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Typically Moroccan? A group dynamic explanation of nuisance and criminal behavior

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Abstract: In the Netherlands there is a lot of attention to troublesome youth groups of Moroccan descent. In the media these groups are classified as gangs and anthropologists offer an explanation of their delinquent behavior based on their Moroccan cultural heritage. In this chapter both positions are questioned. Should we classify these groups as gangs? There is reason to believe that the groups are not gangs because they aren't durable enough, but what can we say about the networks from which these groups emerge? And should we utilize a cultural explanation for their delinquent behavior? In this chapter it is proposed that a group dynamic model of delinquent behavior and group identity explains more of the behavior of these Moroccan youth than does a cultural explanation. The boys form groups for their interactive needs for recognition, security and enjoyment. They develop a street culture in which delinquent behavior is positively valued. They adapt their behavior to the group in order to receive positive responses from other group members and especially avoid negative reactions. I argue that

strengthening group identity, increasing peer pressure, and intensification of us-them contrasts leads to nuisance and criminal behavior that can be classified as extreme.

A Moroccan gang problem

In the Netherlands troublesome 'Moroccan' youth groups[1] have become a symbol of nuisance and criminal behavior, and are depicted in the media as 'gangs'. The media refer to a 'Moroccan gang problem' (also known as the 'Moroccan drama') and in politics there is talk of a 'Moroccan debate' (*NRC Handelsblad*, February 16th 2006). In this debate it is stated that gangs consisting of boys of Moroccan descent pose a nuisance to the larger society and are often engaged in (serious) criminal behavior. In recent years, these groups of Moroccan young men have also been alleged to be involved in 'street terrorism'. The media and politicians have labeled the behavior of these Moroccan boys 'typically Moroccan' (*NRC Handelsblad*, October 11th 2008).

What this means is that the delinquent behavior of these boys is interpreted as a reflection of values that have been identified by anthropologists as typically Moroccan. They refer to Moroccan values such as distrust, shame, family honor, and an appreciation of a warrior mentality (Werdmölder 1986, 1990, 2005; van Gemert 1998). In their view the groups of Moroccan boys in the Netherlands reproduce these 'typically Moroccan' values. This reproduction process is said to explain the extreme amount of the nuisance and criminal behavior for which the 'gangs' are known.

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[1] The Amsterdam boys included in this research have Moroccan parents, but are born and raised in the Netherlands, and in most cases have a hybrid identity. To emphasize this, I put the adjective 'Moroccan' in quotation marks.

This labeling of (serious) delinquent behavior as 'typically Moroccan' and of the groups as 'gangs', has taken place in a social and political context during the past few years in which right wing parties have gained power based on naming and shaming. These parties openly point their fingers at the Moroccan community in the Netherlands and hold them accountable for safety issues in public spaces (*Elsevier*, October 30th 2010). To be precise they state that Moroccan parents are unable and unwilling to raise their children properly and that they don't care what the young boys are up to when they are outside in the streets. They also blame the Moroccan community for breeding gangs of young street terrorists based on a view of Islam as a 'violent and fascistic' religion (*Algemeen Dagblad*, March 28th 2008). The fact that the Moroccan community occupies a low rung on the social-economic ladder of society is not mentioned very often as an explanatory factor for the group delinquent behavior of the boys, but their cultural heritage is (*Trouw*, November 27th 2010).

That Moroccan 'gangs' are now the symbol for nuisance and criminal behavior is based not only on stereotypical images in the media and politics, but also on practical experiences of victims and bystanders. What surprises victims and bystanders is the extremely bold and aggressive behavior that the Moroccan boys display compared to other groups of young boys that cause nuisance and commit crimes (*NRC Handelsblad*, May 23rd 2009). It is this extreme behavior that calls for an explanation. Why do the boys in these groups behave in this manner? It is the purpose of this chapter to deliver an explanation for this matter, though not a cultural one. A cultural explanation (like the one offered above) would have us believe that the reproduction of typically Moroccan values accounts for the extreme nuisance and criminal behavior. This explanation, however, is lacking an empirical foundation. The anthropologists that hold this opinion, only point at similarities between what they perceive to be traditional Moroccan values

and the behavior of Moroccan boys in the Netherlands. They do not show properly how and why these values are being reproduced in group behavior. The research described in this chapter, therefore, takes a different approach and looks at the group processes that underlie the extreme delinquent behavior of Moroccan boys in the Netherlands. These processes offer a different explanation than a cultural one, as we shall see.

A second question that is raised in this chapter is whether it is justified to classify the groups of Moroccan boys that are responsible for the nuisance and criminal behavior, as gangs. In order to address this question the Eurogang definition of a youth gang (or troublesome youth group) is used: a durable, street-oriented youth group whose involvement in illegal activity is part of their group identity (Klein, Kerner, Maxson, Weitekamp, 2000; Decker & Weerman, 2005). As we shall see the answer to this question is complex as they are street-oriented and their involvement in illegal activity is part of their group identity, but the durability of the group constitutes a problem.

In order to answer these questions I conducted ethnographic field research from August 1999 until January 2007. First, I recruited boys for interviews by offering them coupons for the movies and McDonalds. Later, after I had earned their trust I just hung around in the streets with them and even accompanied them on a trip to Morocco. I have gotten to know most boys of the neighborhood, and about 30 of them quite well[2]. I have spent as much time as possible with the boys and have used the Eurogang Ethnography Protocol as a guideline in my interviews and participant observation (http://www.umsl.edu/~ccj/pdfs/05%20Ethnography%20Guidelines.pdf). In this chapter I will take one incident, which is typical for the 'Moroccan gang problem' in the Netherlands, from my field notes and analyze it from a group dynamic perspective.

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[2] For a detailed description of my methods and findings, I refer to my dissertation (De Jong, 2007).

An incident in Zandvoort

A typical case highlighting the Moroccan 'gang' problem is an incident known as 'the Zandvoort case'. In this case a troublesome youth group of about thirty Moroccan boys from Amsterdam was responsible for extreme nuisance and criminal behavior in Zandvoort. After spending a day at the beach, they committed acts of vandalism, theft, robbery and assault (*Het Parool*, September 20th 2003). The newspaper *Het Parool* branded the group a gang and offered an account of the events based on the case brought against one of the boys called Achmed[3]:

> 'At Zandvoort train station, some boys of the gang had stolen a radio, a football and a mobile phone from assorted youths. Achmed had ripped the mobile phone from the hands of the owner. Others were kicking the football across the platforms, whilst the rest of them took care of the radio. While the victims were reporting the crimes to the police, the gang stepped onto the train. There were four girls in the first class compartment. First Achmed and a tall friend went into that compartment to check things out, but suddenly about thirty others joined them.' (*Het Parool*, September 20th 2003, p.1).

> 'Some boys climbed the luggage racks, others went to sit on the girls' laps. While screaming "tits, tits", they pinched the girls on their buttocks and breasts, also groping them in the crotch. At Haarlem station, eight or nine boys chased the girls onto the platform, pinned two of them down against a

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[3] The name Achmed is a pseudonym.

candy machine and started again with their pawing. Later at the police station, Achmed with his white jersey wrapped around his naked upper body and in his green tracksuit, was identified by the girls as one of the ringleaders. They stated that he had dropped his tracksuit bottoms revealing grey underpants with pink hearts and proceeded to sit on one of the girls' laps. In court Achmed couldn't recall the event. "Maybe they have me confused with one of the other boys", was his reaction to the allegations.' (*Het Parool*, September 20th 2003, p.3)

In many reactions to the events of that day, the group of Moroccan boys was defined as a gang and their nuisance and criminal behavior was explained by pointing out that these boys were of Moroccan descent (even though most of them were born and raised in Amsterdam). This raises the question of whether or not the behavior of these Moroccan boys can be explained by the culture of their forbears from the Rif mountains in northern Morocco. Conversely, could the behavior of these young Amsterdam boys be better explained by general group dynamics that take place within the circumstances in which these boys grew up? In other words, is it typically a Moroccan problem or is this a case of marginalization more generally?

Are there unique processes of group formation amongst Moroccan boys that contribute to the classification of their behavior as extreme delinquent behavior in general and their group as a gang more specifically? Do the same behaviors among other groups result in the same labeling? Is there something fundamentally different within the Moroccan boys' group that contributes to their social ostracism? My specific research questions are: How and why do Moroccan boys form troublesome youth groups in the streets? What is it about their behavior that leads their

behaviors to be labeled as the extreme nuisance and criminal behavior for which they are notorious? And, is there reason to label these groups gangs? In this study, an attempt is made to answer these questions by validating a theoretical model based on empirical ethnographic research.

A theoretical model of group dynamics

In order to explain the nuisance and criminal behavior of a Moroccan group like the one in Zandvoort, a theoretical model combining micro-sociological and social psychological theories is proposed. This integrated theoretical model helps us to understand group formation, development of group culture, and behavioral adaptations that can explain serious and violent delinquent behavior of Moroccan boys.

Jonathan H. Turner (2002) developed a theory explaining that group formation is a useful and even necessary condition for humans to satisfy certain (interactive) needs. The need for recognition and appreciation, for example, is satisfied by friendships and loving relationships. People also seek out each other to meet their needs for safety and security. The desire to satisfy social needs leads people to seek out others and to form new groups or join existing ones. Turner also maintains that, in order to be accepted into a group, a person will adapt his/her behavior to what s/he perceives to be the group's values and norms. In addition to this internal urge to conform to the group norms, the individual will also experience external pressure in the form of peer pressure. Out of fear of rejection or a negative sanction from other group members, a person will act in accordance with the demands placed on him by others (Turner, 2002).

Individual expectations of normative behavior for members are created through group processes in which they judge each other's behaviors: they react positively to conformist behavior and negatively to deviant behavior (according to the group norms). Group members do not only adapt their own behavior to the expectations of the group, they also contribute to determining the group's values and norms. In group processes that are partly influenced by their environment, group members confirm their shared values and norms, and contribute to the social identity of the group (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977).

According to Turner (1985, 1987, 1999) all people preferably identify themselves with groups that match their interests and values, that are accessible (in which they are accepted as a member), and that cater to their specific (interactive) needs. According to the self-categorization theory advanced by Turner, the processes by which a person identifies with a group take place on an individual level and on a social level.

At the individual level, identification with a group leads to a sense of group membership and awareness of a social identity. The extent to which a person will identify with a group and adapt his/her behavior to the expectations of other group members, depends on three factors: 1) how important group membership is to the individual; 2) the degree of freedom the individual has to claim group identity, and 3) the existence of alternative groups to which the individual can affiliate. The stronger someone identifies with a group, the more his or her self-image will depend on the valuation given by other group members. A person will experience this as peer pressure and will feel forced to adapt to the values and norms of the group.

At the social level, group dynamics arise in which us-them relationships develop between group members and outsiders. This means that group members and outsiders are oppositional. If this is the case, someone will be quick to bond with a group when membership depends on

external recognition (such as skin color, symbols or a uniform dress code), and when the group is considered a minority (Vigil, 1988, 2002). A person will also quickly and strongly identify with a group when there is a conflict with outsiders (Turner, 1987).

The social identity theory posited by Tajfel and Turner (1979, 1986) explains the origins of deviant group values and norms. Tajfel and Turner also maintain the importance of environmental influences on behavioral adaptations within the group and the importance that group members attach to the social identity of the group. The social identity of a group is derived from shared experiences, meanings, values and norms of the group. In addition, the social identity also reflects the status of a group compared to rival groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1978, 1981). A group that performs better or is otherwise regarded as successful will not only provide more satisfaction of collective needs, but also a higher status and a positive social identity.

Members of groups with low status and a negative social identity – such as Moroccan boys in the Netherlands – face negative consequences for members' self-image. Insofar as individual self-image is dependent on the group and its social identity, the individual will be negatively influenced by the negative reactions of the group. The collective need to defend themselves from external attacks on the group's status and identity forces members to align themselves with the values and norms of the group.

A theoretical model in which the discussed theories are combined should explain how and why Moroccan boys form troublesome youth groups, adapt their behavior within the group and collectively react when the self-image of their group is under attack. I will test this hypothesis by analyzing the aforementioned incident in the summer of 2001 in Zandvoort.

The Zandvoort case is a striking example of the kind of nuisance and criminal behavior that the media portrays as 'typically Moroccan' and therefore self-evidently is explained by their

Moroccan descent. The media spoke of a 'Moroccan youth gang from Amsterdam', even though the police were not familiar with this gang. In the eyes of the police it wasn't clear what brought these boys, who came from different neighborhoods in Amsterdam West, to form a 'gang' in Zandvoort and united to commit such a large number of serious crimes[4].

Later, I will discuss whether or not this troublesome youth group should be called a gang. In what follows I will reconstruct what happened that day and make clear how the boys themselves experienced the day's events. This will be done using insights obtained during years of fieldwork in Amsterdam West. Based on my field research I shall show how such extreme delinquent behavior of Moroccan boys as took place in Zandvoort, can be explained by the theoretical model. First, I shall recount the events of that day at the beach and the group interpretations of the events of that day.

Back to Zandvoort

On that particular day in May 2001, warm weather lured sun lovers from all parts of the country to Zandvoort. Among them a number of Moroccan boys from Amsterdam went to the beach in search of fun. When the boys meet, they give each other a 'box' by way of greeting and have a chat in their street language, as they are accustomed.[5] Some guys are real 'matties' (friends), but most know each other only superficially through family, friends and acquaintances, or through

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[4] The crimes are considered serious crimes because of the amount of aggression (the boys threaten bystanders with violence or even death), the extent of the sexual harassment and the property damage.
[5] The correct spelling of slang words is borrowed from the slang dictionary on the internet. On this site young people themselves decide how their spoken language can best be written. It is therefore possible that slang words that stem from the Surinamese or Moroccan language are spelled differently than in the original language.

school, work, sports or entertainment. They hang together on the street or 'chill' together in the centre of town. Usually they go with guys from their own neighborhood, but on these occasions they simply join up with Moroccan boys from other neighborhoods also looking for fun.

In the beginning of the day the boys conduct themselves the way they would on the streets of Amsterdam; they reproduce a street culture with its own values and standards. They tell each other tough 'tories' (stories) about 'fitties' (fights) and 'sick actions' (exciting adventures), talking about 'dope pokoes' (nice rapsongs) and 'vette kinos' (great movies), and boast about 'chickies' (girls) and driving (too fast) in 'dikke waggies' (expensive cars). They also 'diss' (belittle) each other and give each other 'props' (appreciation) for hair styles, (brand) clothes, 'pattas' (shoes) and 'pockets' (mobile phones).

Some of the boys 'tappen' (drink alcohol), others smoke 'jonkos'(joints) with 'wirie' or 'assi' (marijuana or hashish). The boys with sufficient 'doekoe' (money) share their 'tabacca' (cigarettes), alcohol and drugs with the boys who are 'skeer' (broke). They do not want to be called a 'Jew' (stingy) or let bystanders think they hang around with 'zwervers' (losers). What they don't want to share with others, they make sure to hide from the rest in order to prevent that they will be 'genakt' (robbed) or 'geflasht (cheated) by one of their 'gabbers' (friends and acquaintances).

The boys try to outdo each other with 'wisecracking' remarks, cursing each other, threatening each other, and pushing and fighting for the 'fatoe' (as a joke). But when a fight threatens to turn into something serious, often one of the older boys calms the situation down. Their way of 'gek doen' (acting crazy) also means provoking and challenging passers-by. Boys that 'schijt hebben' (don't give a shit) and 'flikken' (dare to do) something are loudly applauded and are told they are 'moeilijk' (tough). Sometimes one of the older boys gets a 'headache' from

this kind of behavior and he stops it by shouting or threatening (or – if it becomes too much – he takes a step away from the group). In other cases, the tough street behavior the boys use to impress each other can suddenly get seriously out of hand.

Some guys try 'lullen' (picking up girls) with an intimidating macho-attitude: "Hey there, baby. Come here! Come listen to me!" When one of these 'players' fails in his attempts, the rest of the group will call him a 'zwerver' (loser). The failure is recouped by calling the girl a 'whore' or something along those lines, and by shouting that he wasn't interested in those 'kaolo tangas' (bitches) anyway because they are arrogant or ugly. The other guys interpret this as gaining stripes for being disrespectful towards women and they dare each other to grab sunbathing girls' bare breasts. Eventually one of the boys shows that he really is completely 'loco' (crazy). He jumps on a woman's lap and pulls his pants down to show her his 'bana' (penis) whilst the rest of the group jeers.

However, not all the guys are involved in this kind of behavior. Some find what the others do kind of 'faya' (annoying). But such a doubter had better keep his mouth shut, because if he publicly criticizes something one member of the group does, the streets will soon hear stories that will make him a 'bitch', a 'zemmel' (gay) or a 'shekem' (traitor). Then he will be laughed at, scolded, or maybe even get hit. Nor can he allow his 'bradas' (brothers) to be left in the lurch when they get into 'problemen' (real trouble). For his own safety he must be able to count on the fact that they will be there for him as well when trouble finds him.

As the events of the day unfold, the boys eventually notice that their group is increasingly attracting attention by the way they are 'chilling' and 'spacing' (lounging). They see the people around them looking annoyed, and some of bystanders appear scared or intimidated. The boys, however, feel that they have every right to be at the beach and they convince each other that they

are really not doing anything wrong. They find those 'cheese-heads' (Dutch people) are 'dooie' (boring) losers and they complain to each other about the dirty looks they are getting. In their eyes these Dutch are all 'homos' (cowards), 'Nazis' (racists) and 'Jews' (anti-Muslims) who hate Moroccans because they have black hair. And when one of these 'tattas' (Dutch people) dares to say something to them, it's never 'normal' (friendly), but always patronizing and without 'respect'. If bystanders cause problems, the boys back each other up without asking who is responsible or at fault. They think the 'cheese-heads' with their racist attitude deserve to be bothered or hit.

Yet the way they are treated doesn't sit well with the boys. They become 'para' (agitated) by the idea they are thought of as 'criminals' and won't allow anyone to make remarks about their behavior. On the other hand, they find it 'moeilijk' (cool or tough) that adult people fear their 'cliq' (gang). It gives them a sense of power to intimidate others. To a certain extent they enjoy it when others see them as 'thugs' (street boys), who – when it comes to a fight – always display courage and do not hesitate to 'bossen' (hit) or 'punteren' (kick).

Nuisance and criminal behavior explained by group dynamics

The description of the events in Zandvoort from the perspective of the Moroccan street boys illustrates several group processes. The boys get together to have fun, to gain recognition within the group and to feel protected. They develop a specific street culture with its own values and norms (Fleisher 1995). The boys adapt their behavior to these values and norms not only because

they want to satisfy their needs. They also try to live up to the expectations of the group because of peer pressure, in other words, out of fear of negative reactions from other group members.

These group processes are general to all problematic youth groups and can explain how and why Moroccan street boys form groups, how and why they adapt their behavior to the group, and how and why delinquent behavior can arise. In the case of the Moroccan boys in Zandvoort, however, there was delinquent behavior that escalated, and the nuisance and criminal behavior is characterized as extremely challenging and aggressive. In the following sections, I argue that the strengthening of group identity, increasing peer pressure and an intensification of us-them contrasts explains how and why the delinquent behavior of Moroccan boys can get so out of hand.

The strengthening of group identity

Moroccan boys in the Netherlands realize that many people see them as a minority and as an inferior group (they are referred to as 'kut-Marokkanen, which means something like 'awful Moroccans'). The feeling of rejection by the Dutch strengthens their identification with other Moroccan boys. This identification is intensified further by their external recognition based on innate ethnic characteristics. Negative characteristics stemming from their Moroccan culture, such as aggressiveness and a lack of consciousness and responsibility, are ascribed to them. The boys experience such negative and stigmatizing reactions as threatening because it compromises their self esteem (Vigil, 2002).

In order to neutralize this threat they embrace the negative stigma as a positive group identity and behave accordingly. This is why negative reactions from the public serve to

strengthen the group identity, which is expressed by showing behavior that bystanders perceive as disruptive and threatening. The boys themselves appreciate this challenging and aggressive behavior as 'kapot moeilijk' (very tough) and regard it as appropriate under the circumstances.

Increasing peer pressure

Because they identify so strongly with each other, Moroccan boys feel they have little choice but to pull together if they want to enjoy themselves; this is why they align themselves so easily and naturally with other Moroccan boys, even those they barely know. This creates large, loose group affiliations with constantly changing compositions. There is often confusion regarding what expectations exist with respect to each other's behavior in such groups. Because of the strong sense of interdependence and the uncertainty about the group norms, boys sometimes get entangled in the assumptions about what behavior other group members expect. In the uncertainty they resort to the street culture they know and in which several forms of delinquent behavior are appreciated. Under these circumstances this can give rise to (delinquent) behavior that no one requested nor expected from another group member.

The feeling that they can only count on other Moroccan boys increases the pressure to display desired behavior and to be accepted and valued by the group. Increasing peer pressure and confusion about shared group norms lead then – partly unintended and unforeseen – to delinquent behavior. If boys seek acceptance within the group by creating nuisance and displaying criminal behavior, other group members in turn see this as an incentive to display

similar behavior (or even outdo the others). In this manner, conflicts can escalate so that afterwards, the boys involved can't explain how things got so out of hand[6].

Intensification of us-them contrasts

In such conflict situations the strengthening of group identity and increasing peer pressure lead to an intensification of us-them contrasts between gangs of Moroccan boys and (random) outsiders. Conversely, the intensification of us-them attitudes leads to the strengthening of group identity and increasing peer pressure to engage in delinquent behaviors. Boys who know little of each other will quickly rally for each other, even when they know full well that their 'friends' are the instigators of the conflict. The more they can rely on positive feedback from their peers, the more the boys will be motivated to choose sides in any (alleged) conflict with outsiders.

External recognition (not only because of ethnic characteristics, but also because of clothing and hair styles), frequently hanging around each other in close proximity, a sense of belonging to a 'minority', and their awareness of the fact that Moroccan youth are in conflict with Dutch society, lead to an intensification of us-them contrasts. The Moroccan boys confirm each other in seeing outsiders as the enemy or as 'racists' and they experience strong feelings of mutual loyalty. In conflicts with outsiders this means that, as a group, they have a more challenging attitude, they fiercely back up each other, and they respond aggressively to outsiders.

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[6] The behavior in Zandvoort was extreme even from the boys' perspective as they have indicated in interviews.

A typically Moroccan problem?

The nuisance and criminal behavior of Moroccan youth groups in general and that of the Moroccan boys during the incident at Zandvoort in particular, can be understood and explained by group processes. Nevertheless, the behavior of Moroccan boys in the media and political debate is labeled as 'typically Moroccan'. The behavior of the group of Moroccan boys in the Zandvoort incident was attributed to their alleged Moroccan descent. This view is supported by cultural anthropologists who explain the behavior of Moroccan boys by identifying cultural characteristics of their forebears: in particular distrust, shame, family honor, and an appreciation of a warrior mentality (Werdmölder 1986, 1990, 2005; van Gemert 1998). Apart from the question whether these cultural characteristics are indeed representative of 'the' Moroccan culture, questions can be raised as to the extent to which these cultural characteristics have been transferred to the Moroccan boys who grew up in the Netherlands. It is assumed that cultural factors determine their behavior in the streets but this has not been proven empirically.

My group dynamic model, on the other hand, does provide insight into the ways in which the group culture of Moroccan boys evolves and is reproduced in their interactions with each other in the streets. My field research has granted me the opportunity to conduct a detailed analysis of the group dynamics in which their street culture evolves. The Zandvoort incident provides an illustration of three aspects of Moroccan youth groups which were evident in my field research. First, these boys form groups for their interactive needs for recognition, security and enjoyment. Second, they develop a street culture in which delinquent behavior is positively valued. And thirdly, they adapt their behavior to the group in order to receive positive responses from other group members and especially to avoid negative reactions. Strengthening of group

identity, increasing peer pressure and intensification of us-them contrasts leads to nuisance and criminal behavior that shocks bystanders and leaves victims stunned. Taking into account these circumstances that intensify general processes of group formation and behavioral adaptation can explain why the group of Moroccan boys in Zandvoort backed each other up so fiercely and responded to bystanders so aggressively.

The theoretical model of group dynamic processes and behavioral adaptation clarifies how and why certain behavioral expectations of Moroccan boys emerge, how and why they adapt their individual behavior to the street culture of their group, and how and why general group dynamics intensify to such a degree that unusual nuisance and criminal behavior may result.

A gang problem?

This brings us to the final question that will be addressed in this chapter: can a problematic youth group of Moroccan boys like the one in Zandvoort that engages in such extreme delinquent behavior, be considered a gang? The media and politicians seem to think so. But if we take a close look at the group and use the Eurogang definition of a gang, the answer is not so clear. The group is street oriented and its involvement in illegal activity is part of the group identity, but the group is not durable. The group consisted of boys from different neighborhoods in Amsterdam West and this particular constellation collaborated only for a day. Therefore, we cannot say that this group is a gang according to the Eurogang definition.

The networks of street boys out of which these kinds of groups emerge, however, are a different story. These networks are durable. During my years in the field I have identified over 100 Moroccan street boys that make up the network of the neighborhood Overtoomse Veld in Amsterdam West. Everybody in the network knows each other at least a little bit. The Moroccan boys can identify who is a 'boy from Allebé' (named after the central square in Overtoomse Veld) and who is not. The network of 'boys from Allebé' gives rise to all kinds of different groups. There are groups that form for leisure activities such as hanging around the neighborhood swapping stories or playing soccer. Other groups form because the group members seek activities outside the neighborhood, like going to the movies or going clubbing. And there are the delinquent groups which are divided into 'work groups' and 'riot groups'.

A work group emerges from the network when a couple of neighborhood street boys decide they want to commit crimes in order to make some money ('working' is their slang word for committing instrumental crimes). Mostly these groups are not very big (three to six boys) and they are not durable. Some only exist for one particular criminal event. The reason for this lack of durability is that a lot of times the boys will have a falling out over the division of labor or the loot. Also the network provides enough other boys with whom they can go out to 'work'.

A riot group emerges from the network when there is something exciting to do. The boys will anticipate the fact that it's going to 'kick off' somewhere and they will want to be there for the action. The sheer anticipation of the fact that something is going down makes a lot of boys interested in joining a riot group. Riot groups are usually quite big (30 boys up to a 100). The events that attract riot groups are demonstrations (for example, against the war in Iraq) but also a simple event like a day at the beach. The group in the Zandvoort case can be considered a riot group.

Now that we know that different and dynamic delinquent groups emerge from a durable network, this sheds a new light on the Eurogang definition of a gang. The network as a whole could almost be considered a gang of over 100 boys, because it's durable and the boys' involvement in illegal activity is part of their network identity. I say almost, because the particular groups that emerge from the durable network are not durable themselves but change all the time. Therefore, I think we should conclude that Amsterdam doesn't have a gang problem following the Eurogang definition. But how we should define such a durable network of potential 'ganglike' groups is still open for debate and demands more research.

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