determine social relations, but does play a role in “processes of identification, cohesion, and satisfaction” (Uzzell, Pol and Badenas, 2002: 29). I argue that the determining features of the physical environment and of interventions through urban design must not be underestimated when it comes to constituting structural conditions for inclusion and exclusion on the local level.

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Moreover, analysis of the ethnographic data nuances the thesis presented in other social science research on social inclusion and exclusion (e.g. Elias and Scotson, 1994), that newcomers are designated to hold the position of the outsider. Many of my informants who had just moved to Bornholm and Overbos reported feeling at home “immediately” due to the warm-hearted welcome of their neighbors, while some other respondents never became included even after a decade of residency.

In the case of the cauliflower neighborhoods, the lifestyle of nuclear families is considered to be normal and familiar – even when members of these families haven’t met before, they recognize each other as ‘one of us’. In a setting designed to be child-friendly, social traffic is largely regulated by the in-built informal social control of the *woonerven*. Young families can much more easily become embedded in the social environment, as their lifestyles suit the physical environment. The social network that smoothly incorporates these families helps the swift exchange and the consistent re-establishment of normative standards. Here, it is not so much the density of a historically established local community through which the standards of normal behavior and normal persons to be encountered there are constituted and reproduced, but rather the traditional design of the physical environment that plays a pivotal part.

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Finally, the finding that the old majority group of young families has now turned into a numerical minority, but at the same time has retained its dominant position, suggests that *institutional dominance plays an important role in social interactions in everyday life*. In contrast to the argument made in studies on super-diversity (e.g., Crul, 2016; Vertovec, 2007, 2015) that, once the old majority group turns into a minority, power dynamics on the ground will change accordingly,<sup>22</sup> my empirical data shows that old majority groups that are numerically declining can still retain their institutional dominance, when physical, social and symbolic (infra-)structures are literally designed for and supportive of their shared lifestyles.

Based on the majority-minority thesis, it could be expected that the majority of non- nuclear household members would have gained the power over time to appropriate space and informal norms according to their needs and lifestyles. Instead, they turn out to still be forced to adjust to the informal rules and lifestyle of the numerical minority. Hence, when backed up and supported by material structures and institutional design, numerical dominance might reduce over time, while institutional dominance can remain untouched.

<sup>22</sup>The body of work I refer to primarily deals with ethnic and racial majority groups that turn into numerical minorities in majority-minority cities, such as New York, Berlin, Brussels and also Amsterdam, where no single ethnic group still outnumbers the other. Here, ‘majority’ primarily refers to numerical dominance, whereas I propose the term ‘majority’ should also include institutional dominance.

In summary, four decades after the physical community intervention of the cauliflower neighborhood was established and materialized, the underlying aims and principles reflected in the urban design still produce the categories of those who can call the neighborhood their rightful home, and those who cannot. With the majority of inhabitants today being members of non-nuclear family households, an increasing lack of social cohesion and community life has become inevitable in a physical environment meant to restore urban family life of the past. While the physical intervention does arouse very strong feelings of home among a minority group of residents, who turn out to be the insiders-by-design, the question remains how residents of the majority group of non-nuclear household members will ever be able to feel equally at home.





AFFECTING

FEELINGS

OF

HOME

CHAPTER

**5**

## 5.0 AFFECTING FEELINGS OF HOME THROUGH COMMUNITY-BUILDING INTERVENTIONS

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This thesis has dealt with how community-building interventions in Dutch urban settings attempt to create a sense of local belonging among residents, and subsequently how this affects feelings of home of the residents involved. More precisely, it has looked into: 1. The underlying assumptions, aims and strategies of three community-building interventions; 2. How those influence social dynamics between the residents involved; 3. How categories of local insiders and outsiders are shaped; and finally, 4. How and in what ways this affects feelings of home of the involved individuals.

As established in Chapter One, “feelings emerge in specific social situations, expressing in the individual’s bodily consciousness the rich spectrum of forms of human social interaction and relationships” (Bericat, 2016: 495). With regards to *feelings of home*, those emerge when individuals experience a sense of belonging, familiarity with the social and physical environment, a sense of safety and control to appropriate space according to one’s own needs and wishes (see for example, Boccagni, 2017; Duyvendak, 2011; Yuval-Davis, 2011; Hage, 1997). By following various interventions that aimed at enhancing a sense of local belonging among residents, I wanted to learn more about the interplay between the different aspects of ‘home’ – i.e. belonging, familiarity, safety and control – and aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of how deliberate, institutionalized community-building strategies to enhance belonging would in the end affect the overall feelings of home of residents involved.

During a longitudinal and intersectional ethnographic study, conducted between 2010 and 2018 in various neighborhoods in the Dutch capital city of Amsterdam and the middle-sized city of Hoofddorp, I focused on two social community-building interventions and one physical intervention in urban space. Unlike most other studies dealing with community-building interventions (e.g. Ohmer and Korr, 2006; McLeroy et al., 2003; Wandersman and Florin, 2003; Mattessich, Monsey & Roy, 1997), the main focus of this research project was not so much on whether the interventions were objec-

tively effective or successful in fulfilling their state-supported goals and objectives, but rather on the feelings and experiences of the residents involved.

Combining a structuralist-constructionist with an intersectional approach helped me to keep an eye on the larger structures in and social intersections upon which respondents find themselves and that shape individual feelings and experiences. Additionally, it allowed me to not lose sight of individuals’ ability to act upon, deal with or resist the coercive nature of such structures. Furthermore, this study has built on a large body of social science literature that deals with the politics and complexities of ‘home’ and belonging, the barriers to outsiders that must be erected in order to create feelings of home and belonging, as well as the strong narratives of ‘us’ and ‘them’ that emerge through processes of identification and cohesion (e.g., Boccagni, 2017; Fukuyama, 2014; Duyvendak, 2011; Yuval-Davis, 2011; Hansen and Verkaaik, 2009; Hage, 2000; Ahmed, 1999; Butler, 2011[1993]; Douglas, 1991).

Doing research on feelings of home is in essence a dialectic endeavor: in order to try to understand in-depth what makes people feel at home, it also requires a deep understanding of the opposite – how and when people lack those feelings, or experience feelings of un-home. Moreover, doing research on feelings of home implies looking into social relations: feelings of home never stand alone, are never purely individual but rather come into being in relation to others. During the course of my fieldwork, I experienced how the strong feelings of home of some always stood in stark contrast to the lack of those feelings of others. Taking into account the oppositional and relational character of feelings of home has made me realize that state-supported community-building attempts to increase the feelings of home of specific residential groups are inherently exclusionary practices, despite often being framed as attempts to create “inclusivity”.

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In this concluding chapter, I will first summarize and compare the main findings of the three case studies. Second, I will discuss the important role of the four different types of familiarity that I have introduced in order to better understand why and how some categories of residents seem to feel at home ‘naturally’, while others struggle to belong to the local community and do not seem to be able to feel at home in their neighborhood. Third, I will discuss the implications of these findings for social science research on ‘home’ and belonging, as well as on policy-making.



## 5.1 BUILDING BELONGING THROUGH SOCIAL AND PHYSICAL DESIGN

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The three interventions at the heart of this study are all examples of state-supported social engineering, which has a long historical tradition in the Netherlands. The Neighbors groups (Chapter Two) and the Community Restaurant (Chapter Three) are social community-building interventions, whereas the Cauliflower Neighborhoods (Chapter Four) are a *physical* intervention.

### The Institutional Frameworks

The Neighbors groups were rolled out within the framework of the implementation of the Dutch Social Support Act (Wmo, 2007/2015). This act obliges ‘vulnerable’ citizens in need of structural support to build a support network of their own, or reach out to ‘the community’, before turning to welfare state arrangements. Four social organizations in Amsterdam, working with residents with intellectual and developmental disabilities and psychiatric issues, noted that for this group, building a social network of their own is not self-evident. With the financial support of the Municipality of Amsterdam, they subsequently designed a social intervention that aimed at helping vulnerable residents to build a local community of their own.

The Community Restaurant (Chapter Three) was established within the policy framework of the Empowered Neighborhoods Program (2006 - 2010). The government designated forty neighborhoods as ‘Empowered Neighborhoods’ – including the residential area in which the community restaurant studied here was situated – due to accumulating local problems, a lack of social cohesion and livability, and the large concentration of migrants and their offspring. The community restaurant aimed at contributing to local social cohesion and livability, by building an inclusive community, thereby attempting to bridge differences between native Dutch, white working-class residents, and those with an ethnic minority background.

The Cauliflower Neighborhoods were designed and built in the 1970s and 1980s, within the framework of the socio-democratic administration

of Prime Minister Den Uyl, and meant to restore the ‘human factor’ for young urban families. In response to the modernist housing blocks of the 1950s and 1960s, which were deemed to bring about social isolation and detachment among residents and between families (seen as ‘the cornerstone of society’ at the time), the cauliflower neighborhoods were deemed to provide a safe and protected space for parents and their children to live a ‘natural’ family life in close proximity to other families, and thereby adopted rural architectural features such as ‘the urban yard’.

While the three different interventions were thus established in different eras, within different policy frameworks, dealing with different target groups, and trying to solve different problems, they shared one core characteristic: they aimed at helping, supporting and encouraging presumed vulnerable groups of residents to become (more) familiar with each other and start a local community, in order to ultimately feel more at home in their neighborhood.

### Underlying Aims and Assumptions

The aims and underlying assumptions of the various interventions reveal notions and dominant normative ideas about who is in need of support to integrate, adjust to or socially participate in Dutch society at large. Those underlying principles in turn guided the strategies and practices, and eventually shaped the contours of the categories of residents who became members of the local community and those who were – sometimes unintentionally, sometimes not – kept out.

The community-building project of the Neighbors groups aimed at empowering ‘vulnerable’ residents to make themselves at home in mainstream society through becoming part of a self-reliant community of people with shared social locations, based on their disability or mental health issues. The underlying assumption with regard to this target group was that they would prefer to reach out for and support others ‘like themselves’ (cf. Linders, 2010). By familiarizing vulnerable residents with each other and the neighborhood, it was assumed they would gain a sense of ‘home’ in the place and a sense of belonging to a community of their own.

The community restaurant attempted to ‘teach the white, Dutch working class diversity’, by means of exposing them to proverbial ‘strangers’, e.g. residents with a Muslim or migrant background, or residents from former

Dutch colonies. The assumption was that the white, working class were narrow-minded and uneducated and thus would not be willing to 'embrace the stranger in society', leading to distrust, fear and anxiety on the national and local level. The belief of the community organizers was that livability in disadvantaged neighborhoods would increase once the white, Dutch working class integrated into multi-cultural society.

The cauliflower neighborhood design was meant to facilitate and foster integration and participation of young urban families. Based on the assumption that city life causes a threat to social integration as well as individuals' mental sanity, physical environments recapturing the rural tradition were designed in the 1970s and 1980s, to protect families – still seen as the cornerstone of society at the time – from the ills of modern city life.

In short, in all cases the targeted residential groups were seen as in need of help and support – albeit for different reasons, and with different political motives. In general, living in the city is seen as challenging, too confusing or outright dangerous for these groups. Larger processes, such as migration, emancipation and individualization are assumed to have negative effects on the social cohesion among residents, which has urged policy-makers, social workers and urban designers in different political eras to initiate and establish community-building interventions for vulnerable or threatened groups of residents.

### **Community-building Practices and Strategies**

The neighborhood unit was a guiding principle in all state-supported interventions under scrutiny. The demarcated space of the neighborhood enables (local) governments to locate and solve problems during the period of their administration (cf. Smith et al., 2007). It is therefore no coincidence that all interventions took place in 'the neighborhood' (*de wijk*), primarily targeting 'neighbors' who live in the same bounded residential area.

While all interventions studied here were thus focused on increasing community life in the neighborhood, the practices and strategies involved widely varied among the three interventions.

The two social interventions made use of professional community builders, managers and social workers trained to enhance community life amongst specific residential populations. The professional organization of

the Neighbors groups characterized itself by an ultimately '*laissez-faire*' attitude. The community builders (so-called Quartermasters) limited themselves to facilitating meetings between participants, providing space and time for them to pursue the collective activities they themselves initiated. The core motto of the Neighbors groups was that they could organize their community according to their own needs and interests, at their own tempo and on their own terms.

In contrast, the community-building practices in the Community Restaurant were characterized by forceful attempts and well-planned efforts of the restaurant management and social workers involved. Visitors were obliged to participate in all kinds of different activities, to 'open up their worldviews' and mix with 'strangers' in exchange for a wholesome three-course dinner at a low price.

These different strategies to support participants to engage in the community-building activities unsurprisingly led to different outcomes. While the gatherings with the Neighbors groups were very easy-going, the dinners at the neighborhood restaurant were imbued with tension. Where in the first case a local community came into being because members had the comfortable feeling of being in charge, being able to be themselves and allowed to express themselves freely within the setting of the intervention, the local community in the neighborhood restaurant became strongly cohesive by means of resisting the underlying assumptions and forceful attempts of the community builders to change their behaviors and worldviews.

Although the physical intervention of the Cauliflower Neighborhoods did not involve any social workers, managers or community builders, the community-building strategy shows similarities with the Neighbors groups intervention. In both cases, the targeted population groups were provided space and time to invent themselves as a local community, to give shape to their collective identity and mutual recognition on their own terms, facilitated by the intervention. In the case of the Cauliflower Neighborhoods, community-building activities were facilitated by the physical layout of the urban yard, a protected semi-public space where the lifestyles of young families could flourish, and parents and children could express themselves freely and safely, protected against the hazards of city life.

## Feelings of home

The timing of the fieldwork enabled me to follow participants of the Neighbors groups prior to the start of the intervention. This way, I could make a baseline assessment of their feelings of (un)home before they got in touch with the two Quartermasters. Feelings of home proved to be all but self-evident for respondents dealing with disabilities or psychiatric issues. Most of them had never experienced feelings of home, and only a few of them were still hopeful of learning what it is like to feel at home. In more general terms, it is fair to say the majority of respondents in the case study of the Neighbors groups did not believe they would ever feel completely at home, either in the neighborhood or in life. They carried with them lifelong experiences of being excluded, abandoned, and abused, making them very distrustful of any type of relationship with other human beings, let alone neighbors. For most of them, being safe and in control inside their own houses was as much 'homeliness' as they could get. Belonging to a social network was seen as a straightforward threat to one's own (mental) health and safety. Familiarity with other residents for them meant not so much being comfortable and feeling secure in public space (cf. Blokland-Potters 2006; Jacobs (1989[1961]));, but rather being overly aware of the dangers of going outside: they knew by heart they were seen as an easy target for bullying or harassment by neighbors. This counter-intuitive consequence of familiarity will be discussed further below.

For those few respondents who felt capable of and willing to participate in the Neighbors groups, feelings of home definitely occurred, but only for as long as they were together. Participants felt they were perceived as normal in this setting. In this safe space, residents with intellectual and developmental disabilities and mental health issues could relax, be themselves, and appropriate space and social activities according to their own needs, pace and interests. Although personal relationships scarcely emerged between participants, they felt comfortable amongst each other through *amicable familiarity*, i.e. through mutual recognition and the friendly and informal way in which they were approached, but also through *subdominant familiarity* that made them comfortably aware of being amongst people of the same marginalized group.

In the case of the Community Restaurant, members of the local community felt they had to fight for their community, because of the attempts of the restaurant manager to make them open up their 'group of restaurant friends' to residents who they were supposed to bridge ethnic and

cultural differences with. The white, native Dutch working-class visitors of the neighborhood restaurant were well-aware that they were seen as "deprived" by the restaurant manager. They knew his main purpose was 'to change them,' whereas others could also learn from them, they claimed.

I learned that participants of the Community Restaurant felt at home in different ways, based on different reasons, aroused through different types of familiarity. First, they felt at home amongst each other in a light way only – similar to the experiences of the members of the Neighbors groups – through *amicable familiarity*. By regularly participating in the organized activities, they started to know each other superficially, and being protected by the (informal) rules set by the restaurant management, participants felt safe and to some extent in control amongst each other. Second, I observed that visitors created their own sub-communities, based on *personal familiarity*, i.e. the mutual recognition based on lifestyle, but also intersections of gender, age and sexuality. Feelings of home amongst members of these sub-communities became really strong, not least because the groups firmly protected themselves against the intrusion of outsiders. Amongst themselves, they were even more in control, they felt even more familiar, and they felt truly safe, which aroused strong feelings of home amongst self-exclaimed restaurant friends.

Third, as already eluded to above, visitors started to close their ranks to protect themselves against the accusations of the middle-class community builders of being narrow-minded and in need of support to change their worldviews. Based on *subdominant familiarity*, through which they recognized each other as being part of the same marginalized group within this setting, they felt a mutual solidarity that resulted in a sense of safety and control amongst each other. Feelings of home through *subdominant familiarity* were not as strong as among members of the sub-communities, but definitely helped visitors to regain a sense of home that – as they claimed – was taken away from them. Fourth, and this closely relates to this latter point, white working-class visitors started to enhance their feelings of home by comparing themselves as a group against the backdrop of ethnic, cultural and racial 'others'. In an attempt to defend themselves against the implicit but clearly-felt assumption that neighborhood life would improve once *they* had embraced the ethnic, cultural and racial differences of 'others', they turned the argument upside down: it is not 'our' behavior that should be changed, but 'theirs'. Drawing upon notions of white supremacy, the white, native Dutch visitors used their *dominant familiarity*, i.e. the mu-

tual recognition of all being members of the dominant group in the given setting, to claim their place as masters of a white, native Dutch society.

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Feelings of home of residents involved in the physical intervention of the Cauliflower Neighborhoods turned out to be neatly divided between strong feelings of home amongst young urban families and a lack of such feeling amongst those residents belonging to the category of non-nuclear households, such as the (single) elderly, couples without children and youngsters. A powerful combination of *personal* and *dominant familiarity* made parents (especially mothers) and their children feel as if they were ‘natural’ insiders to the local community. With a physical environment designed to support their lifestyles and all their shared family practices, members of the local community not only recognized each other personally, in terms of age, household type and most often gender and sexuality, but also as being part of the same dominant group in this setting. The combination of types of familiarity resulted in very strong feelings of home among parents and children, making them true masters of space without even having to fight for it – unlike the white working class at the Community Restaurant. Every single inhabitant of the urban yards, also those without young children, had incorporated the dominance of young families in a residential area meant and designed for them, effortlessly turning the members of non-nuclear households into the category of ‘natural’ outsiders, despite their painstaking efforts to become part of the local community.

### **Insiders and outsiders by design**

In sum, within the institutional frameworks of the three interventions, different categories of insiders and outsiders were produced. Depending on the underlying assumptions, aims and target groups of the intervention, some residential populations were seen as and supported to behave as ‘natural’ owners of the neighborhood, while other populations were seen as ‘strangers’ and outsiders. Interestingly, in all cases the ‘world outside’ was seen as threatening, unsafe and opaque. However, who could become perceived as in insider or outsider within the setting of the intervention largely depended on the underlying aims, assumptions and strategies involved.

Empirically, it was shown that in the social intervention of the Neighbors groups, which were designed to build self-sufficient and self-sustaining

local communities of ‘vulnerable’ residents, only those who were already self-sufficient and self-sustaining in their daily lives were able to become and remain part of these groups. For those who are truly vulnerable, in the sense of having a lack of the social, cognitive or communicative skills to function well in communities in general, becoming part of such a local community was simply too hard to manage. As a result, the most vulnerable of the targeted residents, those without any social contacts of their own, did not dare to join the project. Some of them, who were severely longing to become part of a community, and eager to learn what feelings of home might mean for them, took the step to participate, but felt deeply disillusioned after a period of trying to become part of the Neighbors groups without any success.

In case of the social intervention of the Community Restaurant, which aimed at building an inclusive, ethnically and racially diverse local community, the design of the intervention turned out to be predominantly focused on ‘teaching the white working class how to deal with diversity’. In line with these basic principles of the intervention, white working-class visitors to the restaurant became reluctant to be forced into the subdominant position of ‘narrow-minded’ people who posed a threat against the integration of ethnic and racial ‘others’. As the latter were structurally depicted by the professional community builders as the ‘outsiders’ who should be welcomed in ‘our’ midst, insurmountable barriers were erected – discursively and symbolically – for non-white, non-native Dutch residents to become part of the established local community. The design of the intervention turned out to encapsulate so many prejudices against ‘the white working class’ as ‘ethnic and racial minorities’ that the former category of residents consequently closed their ranks and became a strong cohesive local community, whereas the latter were excluded from it – despite the efforts of some of them to belong.

In the case of the Cauliflower Neighborhoods, who would become the local insiders of today was already determined at the drawing table of the urban designers and architects of the urban yards in the early 1970s, based on the institutional principles of the intervention. Members of young urban families were to be protected against the ills of modern city life, turning them into the ‘natural’ masters of space. Personal efforts and actions of contemporary residents who are not members of nuclear households turn out to fail drastically in their attempts to become part of local community deliberately built for their counterparts.

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Based on the findings outlined above, the main argument of this study is that the parameters for local belonging are produced by the institutional frameworks of the community-building interventions. These categories of local belonging in turn affect feelings of home positively for those who ‘naturally’ fit the framework of the intervention, while they negatively affect such feelings of residents who fall outside the institutional parameters of the intervention. *Hence, state-supported community-building interventions create structural categories of insiders and outsiders by design.*

Insiders-by-design are supported by institutional, material and symbolic means to belong to the state-supported local community, and encouraged to feel at home in their neighborhood. Conversely, for those population groups for whom the intervention was not designed and meant in the first place, it turns out to be hard – and most often completely impossible – to become part of the professionally-built local community, despite the relentless efforts of those who wish and sometimes crave to belong and feel more at home in their residential area.

Feelings of home of residents who are involved in state-supported community interventions are thus affected positively or negatively, dependent on whether the policy framework, the underlying assumptions and principles, the aims and strategies of the interventions fit the capacities, the ethnicity, race, class, gender, lifestyles and even household type of the resident groups involved. I suggest that what was experienced by my respondents as a personal achievement or a failure to become an insider and belong to the local community should rather be seen as a respective institutional achievement or failure.

## 5.2 FAMILIARITY AND FEELINGS OF HOME

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An important theoretical contribution of this study is the insight that *different types of familiarity play a role in the enhancement of feelings of home.* Whereas public familiarity (defined as recognizing the comings and goings of fellow residents in public space) and familiarity (i.e. cognitively and emotionally knowing the physical and social environment) are generally seen by social scientists (e.g., Blokland and Schulze, 2017; Boccagni, 2017; Duyvendak, 2011; Tonkiss, 2005; Jacobs, 1989[1961]; Fischer, 1982) as a condition for people to feel at home, the data presented in this study have shown that the concept of familiarity needs much more scholarly attention and nuance in order to truly understand how feelings of home come into being, and are sustained or undermined.

By making use of an intersectional approach it became clear that different social locations, based on gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, health, and class, account for very different experiences in public space and home feelings in general. Depending on the intersections at which people find themselves, (public) familiarity can either result in a sense of home in a place, or the opposite: a sense of non-belonging, of not being safe, of not being in control. Unlike other social science studies on (residential) belonging and feelings of home, I argue that (public) familiarity is only a condition for feelings of home for those who ‘naturally’ fit the physical and social environment. For those who visibly deviate in a certain setting, based on for example intersections of disability, skin color, lifestyle or gender, (public) familiarity can also be a condition for undermining feelings of home.

Familiarity, I have suggested, can be categorized into four types: amicable familiarity, personal familiarity, subdominant familiarity and dominant familiarity. Depending on the type of familiarity that is produced within the institutional setting of the community-building intervention – and beyond – feelings of home of residents are affected in different ways. In what follows, I will briefly discuss the theoretical and empirical implications of each type of familiarity.

### **Amicable familiarity**

Amicable familiarity, when residents start to recognize each other through regular collective participation in social activities, brings about a light sense of home among residents that allows for internal heterogeneity, and what I have called a gentle indifference to difference within a loose local community. *Amicable familiarity emerges from shared social practices, rather than shared social identification.* Participants feel safe, comfortable and in control amongst each other, not so much because they know each other personally, or because they share common social locations, in terms of for example gender, ethnicity, culture, race, age, health or class, but simply because they play their part in a set of shared practices. In order to let the collective practices move smoothly, a friendly and respectable mutual approach becomes the informal norm. Here, residents encounter each other as if they were friends, with mutual trust instead of distrust as a starting point.

The finding that amicable familiarity allows for heterogeneity applies to semi-public settings where the rules of a (social) organization apply. As came to the fore in the empirical Chapters Two and Three, without the guidance of social professionals who embody and enforce this norm of friendliness and respect, people tend to “flock together” based on a shared social identification to protect themselves against others.

Amicable familiarity can self-evidently also be found in public space, as was shown in Chapter Four – I believe that scholarly ideas of public familiarity, where residents feel comfortable amongst each other because they are familiar with each other’s whereabouts, are based on such observations – but must be understood as *a type of familiarity that occurs most easily amongst those residents who seem to ‘naturally’ fit the environment, in other words those who seemingly ‘organically’ belong to a place.*

My research has shown how physical and social structures shape the categories of belonging, and that no single human being belongs to a place ‘naturally’ all by herself. She is institutionally supported and facilitated to belong, to feel safe, to feel comfortably familiar with her surroundings and to have some control to appropriate space according to her needs and wishes. She is institutionally allowed to feel at home.

Heterogeneity, inclusiveness and amicability in public space are easily undermined whenever certain categories of residents are seen as ‘abnormal’ within a given setting. This situation can for example occur when new-

comers enter the already established local community, or when smaller sub-groups of people start to flock together and define ‘others’ as outsiders, or when an environment is especially designed for a specific category of residents, such as the urban yards of cauliflower neighborhoods. In these instances, residents will most often only be dealt with in an amicable way, once the insiders recognize and accept them as ‘normal’ in the given setting.

### **Personal familiarity**

When smaller groups of residents start to flock together, they do so on the basis of personal familiarity. They recognize each other based on shared lifestyles, hobbies, ideologies, culture, religion, or on the basis of a shared social location in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, race, or class. As was shown in the empirical chapters, personal familiarity brings about strong feelings of home, not only because residents increasingly feel they belong to a community of ‘people like us’, but also because they actively protect the boundaries of their sub-community against the intrusion of ‘others’. Members of the in-group start to feel safe and in control amongst each other, resulting in increased feelings of home.

Such strong feelings of home as could be observed amongst residents who felt connected through personal familiarity only emerge when barriers to outsiders are established and sustained. Strong, cohesive communities are constituted by their outside, and are therefore by definition exclusionary of ‘others’ (cf. Butler, 2011; Fukuyama, 2001). Counterintuitively, aiming for local community life that allows for internal heterogeneity thus entails aiming for light and superficial feelings of belonging only. These can be established through amicable familiarity, where residents treat each other as if they were friends, without becoming real friends. However, as the empirical material presented in Chapter Three has shown, residents can start to resist passionately when social professionals attempt to open up the boundaries of their small community and encourage them to include ‘others’.

Hence, building inclusive, heterogeneous local communities in a way implies impeding residents from becoming real friends, because no one can be real friends with everyone. Strong social connections are forged through social identification and homogeneity, whereas heterogeneity and inclusivity mainly thrive by being connected through social practices only.

### **Subdominant familiarity**

In social and physical settings, supported by the institutional and physical structures of the setting, some categories of residents become institutionally subdominant, while others become dominant. Once residents start to socially identify with each other, by becoming collectively conscious of their shared marginalized position, they might find ways to resist the status quo, and empower themselves as a group by appropriating space and informal rules according to their own standards.

The social solidarity that occurs on the basis of this mutual identification enables the subdominant category of residents to establish and account for their respectability. Doing so collectively together can enhance feelings of home, as members of this category of resident start to feel they belong to a group of ‘people like us’, and begin to feel safer and more in control because they feel the power they can exert as a collective.

Interestingly, as was discussed in Chapter Four, residents who are institutionally designated to the subdominant category do not necessarily recognize themselves as part of the same ‘group’. When dominant structures are very static, residents incorporate the dominant standards and start to perceive themselves as deviant and abnormal. They do not see that their failure to blend in and to become part of the local community is not a personal one, but influenced by institutional structures, materialized in physical design and embedded in informal rules. In this case, subdominant familiarity remains absent, as residents do not mutual recognize each other as being part of the same category of marginalized people in this setting, with shared interests. This makes them powerless to collectively resist the constraints that the physical design and social setting imposes on them.

### **Dominant familiarity**

The counterpart of subdominant familiarity is self-evidently dominant familiarity. Here, residents recognize each other as being part of the same category of people who ‘naturally’ belong to the place – they are in charge. Dominant familiarity arouses very comfortable feelings of home, as people belonging to this category do not even have to question their rightful place in this setting: the physical and social environment is meant, designed and constructed for them. Consequently, as this group is able to express itself freely and is supported and facilitated to further adjust public space and informal rules according to its standards, the physical and social environ-

ment starts to fit it even more neatly over time. Hence, members of this dominant category of residents are structurally and institutionally supported and acknowledged as the rightful owners of a place.

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Who becomes designated to the dominant and subdominant category of residents in urban settings, however, remains a question for debate. In contrast to the argument made in studies on the social dynamics in majority-minority cities (e.g., Crul, 2016), I argue based on the findings of this research project that *old* majority groups that have turned into numerical minorities can retain their dominance. This means that new majority groups in majority-minority cities such as Amsterdam<sup>23</sup> – for example residents with a migrant background, but also members of non-nuclear households – still assimilate into the culture, lifestyle and informal standards of the dominant group, even if the latter’s numbers are dwindling.

It is important to highlight here that with dominance I do not refer to the number of people, but to institutional structures that are designed and established to support the old majority group. As my empirical data shows, power dynamics between residential groups can remain untouched despite the reduction in size of the powerful group, when this latter group remains supported, facilitated and encouraged by the physical and social environment to publically express and employ its group identity and shared interests.

These findings have far-reaching implications, not only for our thinking on issues of community life, belonging and feelings of home, but also for studies on decolonization, inclusion, integration, (super-)diversity, class and policy-making. As long as basic assumptions, principles and structures in regards to who the quintessential insiders and outsiders are remain unconscious, biased and unchanged, power dynamics on the ground and in our work will remain untouched as well. This means that the old majority group will maintain its dominant position even when their numbers are declining, thereby impeding other residential groups from equally appropriating space and social life according to their needs and interests.

<sup>23</sup> In 2011, Amsterdam officially became a majority-minority city as the white, native Dutch population became a minority. See Crul, M. R. J., Schneider, J., & Lelie, F. (2013).

Here, it must be stressed that with the ‘old majority group’ I do not only refer to dominant ethnic and racial groups (as is the case in social scientific literature on majority- minority cities), but rather I refer to *all* dominant categories of residents for whom a certain physical, institutional and social environment is deliberately designed – be it for ‘young urban families’, ‘self-sufficient residents with mental health issues’ or ‘the white, native Dutch’. Again, the dominance of some groups over others in a given setting is not so much related to their numerical majority, but rather to the relentless institutional support they receive. These residents are insiders-by-design, seemingly ‘naturally’ belonging to a place and seemingly more entitled to feel at home than their counterparts.

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Intuitively, one could argue that people find themselves either in the sub-dominant or dominant position within one physical and social setting. However, the empirical material in Chapter Three has shown how different intersections of class, race and ethnicity can result in being marginalized in one respect, while being dominant in another. For example, while residents can mutually identify based on their shared marginalized position as working-class people – or, dependent on the socio-cultural setting, as women, as people of color, as people with disabilities, as homosexual or transgender – they can at the same time mutually identify on the basis of a dominant social signifier, such as being white, native Dutch in the context of Dutch national and local space. When these different types of familiarity conflate, feelings of home in a local community further strengthen, through both social solidarity and the collective notion of being masters of space.

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More generally, in cases where different types of familiarity overlap, as we have seen in all three case studies presented above, feelings of home further increase. Based on the smaller and larger sub-communities residents become part of, through mutual recognition based on shared social practices and/or through shared social identification, residents can feel marginalized and empowered within one urban setting, can feel unsafe and protected at the same time, can feel in and out of control, and can feel at home and out of place within the same urban setting.

These multiple levels of belonging that emerge through combinations of various types of familiarity affect feelings of home in sometimes unexpected and even contradictory ways. Hence, a more nuance conceptualization of familiarity must be taken into close consideration when we aim to understand the multi-layered, oppositional and relational nature of feelings of home.

### 5.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH AND POLICY-MAKING

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The findings of this study have implications for the ways in which we think about feelings of home and community building, as well as the ways in which we organize and establish them in practice. As the empirical case studies have shown, which categories of residents are enabled to belong to the local community largely depends on the (material and immaterial) institutional framework within which the community-building practices and strategies take place. The underlying aims and assumptions as well as the community-building strategies deployed reveal – intentionally or unintentionally – which category of residents is considered ‘normal’ and which category or categories fall outside the rationale of the intervention. Even when a language of inclusion and bridging differences is used to frame the intervention, participants will find out soon enough who the community-building intervention is actually designed for.

As I have attempted to show, an intersectional approach is indispensable to gain a deeper understanding of the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion at play in community- building interventions as well as of the contested nature of feelings of home. Before we start to dream of a truly democratic, inclusive and equal global society, where no one group is dominant and “the pressure to assimilate, coming from the—old—majority group, is less strong if not backed by sheer numbers in everyday life” (Crul, 2016: 57), we should first start to deconstruct and dismantle the ethnic, racialized, gendered, ableist, and classist principles that underlie our institutions, including our knowledge production.



Intersectionality has helped me to carefully distinguish the four types of familiarity that play a role in institutionally-supported community building, as well as the establishment or undermining of feelings of home. These new conceptual tools allow us, first, to better understand the power struggles at play in urban settings, especially when it comes to state-supported attempts to enhance local belonging and feelings of home of residents. This study has revealed the huge impact of intersections of class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, health, age, and even household type on the outcomes of such attempts. And second, the tools allow us to understand how stigmatized and subdominant categories of residents struggle to make themselves at home in a mainstream society.

Following these insights, I suggest contemporary studies on local communities and feelings of home are still too focused on ‘the mainstream’, thereby reproducing rosy ideas of how (public) familiarity helps to establish feelings of home in a place. As my research has shown, most types of familiarity are exclusionary, and for some population groups (public) familiarity can even undermine feelings of home. Social science studies should therefore be careful not to primarily reflect experiences and perspectives of mainstream residents, who are able to feel at home much easier than residents who are not recognized and accepted as ‘normal’ in society.

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To complicate these insights further, we should take into account that state-supported community-building interventions are paid for with public money, while such interventions can never be truly public. The inclusion of some and the exclusion of others is thus financially supported by local or national government.

On the one hand, I am inclined to suggest community-building interventions should not be initiated and financially supported by (local) governments, based on my conviction that the state should not prioritize one population group over another and should remain neutral when it comes to feelings of home in a neighborhood, city, or country. On the other hand, it could be argued that public money should exactly be used to establish home-spaces for those who do not ‘naturally’ belong to national or local space, based on the intersections at which they find themselves. While certain population groups are institutionally enabled to feel at home naturally in their neighborhoods and Western society at large, it could be a politi-

cal choice to actively support those for whom our societal structures were not built in the first place. In that sense, we could use our public resources to create safe spaces where institutional outsiders can feel ‘normal’, if only for a little while.

In sum, the exclusionary character of community-building interventions could, from a policy perspective, be used to the advantage of subdominant rather than dominant population groups. This way, experiences of belonging and feelings of home would become more equally distributed among all categories of residents, with the help of (local) governments.

## 5.4 CONCLUSION

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How do community-building interventions in Dutch urban settings attempt to create a sense of local belonging among residents, and how does this affect feelings of home of the residents involved? The simple answer to this question is: through simultaneous mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. The more precise answer is: based on the types of familiarity that are brought about by the community-building practices and strategies, feelings of home and belonging to the local community can be strongly aroused, lightly increased, or undermined. Furthermore, state-supported community-building interventions create structural categories of local insiders and outsiders, thereby – sometimes unwittingly or unintentionally – facilitating strong feelings of home for some categories of residents at the expense of such feelings for others.

As we have seen, the designated outsiders of a local community can be deeply troubled by their exclusion, perceiving it as a personal failure when they are not able to become part of the local community despite their attempts to participate. When taking into account the institutional frameworks of the interventions, it becomes clear that they were not meant for some categories of residents to participate in in the first place. To put it even more strongly, the intervention was *designed to exclude* them – simply because a successful community-building intervention has to exclude some in order to create strong social bonds among others.

But who is excluded, and why, can also be influenced by the institutional framework, the aims and principles of the intervention. Instead of concluding by saying state-supported community-building interventions should not be pursued for they are always inherently exclusionary, I would rather suggest the exclusionary character of communities should be used to the advantage of those who lack the institutional power to feel at home 'naturally' in the local and national setting.

However, if the aim is to build inclusive local communities that are open to difference and marked by internal heterogeneity, the insights presented in this thesis should be carefully taken into account. As has been shown, those who suffer from their local exclusion the most are those residents who believed the community-building interventions were also meant for them. They were misled by the unjustified claims of inclusivity the interventions conveyed. Before making claims of inclusion and inclusivity, it is important to gain a profound understanding of why and how truly inclusive communities can only be established when feelings of belonging and home amongst residents are superficial. Once smaller groups of residents start to mutually identify with each other, based on a shared social position or personal familiarity, their feelings of home become stronger and hence exclusionary. The stronger feelings of belonging and home become, the more insurmountable the barriers to outsiders become, and the fiercer the attempts of insiders to protect them are. Building inclusive, heterogeneous local communities therefore implies a sole focus on the establishment of amicable familiarity. This means that residents will not become real friends, thereby withdrawing into their own circle of 'people like us', but rather approach and respect each other *as if* they were friends, allowing all categories of residents to participate in local practices.

# SUMMARY

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**This book deals with ways in which state-supported community building interventions attempt to create a collective sense of belonging among (specific groups of) residents in urban settings, with a focus on how these interventions affect feelings of home of the urban dwellers involved. From a policy perspective, a sense of belonging to one's residential area is deemed important as it encourages residents to take responsibility for their physical and social environment. Thereby, by means of financially supporting community building interventions, local governments aim at improving the collective self-sufficiency and home feelings of inhabitants, especially of those who are vulnerable and disadvantaged, in order for them to function better in the city and, accordingly, to make (disadvantaged) neighborhoods and cities function better at large.**

This study explores how such state-supported attempts to build a sense of local belonging among neighbors affect the feelings of home of the residents involved.

## *Chapter 1*

### **Community Building Interventions**

The three ethnographic case studies at the heart of this research project, deal with: 1. The Neighbors Groups. A social intervention that aims at enhancing a sense of belonging among residents with intellectual and development disabilities and mental health issues; 2. The Community Restaurant. Here, the focus lies on state-supported attempts of professional community builders to create a local community restaurant, where residents with different cultural and ethnic backgrounds can bridge their mutual difference and feel more at home amongst each other, and 3. The Cauliflower Neighborhoods. A physical intervention of urban design and architecture, the so-called cauliflower neighborhoods (*bloemkoolwijken*), to literally build a material environment where community life among young urban families can thrive.

The main questions are: how do community building interventions in Dutch urban settings attempt to create a sense of local belonging among

residents and, subsequently, how does this affect feelings of home of the residents involved? More precisely, I am looking into the following: what are the underlying assumptions, aims and strategies of the three community building interventions? How do those assumptions, aims and strategies influence social dynamics between the residents involved? How are categories of local insiders and outsiders shaped within the framework of the intervention? And how and in what ways does this affect feelings of home of the involved individuals?

## Chapter 2

### The Neighbors groups

This chapter deals with the feelings of home of people with intellectual and development disabilities, and people with psychiatric problems who were targeted by the Neighbors groups intervention.

In 2016, the pilot project Neighbors groups was initiated by four social organizations in Amsterdam, with the aim of helping clients with intellectual and development disabilities, psychiatric issues or post-traumatic stress syndrome to build a local support network of their own. For the targeted individuals, participating in the new local community was by no means self-evident. Actually, most of my respondents choose not to participate at all and decided to remain withdrawn inside their self-established 'home-as-safe-haven'. They prioritized personal safety and security, familiarity with and control over their own private place, over becoming embedded in a community and becoming socially attached to others.

An important finding of the material presented in this chapter is that, in contrast to other social science findings, public familiarity with familiar strangers in one's residential area can lead to a loss of local belonging rather than an increased sense of it. In the case of visibly 'deviant' persons, who are not perceived as normal by mainstream society, a sense of safety, control and belonging is obstructed through being publically familiar with the social environment. As a result, their general feeling of home is undermined.

As I found, it is *amicable familiarity* – i.e. being approached by familiar strangers in a friendly and respectable manner – that enables people to gain a sense of safety and control amongst fellow residents. For the vulnerable population groups under scrutiny here, the creation of safe, exclusionary spaces turned out to be indispensable to make them feel socially

embedded and more at home in their neighborhood. However, as turned out, in order to make the step to such a safe space takes already some extent of self-sufficiency and self-confidence of the residents involved. In that sense, these aspects unwittingly and unintendedly became conditions for participation and for becoming an insider of the Neighbors Groups.

## Chapter 3

### The Community Restaurant

The main purpose of the community restaurant under scrutiny is to bridge ethnic and cultural differences between various population groups that live in the residential area, with a strong emphasis on helping elderly, white native Dutch residents adjust to the increased diversity in their once predominantly white, working-class neighborhood. These aims are strived for using various strategies, ranging from offering workshops on how to control one's limited budget and how to deal with cultural differences, to special nights that should help to familiarize white, native Dutch visitors with residents with migrant backgrounds. However, even after 9 years of forceful attempts of the community builders and social workers involved to open up the community to residents with ethnic minority backgrounds, the restaurant community turns out to be predominantly white, native Dutch.

The chapter shows, how different types of familiarity among visitors bring about a sense of belonging, related to shared structural social positions, lifestyles or normative ideas. In some cases, this sense of belonging to a specific category of visitors led to a sense of control and safety, resulting in increased feelings of home. Besides *amicable familiarity*, already introduced in Chapters Two, I introduce three other types of familiarity in this chapter: *sub-dominant familiarity*, *personal familiarity* and *dominant familiarity*.

Mutual recognition and trust, even among strangers, are determined by various intersections of class, education, ethnicity, race, gender, sexuality and age. A shared social location results into a shared lived reality. This way, residents recognize each other respectively as a. a member of the same marginalized population group; b. as someone with the same lifestyle, interests or opinions; or c. as being part of the same dominant group in the given setting. In the neighborhood restaurant these types of familiarity turned out to overlap in different combinations, thereby leading to various extents of home feelings amongst the present visitors.

Because of their strong mutual familiarity based on their shared marginalized position as white working class people, it turned out to be hard for the professional community builders to create a truly inclusive local community. To put it more strongly, the harder the professionals tried to encourage the regular visitors to reach out to ethnic and racial ‘others’, the more the former closed their ranks and the more they resisted the attempts of the restaurant manager to change their conduct.

In contrast to what the community restaurant tried to establish, the forceful attempts to build bridges between different population groups turned out to strengthen boundaries between them instead of weakening them. While the feelings of home of the white, ethnic Dutch visitors visibly increased with every visit, for visitors of non-Dutch decent it became almost impossible to participate equally and to feel a ‘natural’ member of the local community.

#### *Chapter 4*

##### **The Cauliflower Neighborhoods**

The ethnographic case study presented in this chapter explores (the lack of) feelings of home of residents living in a deliberately designed neighborhood meant to shape a local community. The urban community-building intervention of the 1970s and 1980s, which aimed at restoring the ideals of family life through the urban design of the Dutch cauliflower neighborhoods, turns out to cast its shadow on social dynamics among contemporary residents.

The chapter shows how the physical and deliberately designed social setting of the cauliflower neighborhoods produces specific categories of “insiders” and “outsiders”, based on gender, age and types of household. The family-based architecture of the cauliflower neighborhood turns out to ‘naturalize’ the lifestyles of nuclear family households, while it does not provide sufficient possibilities for other categories of contemporary residents – who notably make up the majority of the residential population – to express themselves and appropriate public space accordingly.

An important finding is that the old majority group of young families has now turned into a numerical minority, but at the same time has retained its dominant position. While it could be expected that the majority of non-nuclear household members would have gained the power over time

to appropriate space and informal norms according to their needs, instead, they turn out to still be forced to adjust to the informal rules and lifestyle of the numerical minority. Hence, when backed up and supported by material structures and institutional design, numerical dominance might reduce over time, while institutional dominance can remain untouched.

#### *Chapter 5*

##### **Affecting Feelings of Home through Community-Building Interventions**

From the empirical results, the conclusion emerges that within the institutional frameworks of the three interventions, different categories of insiders and outsiders were produced. Depending on the underlying assumptions, aims and target groups of the intervention, some residential populations were seen as and supported to behave as ‘natural’ owners of the neighborhood, while other populations were seen as ‘strangers’ and outsiders.

Based on the findings, the main argument of this study is that the parameters for local belonging are affected by the institutional frameworks of the community-building interventions. Different types of familiarity among residents, based on their shared social locations, play a role in sustaining a sense of collective power and natural ownership of the neighborhood within the structure of the intervention at stake. These categories of mutual recognition and local belonging in turn affect feelings of home positively for those who ‘naturally’ fit the framework of the intervention, while they negatively affect such feelings of residents who fall outside the institutional parameters of the intervention.

Hence, state-supported community-building interventions can, unwillingly and unintendedly, create categories of local insiders and outsiders, thereby facilitating and supporting specific population groups to feel at home in their neighborhood, while impeding others to feel the same.

# DUTCH SUMMARY

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Dit boek gaat over door de overheid gesubsidieerde interventies om lokale gemeenschappen te vormen, met een focus op hoe deze interventies het thuisgevoel van stadsbewoners beïnvloeden. Vanuit het perspectief van beleidsmakers is thuisgevoel in de wijk belangrijk, omdat dit gevoel bewoners stimuleert verantwoordelijkheid te nemen voor de buurt en voor elkaar. Door lokale gemeenschapsvorming financieel en institutioneel te ondersteunen, hopen lokale overheden er bovendien voor te zorgen dat kwetsbare bewoners en bewoners in achterstandswijken een bepaald mate van collectieve zelfredzaamheid ontwikkelen. Door collectieve thuisgevoel onder wijkgenoten te verhogen zouden niet alleen individuen beter gaan functioneren in de wijk, maar zou ook de wijk en de stad als geheel leefbaarder worden.

Deze meerjarige etnografische studie kijkt naar hoe deze community building interventies het thuisgevoel van betrokken bewoners beïnvloeden.

## *Hoofdstuk 1*

### **Gemeenschappen bouwen**

In dit hoofdstuk worden de drie casussen geïntroduceerd die het hart vormen van dit onderzoeksproject: 1. De Burengroepen. Een sociale interventie gericht op het vergroten van thuisgevoel van stadsbewoners met verstandelijke beperkingen en/of psychiatrische problematiek; 2. Het Buurtrestaurant. Deze sociale interventie houdt zich bezig met het slaan van bruggen tussen verschillende etnische groeperingen in een achterstandswijk, in de hoop zo wederzijdse vooroordelen over en angst voor elkaar te verminderen; en 3. De Bloemkoolwijken. Een fysieke interventie in de gebouwde ruimte met het doel om een gemeenschapsvorming onder jonge families in de grote steden te bevorderen.

De onderzoeksvragen van deze studie zijn: hoe proberen community building interventies in Nederlandse steden een gezamenlijk gevoel van thuis te creëren onder bewoners en, daaruit volgend, welke invloed hebben deze interventies op het thuisgevoel van de betrokken bewoners? Meer precies kijk ik naar het volgende: wat zijn onderliggende aannames, doelen en strategieën van de drie community building interventies die onder-

zocht worden? Hoe beïnvloeden deze assumpties, doelen en strategieën de sociale dynamiek tussen bewoners die bij de interventie betrokken zijn? Hoe worden binnen het institutionele raamwerk van de interventies categorieën van lokale *insiders* en *outsiders* gevormd? En ten slotte, hoe en op welke manieren beïnvloeden deze categorieën het thuisgevoel van de betrokken bewoners?

## Hoofdstuk 2

### De Burengroepen

Dit hoofdstuk gaat over thuisgevoelens van mensen met verstandelijke beperkingen en psychiatrische problemen die benaderd zijn door maatschappelijke organisaties om deel te nemen aan de sociale interventie Burengroepen.

In 2016 ging het pilot project Burengroepen van start, op initiatief van vier Amsterdamse maatschappelijke organisaties. Het doel van dit project was om hun cliënten te helpen met het bouwen van verschillende lokale support-netwerken. Voor de betrokken individuen was deelname aan dit project alles behalve vanzelfsprekend. In feite bleken de meeste mensen die door de maatschappelijke organisaties benaderd werden om deel te nemen helemaal niet mee te willen doen. Zij besloten zich te blijven isoleren in hun eigen veilige haven. De meeste respondenten gaven voorrang aan hun persoonlijke veiligheid en het gevoel van controle over hun eigen leven, boven het ingebed raken in een nieuwe gemeenschap en sociale contacten met onbekende anderen.

Een belangrijke bevinding is dat, in tegenstelling tot andere sociaal wetenschappelijke bevindingen, publieke familiariteit niet perse tot een groter gevoel van thuis in de buurt leidt. In tegendeel, bekendheid met de sociale en fysieke omgeving buiten het eigen huis veroorzaakt bij mensen met zichtbaar 'afwijkende' personen, op basis van hun handicap of psychiatrische problematiek, kan een gevoel van thuis juist ondermijnen. Zij zijn zich er vaak pijnlijk van bewust dat zij door 'normale' buurtgenoten als afwijkend worden gezien en hebben regelmatig ervaringen in de publieke ruimte die voor een afname van hun gevoel van veiligheid en controle zorgen.

Dit hoofdstuk laat zien dat vooral *amicale familiariteit*, zoals ik het genoemd heb – waarbij vreemden elkaar benaderen op een vriendelijke en respect-

volle manier – er toe bijdraagt dat kwetsbare bewoners zich prettig voelen in de wijk. Het creëren van een veilige, exclusieve ruimte waar zij onder elkaar kunnen zijn kan dit faciliteren. De stap naar zo'n veilige ruimte blijkt alleen voor de meeste kwetsbare stadsbewoners al te groot, waardoor een zekere mate van zelfredzaamheid en zelfvertrouwen als een ongewilde voorwaarde blijkt te dienen voor deelname.

## Hoofdstuk 3

### Het Buurtrestaurant

Het buurtrestaurant dat in dit hoofdstuk onder de loep wordt genomen heft als doel om etnische en culturele verschillen tussen verschillende populatiegroepen te overbruggen. Het restaurant ligt in een arbeiderswijk die voorheen hoofdzakelijk bewoond werd door witte Nederlanders. De afgelopen decennia heeft de wijk een grote verandering ondergaan en zijn er veel nieuwe bewoners komen wonen met een niet-Nederlands etnische achtergrond. De nadruk van de activiteiten in het restaurant ligt op het ondersteunen en aanmoedigen van oudere, witte Nederlanders uit de arbeidersklasse om culturele diversiteit te omarmen als het nieuwe normaal in de Nederlandse samenleving. De restaurantmanager en betrokken maatschappelijk werkers bieden workshops aan over omgaan met culturele diversiteit en organiseren speciale avonden waarbij witte, oudere Nederlanders kennis kunnen maken met buurtgenoten met een migrantenachtergrond. Ondanks aanhoudende pogingen om een gemeenschapsgevoel tussen verschillende etnische bevolkingsgroepen te creëren, is de vaste groep bezoekers van het buurtrestaurant nog steeds opvallend wit en etnisch Nederlands.

Dit hoofdstuk laat zien hoe verschillende vormen van onderlinge familiariteit tussen bezoekers een thuisgevoel teweeg brengt dat nauw samenhangt met een gedeelde sociale locatie. De wederzijdse (h)erkenning onder de vaste bezoekers van het restaurant als 'leden' van een gemarginaliseerde witte arbeidersklasse, leidde tot een gezamenlijk gevoel van controle en veiligheid dat hun thuisgevoel in deze setting sterk vergrootte.

Naast *amicale familiariteit*, een begrip dat geïntroduceerd is in hoofdstuk 2, munt ik in dit hoofdstuk drie andere typen familiariteit: *subdominante familiariteit*, *persoonlijke familiariteit* en *dominante familiariteit*. Onderlinge vertrouwdheid en bekendheid, zelfs tussen vreemden, wordt bepaald door verschillende intersecties van klasse, opleiding, etniciteit, 'ras', gender, sek-

sualiteit en leeftijd. Een gedeelde sociale positie resulteert in een gedeelde dagelijkse realiteit en specifieke gedeelde ervaringen, waardoor mensen elkaar respectievelijk herkennen als a. onderdeel van eenzelfde gemarginaliseerde bevolkingsgroep; b. als iemand met dezelfde interesses, leefstijl of opinie; of c. als onderdeel van dezelfde dominante groep in de gegeven setting. In het buurtrestaurant overlaptten de verschillende typen familiariteit in verschillende combinaties, die daardoor in verschillende maten het thuisgevoel van de aanwezigen versterkten.

Door een sterke onderlinge vertrouwdheid op basis van hun gedeelde sociale positie als witte, oudere Nederlanders uit de arbeidersklasse, bleek het moeilijk voor de opbouwwerkers om een waarachtig inclusieve lokale gemeenschap te vormen waarvan ook bewoners met een niet-Nederlandse achtergrond deel konden uitmaken. Sterker nog, hoe harder de maatschappelijk werkers probeerden de vaste groep restaurantbezoekers contact te laten maken met etnische en culturele 'anderen', hoe meer zij hun gelederen sloten en zich verzetten tegen de pogingen van de restaurantmedewerkers om hun houding te veranderen.

In tegenstelling tot wat het buurtrestaurant probeerde te bewerkstelligen, bleken de verwoede pogingen om bruggen te slaan tussen verschillende bevolkingsgroepen eerder bestaande scheidslijnen tussen deze groepen te versterken dan te verminderen. Terwijl het thuisgevoel van witte, etnisch Nederlandse bezoekers toenam bij ieder bezoek, werd het voor bezoekers met een niet-Nederlandse achtergrond vrijwel onmogelijk om op gelijke voet deel te nemen aan de buurtdiners en zich een organisch onderdeel van de lokale gemeenschap te voelen.

#### *Hoofdstuk 4*

##### **De bloemkoolwijken**

Dit hoofdstuk behandelt de thuisgevoelens van mensen die in Nederlandse woonerfwijken wonen; wijken die bewust gebouwd en ontworpen zijn in de jaren '70 en '80 van de vorige eeuw om gemeenschapsvorming onder buurtbewoners te bevorderen. Deze wijken, die ook wel bloemkoolwijken genoemd werden naar de typisch Nederlandse groente, werden in die tijd speciaal gebouwd voor jonge families vanuit het idee dat deze hoeksteen van de samenleving bedreigd werd door het onpersoonlijke stadse leven.

Deze casus laat zien hoe de fysieke en bewust gebouwde sociale omgeving

van de bloemkoolwijken specifieke categorieën van ingewijden en buitenstaanders produceert, op basis van gender, leeftijd en type huishouding. De architectuur en gebouwde ruimte is volledig ingericht op ouders met jonge kinderen, maar biedt nauwelijks mogelijkheden voor andere categorieën bewoners om die ruimte naar zich toe te trekken en zich er in thuis te voelen.

Een belangrijke bevinding is dat de oude meerderheidsgroep van jonge families vandaag de dag de numerieke minderheid heeft in Nederlandse bloemkoolwijken – er wonen tegenwoordig meer alleenstaanden, ouderen en koppels zonder kinderen, dan ouders met kroost. Tegelijkertijd nemen zij nog steeds de dominante positie in de wijken in. Terwijl het te verwachten zou zijn dat de meerderheid van niet-nucleaire huishoudens inmiddels meer zeggenschap zou hebben gekregen over hoe de publieke ruimte in deze wijken ingericht en gebruikt wordt, blijken zij zich nog steeds als vanzelf aan te passen aan de informele omgangsvormen en leefstijl van de numerieke minderheid: families.

De materiele omgeving heeft sociale structuren geïnstitutionaliseerd die vandaag de dag nog in grote mate de dominante manier van leven en sociale omgangsvormen bepalen, zelfs nu er steeds minder bewoners zijn die zichzelf identificeren met de leefstijl van een jonge familie. Het besef niet 'organisch' thuis te horen in deze wijk, leverde bij veel bewoners uit een niet-nucleair huishouden een gevoel van ongemak en ongenoegen op; alsof wat zij ook probeerden om bij de lokale gemeenschap te horen nooit goed genoeg was. Leden van nucleaire huishoudens daarentegen gaven aan zich ten diepste thuis te voelen in de wijk en bij de lokale gemeenschap en keken naar de anderen als vreemden: deze wijk was immers voor hèn gebouwd. Met andere woorden, gesteund en gefaciliteerd door de materiele en sociale structuren van de woonerfwijk, blijkt de numerieke minderheid er in te slagen zijn institutionele dominantie in de wijk te behouden, ten koste van het thuisgevoel van de meerderheid van de bewoners.

#### *Hoofdstuk 5*

##### **Thuisgevoel beïnvloeden**

##### **door middel van community building interventies**

Gebaseerd op de empirische uitkomsten van deze etnografische studie, kom ik tot de conclusie dat binnen de verschillende institutionele raamwerken van de drie interventies verschillende categorieën van ingewijden



en buitenstaanders zijn geproduceerd. Afhankelijk van de onderliggende aannames, de doelen en de doelgroep van de interventie, gaan sommige bevolkingsgroepen zichzelf als rechtmatige eigenaren van de wijk beschouwen, mede omdat zij door institutionele structuren ondersteund en gefaciliteerd worden om thuis te zijn. Groepen die niet passen binnen het raamwerk van de interventie of niet voldoen aan de onderliggende aannames waarop de wijk gebouwd is, ervaren al snel dat zij vreemden en buitenstaanders zijn.

Voortkomend uit deze bevindingen is het overkoepelende argument van deze thesis dat de parameters voor thuisgevoel worden beïnvloedt door de institutionele kaders van de community building interventie. Buurtbewoners die als van nature passen binnen het raamwerk van de interventie krijgen de kans een diep thuisgevoel in de buurt te ontwikkelen, terwijl buurtbewoners die niet mee kunnen of willen komen met de interventie zich maar met moeite een thuis kunnen maken in de wijk.

Verschillende vormen van familiariteit blijken bij de totstandkoming van de categorieën insiders en outsiders een belangrijke rol te spelen: zij die elkaar wederzijds herkennen op basis van gedeelde sociale posities of persoonlijke belangen en daarbij gesteund worden door de interventie, zullen de fysieke en sociale omgeving van de buurt eerder naar zich toe kunnen trekken dan buurtbewoners die zich alleen voelen staan – zelfs als die laatsten samen feitelijk in de meerderheid zijn. Zolang men elkaar niet herkent als behorend tot dezelfde categorie, is het moeilijk voor bewoners om zich thuis te maken in de wijk. Wederzijdse herkenning en saamhorigheid, gestuurd en gefaciliteerd door professionele community building interventies, vormen belangrijke voorwaarden voor een gezamenlijk thuisgevoel onder buurtbewoners. Concluderend, door de overheid gesteunde interventies om lokale gemeenschappen te vormen kunnen onbedoeld en ongewild categorieën van insiders en outsiders produceren die het thuisgevoel van de ene bevolkingsgroep versterken terwijl dat van anderen bevolkingsgroepen wordt ondermijnd.

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This book deals with ways in which state-supported community building interventions attempt to create a collective sense of belonging among (specific groups of) residents in urban settings, with a focus on how these interventions affect feelings of home of the urban dwellers involved. From a policy perspective, a sense of belonging to one's residential area is deemed important as it encourages residents to take responsibility for their physical and social environment. Thereby, by means of financially supporting community building interventions, local governments aim at improving the collective self-sufficiency and home feelings of inhabitants, especially of those who are vulnerable and disadvantaged, in order for them to function better in the city and, accordingly, to make (disadvantaged) neighborhoods and cities function better at large.

*This study explores how such state-supported attempts to build a sense of local belonging among neighbors affect the feelings of home of the residents involved.*

*Fenneke Wekker* graduated in 1996 from the Theatre School in Amsterdam and worked as a playwright and theatre director. In 2015, she obtained her research master's degree Social Sciences cum laude at the University of Amsterdam. Since 2019, she is Head of Academic Affairs at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences.