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Contextual and individual factors determining escalation of collective violence

Case study of the
project X riot in Haren,
the Netherlands

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Abstract

Two dominant perspectives explaining collective violence differ in the extent to which they ascribe influence to individual and contextual factors. Our analysis of a project X disorder in the Netherlands shows organized groups were not involved. Instead spontaneous group formation and identification were observed, confirming socio-contextual theory. Arrested suspects, however, were no cross section of youths, with a minority mirroring the personality profile of individuals disproportionately involved in collective violence. This suggests predispositions are of relevance as well in explaining public disorder. This case study shows the recently developed initiation/escalation model provides a useful framework that incorporates both perspectives, i.e. both theoretical perspectives are not mutually exclusive. Research suggestions are discussed.

Keywords: *public disorder, collective violence, predispositions, socio-contextual theory*

Introduction

Nothing ever happens in the sleepy, 16,000 inhabitants villa town of Haren, designated twice as the 'best municipality in the Netherlands'. Yet, on 21 September 2012, thousands of youngsters descended on the small town after a Facebook invitation for a sweet 16 party was turned into an open invitation for a *project X* party, referring to a film released earlier that year. The film 'Project X' depicts three high school seniors who have the idea of throwing a birthday party that no one will ever forget. They advertise it via their school, a website and a local radio station. Hundreds of youngsters show up at the home where the party is given. Things get out of hand, authorities intervene, a ravaged residential area is left behind.¹⁸ In several countries, parties inspired by the film had earlier led to public order problems, e.g. United States (Houston, 14 March 2012¹⁹), France (Roques sur Argens, 17 May 2012²⁰) and Germany (Backnang, 30 June 2012²¹).

In Haren too, things got out of hand. In the course of the evening, a violent confrontation between youngsters and police lasting several hours erupted (called excessive and without precedent by authorities) and some shops were looted. Thirtyfour people were arrested during the riot (after subsequent investigations in the following weeks, the number of arrested individuals totaled 108). Events drew a lot of national and international media attention including from the BBC (*Facebook party invite sparks riot in Haren, Netherlands*²²) and CNN (*Facebook birthday invite leads to mayhem in Dutch town, authorities say*²³). The so-called Haren Facebook riot led to a lot of copycat behaviour: in the weeks following the riot, more than 40 invitations for new project X parties all over the Netherlands were announced via social media. Most never materialized, others were actively prevented from

¹⁸ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1R1TJG17Wk> (accessed 22 March 2015)

¹⁹ <http://abcnews.go.com/US/project-movie-inspires-teen-parties/story?id=15922034> (accessed 22 March 2015).

²⁰ <http://www.rczeitung.com/index.php/provence-cote-dazur-artikel/items/villa-in-les-issambres-nach-massen-party-verwuestet.html> (accessed 22 March 2015).

²¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aQZgtq0SF2s> (accessed 22 March 2015).

²² <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-19684708> (accessed 22 March 2015).

²³ <http://edition.cnn.com/2012/09/22/world/europe/netherlands-facebook-riot/index.html> (accessed 22 March 2015).

happening by authorities. Nevertheless, similar to the England riots of 2011, the role social media played in the run up to and during these events became a hot topic and was seen as a distinguishing feature of the riot. Newburn (2015) puts the England riots ('the most significant civil disorder on the British mainland in at least a generation') in recent historical perspective and notes four ways in which these riots deviate significantly from other riots in the post-war period, through (1) their speed and malleability as the consequence of the information flows made possible through social media, (2) the amount of looting as a possible expression of violent consumerism, (3) the criticism levelled at police by politicians and (4) the most distinctive, the nature and extent of the response by the penal state: special court settings, utilizing massive resources to analyze CCTV data to bring unprecedented numbers of people before the courts that are subsequently remanded in or sentenced to custody.

Although the scale of the violence in Haren cannot be compared to what happened during the 2011 England riots and the looting was limited, it is not difficult to apply Newburn's four 'points of distinction' to the project X riot in Haren. Authorities in Haren were surprised by the mobilization power of social media (1), several commentators blamed the hedonistic behaviour of the youths involved (2), and the response of the criminal justice system was extraordinary (4): a dedicated police investigative team of the type usually reserved for capital crimes was set up, police analyzed a total of 120 hours of video material (filmed by police cameras, obtained from the public and downloaded from YouTube. There were no CCTV cameras in Haren), fast-track court proceedings were used and, as an innovation, perpetrators were convicted to contribute to a specifically established fund to cover damages (in other respects, punishments did not deviate from what was normal). Because of all the criticism levelled at them, police and authorities chose to commission an independent investigation into the riots and the way they were handled. Following the publication of the critical report, the mayor, as the one responsible for public order in the Dutch system, resigned (3). There is another similarity: the day after the project X riot, police and authorities blamed 'scum' (specifically, outside organized groups of 'hooligans') for the chaos and violence. The same happened after the 2011 England riots where some (especially politicians) blamed career criminals and gang members for the riots (prime minister David Cameron in a statement to Parliament: 'it is criminality, pure and simple'). Others, however, pointed to the importance of a social context of deprivation and discriminating police tactics in London and other English cities that caused normally non-criminal individuals to participate (e.g. Guardian/LSE 2011; Reicher and Stott 2011). Haren is in no way a disadvantaged place, with an average household income that is the highest in the north of the Netherlands, a virtual absence of inhabitants of migrant origin and less than 1 per cent of inhabitants dependent on welfare/social security (well below the national average). Other than with the England riots, there was no suggestion that the violence and looting in Haren was some kind of political protest, but the question did arise what role social context and group dynamics played in the project X riot.

This question links neatly to the theoretical debate that is going on between different explanations for collective violence (Reicher 1996; Stott and Reicher 1998). One perspective suggests that collective violence is an

outcome of the convergence of individuals who are predisposed toward creating 'disorder' (e.g. 'hooligans' or 'career criminals'). This approach does not explain how and why collective violence erupts in specific circumstances but not in others. The other side of the theoretical debate argues the need for a contextualized, group-dynamic understanding of collective violence. This paper wants to contribute to that debate. In analyzing the riot, we will make use of the initiation/escalation model for collective violence (Adang 2011). The model was developed on the basis of systematic observations of 225 so-called 'high-risk' football and protest events as a first step toward combining both theoretical approaches. The model made clear the relevance of context, intergroup interaction and intergroup relationships while at the same time indicating variations in the willingness of individuals to become involved in violence, with some actively seeking opportunities to be violent, without the need for external triggers (other than the presence of a rival group). The model, as outlined in Adang (2011), posits that as far as the initiation of collective violence is concerned, a distinction should be made between two types of violence:

- (1) Violence that is linked to a clearly identifiable trigger. This type of violence is reactive – it is a response to specific elements or frictions in a given situation, be it provocations by other groups or third parties, events on the pitch (in the case of football), measures taken by police or some other identifiable trigger. Theoretically, this type of violence is easily linked to familiar aggression theories (e.g. aggression out of frustration), competition for limited resources or as a response to threats. As with other forms of aggression, males are more likely to react aggressively than females, and adolescents/young adults are more likely to react aggressively than individuals from other age groups. The targets of the violence are usually linked with the trigger preceding the behaviour.
- (2) Violence that is not linked to a clearly identifiable trigger. This type of violence is not reactive, and thus seems to arise more spontaneously in the situation (although it might be preplanned). It is performed by groups of male adolescents/young adult males and is directed specifically at similar, rival groups of young males. The individuals and groups concerned seem to actively seek out opportunities to confront rival groups. Theoretically, this type of violence can be seen as another expression of the so-called 'young male syndrome' (Wilson and Daly 1985), the tendency of young males to take risks and be violent because they discount the future in favour of short-term gains, which is socially facilitated by the presence of peers in pursuit of the same goals.

The distinction between the two types of violence is not absolute and an obvious overlap is created by the fact that the young male syndrome may also be expressed in response to triggers that may seem trivial to outsiders. However, the model posits that different mechanisms are responsible for the *escalation* of violence (in the sense that more individuals decide to involve themselves):

- (1) On the one hand, there is the opportunity and (perceived) risk of retaliation. Only a small minority of a group engages in the most risky types of behaviour, whereas the majority of participants opt for less risky alternatives (shouting, gesturing, running) or do not become involved at all. Even for those being violent, there is a lot more missile throwing than physical fighting, and redirected aggression at inanimate objects (fences, buses, trains) rather than at individuals who can fight back. The fact that the young males, when violent, operate in groups is a form of risk reduction in itself, as is the fact that they avoid or flee from confrontations that they seem unable to win. In several respects, the data show that violence became more likely when there was no police present at risk locations. Violent fans and protestors regularly took measures to hide their faces to make recognition more difficult and avoid identification and arrest. These risk-reducing attempts to maintain 'anonymity' (to authorities, not to their fellows!) are to be distinguished from the so-called deindividuation effect of 'anonymity', for which there is no support (Postmes and Spears 1998).²⁴ The evidence for bounded rationality in combination with the relevance of opportunities to be violent with limited risk for escalation provide a link between collective violence and principles of situational crime prevention (Clarke 1995).
- (2) The second important escalation mechanism is the existence of an 'us versus them' antagonism. The more antagonistic the relationships between different groups, the higher the frequency of observed violence. This was clearly the case for the relations between rival fan groups and for the relationship between certain groups of protestors ('autonomen/black block') and police. Theoretically, the elaborated social identity model (ESIM), which states that collective 'disorder' is made possible through the shared psychological salience of a common social identity among crowd participants is relevant here (Reicher 1984; 1996). The defining dimensions of this identity serve to explain the normative limits of collective action (what people do) and the extent of participation (who does and does not join in) during a crowd event. This 'social identity' analysis argues that the dynamics of intergroup interaction are integral to the psychology of widespread 'disorder'. Stott and Reicher (e.g. 1998) indicate that when an initially heterogeneous crowd has come to be treated as a homogeneous whole by the police, this has led crowd members to reconceptualize themselves as members of a common category, thus setting up a cycle of tension and escalating conflict.

In this model, alcohol and drugs may indirectly contribute to the initiation and escalation of violence through one of the factors in the model, e.g. by increasing the likelihood that a trigger is reacted to or by altering perceptions of opportunity. The effects of alcohol consumption may make violence more likely under specific circumstances because of self-overestimation, less impulse control, less accurate assessment of social and risky situations, less fear of sanctions and contributing to a feeling of 'everything goes' (van Hasselt 2013: 210). We want to explore if the escalation in Haren can be explained using this model, which was developed in the quite different context of football and protest events. In terms of the six levels of the widely used 'flashpoints' analytical model (e.g. Waddington 2010), we focus on the role contextual, situational and interactional aspects play in the

24 According to deindividuation theories, anonymity causes antinormative and disinhibited behaviour.

initiation and escalation of collective violence (rather than on the structural, political/ ideological or cultural aspects that usually receive more attention). The questions this paper seeks to address is *how events escalated, what individual, situational and contextual factors played a role and why police were attacked*. Our analysis will focus on events at the day itself. After a description of the methodology used, we present a reconstruction of events, analyze contextual factors and present an analysis of individual factors, based in large part on a detailed analysis of apprehended suspects. In the end, we discuss the theoretical implications of our findings.

Methodology

This study was performed as part of the official independent investigation into events in Haren (Commission Project X Haren 2013) and made use of written documents, audio and video material and interviews. A factual reconstruction was made based on interviews and an analysis of written documentation and audio-visual material. The researchers had access to all relevant material from authorities. Audio was available of police communication. Video material was available that was made by a police officer wearing a bodycam (containing recordings made mainly in the lead up to the riot) and from two cameras fixed to two different riot police vehicles. Also video material from open sources was analyzed, both from media reports and YouTube. Police and authorities provided documentation of preparations, evaluations and official meetings held in relation with the event. In addition, 94 face-to-face and 11 phone interviews were held with authorities, police officers and municipal workers that played a role in preparation, on the day itself or in the aftermath. An information and interview protocol guaranteed anonymity of respondents and complete independence of the researchers from authorities. Because of the wealth of the information available, it was possible to make a highly accurate reconstruction of events (Adang 2013). Where appropriate, the findings in this paper are complemented with the results of other studies done for the Commission: a study on the mobilization for Haren (Van Dijk *et al.* 2013) and a study on societal aspects of project X Haren (van den Brink *et al.* 2013). For this last study, 16 youngsters who were present in Haren during the riots were interviewed. After the riot, a total of 74 suspects were arrested after an extensive large-scale investigation to identify, arrest and prosecute as many suspects as possible (in addition to the 34 who had already been arrested during the riot itself). For our analysis of all 108 arrested suspects and in conformity with Dutch Law, permission was sought and obtained from the Minister of Safety and Justice to obtain and use the relevant individual data from police files. This includes data contained in police systems and reports of police interrogations of these suspects. Also, interviews were held with two officers who conducted many of the interviews with suspects.

The 108 arrested suspects in all likelihood form a good representation of those that were violent on the night of 21st September in Haren. According to police officers on the scene that night at most 300 individuals (highest estimate) were violent that night. Arresting over one third of them is a relatively high percentage. Because of the outrage following the riot, the police got a lot of cooperation from the public as evidenced by 722 tip-offs and many hours of video material made by citizens. Almost all of the suspects

police sought to identify and arrest following their analysis of the 120 hours of available video material were in fact arrested. For the study, this meant that the potential bias of mainly those already known to police being arrested was avoided (cf. Ball and Drury 2012). All but three were convicted.

In our analysis of suspects, we specifically looked for data that could provide information on suspects' previous police contacts and previous offences and convictions, and for indications of any form of psychosocial problems. The following police systems were consulted:

- To assess whether arrested suspects can be considered to belong to so-called 'hooligan' groups, a query on arrested suspects was conducted in the Dutch police national Football Tracking System (Voetbalvolgsysteem). Since 1997, all misconduct and misbehavior of persons around football matches is registered in this system to monitor the prevalence of football-related delinquency for management and policy goals.
- The extent to which arrested suspects had been brought to justice for felonies prior to the project X disorder was investigated by consulting a police registration system called HKS. This system has been in use by the Dutch national police since 1986 and registers all persons that have been prosecuted due to committing a felony and the felony concerned.
- The police registration system BVH is used among other things to register persons who are involved in or suspects of felonies and misdemeanor. Due to legal rules records that had been registered five years or more ago could not be consulted. Therefore, only records between 2008 and 2012 were included. All available records in BVH were also analyzed for information on problem behaviour during education and at home, personality aspects and alcohol and drug habits.

To put these data in perspective, we will compare them where possible with the analysis of arrested suspects following the so-called Hoek van Holland beach-riot of August 2009. This riot took place at a freely accessible dance party attended by between 30,000 and 50,000 visitors.

Late in the evening of this event, police officers were attacked by a group of 200-300 persons and persecuted into the dunes. Police officers fired a total of 75 (mostly warning) shots in self-defense; one person was killed by a police bullet. Statements of police officers and witnesses depicted violence of – by Dutch standards – almost unprecedented severity and intensity. Independent investigators Muller *et al.* (2010) showed that this riot was unequivocally caused by an organized group of 'hooligans' that is frequently involved in public disorder, calling themselves Rotterdam Jongeren Kern (RJK, Rotterdam Youth Core, fans of football club Feyenoord Rotterdam). The comparison with project X Haren is interesting because it also involves an escalation in a party atmosphere.

Results: A Reconstruction of Events

Anticipation: 6–20th September

On Thursday, 6th September, a 15-year-old girl from Haren opens an event on Facebook to celebrate her 16th birthday. The party is to take place on the 21st.²⁵ The next day she notices the invitation is being spread widely and as much as 3,500 people on the first day announce they will attend. When the number keeps increasing and a link is being made with the film project X, she contacts her father. They decide to remove the invitation from Facebook. That doesn't help much because several new Facebook events are started that hijack her original event. Eventually, one event remains active and the number of registrations keeps growing day by day (eventually, some 250,000 invitations were sent out with some 30,000 people indicating they would attend).

On 18th September, three days before the event is supposed to take place, several national media pick up on the news and (falsely) mention that the municipality has taken emergency measures. From this moment onwards, national attention is growing, activity on social media keeps growing exponentially (van Dijk *et al.* 2013: 72). Although they do not know what to expect, authorities start preparations. No measures are taken to prevent people from travelling to Haren. It is decided that the police should adopt a low-profile approach²⁶, using regular patrol officers without deployment of riot police.²⁷ In case a large number of people show up, an abandoned field is designated as a place for them to meet and be transported to nearby Groningen by bus. A special ordinance is issued, prohibiting the use (but not the possession) of alcohol in the evening of the 21st.

Project X Haren: 21st September

In line with the low key approach, police deployment this day is mainly focused on monitoring the number of people travelling to Haren and patrolling the road where the non-existing party is supposed to take place and surrounding streets. In the course of the afternoon and early evening, several hundreds of people enter Haren by various means (e.g. train, walking, car). The ordinance that it is forbidden to drink alcohol in the street is not communicated or enforced: police feel unable to do so, given the number of people arriving, many of whom carry alcoholic drinks. The atmosphere is happy, festive, jovial and upbeat. By the time it starts to get dark, after a quarter to eight, the total numbers of visitors is already well over a 1,000, with probably around 700 of them converging at the crossroads where most of the media representatives have taken up position. The first signs of trouble are beginning to show. Occasionally fireworks are thrown. Individuals climb in traffic signs and lantern poles, and offensive chants are at times directed to the police. At some point, all police officers present at the crossroads take up position behind a barrier that had been placed in the afternoon to close off the street. The crowd advances to the barriers and leans on them. At no

25 She deliberately makes the event 'public' to give her friends the opportunity to invite a few others who are not Facebook friends of hers.

26 This is a common approach in the Netherlands, specifically intended to avoid being seen as provocative and allowing for easier communication with citizens.

27 Riot police units in the Netherlands are composed of regular patrol officers who received a four-week basic riot police training and are equipped with protective padding, a shield, a helmet and a long baton ('full riot gear'). One group of riot police consists of six officers with a group commander and a driver. Three groups form a section, three sections form a platoon. They are mobilized as needed, there are no full-time riot units.

point do they try to break through it, but occasionally, empty bottles and beer cans are thrown around, at first randomly, then in the direction of police officers. Several of the officers feel increasingly uncomfortable and threatened. By 20.00 hours, reinforcements are called up, both in the form of additional patrol officers in daily uniform (the idea is to have them enter the crowd and engage them) as well as in the form of riot police as a form of back up. The first group consisting of seven riot police officers arrives on the scene at 20.49 hours. These seven riot officers descend from their vehicle and, carrying helmets and shields (i.e. full riot gear), take up position as a human barrier. They do not charge at the crowd, which had already backed away at their approach. Nevertheless, immediately a barrage of objects is thrown at the officers. They have difficulty maintaining their position and at times have to retreat. The riot has started in earnest and it the police clearly are not in control of the situation. It takes time for additional riot police officers to arrive on the scene. Lack of manpower, lack of a properly functioning command and communication structure and the severity of the violence in combination with local infrastructure (wide alleyways, big gardens, many side streets) result in the violence continuing and displacing itself. On two occasions, a car is turned over and set on fire. Shopping windows are being smashed in and goods are stolen. A fire is started on the market square. The disorder finally ends almost four hours later, after it has started raining and mounted police officers in riot gear charge the remaining rioters. The damage to properties of citizens and authorities is somewhat in excess of 200,000 euro.

Analysis of Events

— The reconstruction of events makes clear that there are two different phases: before and after the arrival of the first unit of riot police. Below, events are analyzed for factors that might help explain why this escalation occurred. First, by looking at the mobilization for the event, the background of arrested suspects and their actions and motives. Following that, attention will be paid to contextual factors in the phase leading up to the attack on police and the escalation.

Visitors and perpetrators of violence

— Why did people come to Haren and where did they come from? van Dijk *et al.* (2013) report on a web survey of youngsters/young adults between 15 and 25 that was conducted two months after events in Haren.²⁸ The most important motivators to go, according to the youngsters themselves, were curiosity, excitement, the fact that something was happening at last and the fact that others would be going too. Most of the respondents knew about the film project X (many because they had seen the trailer rather than the film itself). Although it may have served as an inspiration for some, for many, knowledge of the film was an incentive NOT to go. The initial mobilization to Haren was facilitated by a combination of social media and traditional media activities, easy availability of transport and inconsistent communication by authorities. Mobilization for Haren was not mobilization for a riot. Most

28 All 3,115 young people between the ages of 15 and 25 from the three northern provinces that formed part a representative national online panel were approached, 990 or 31 per cent started answering the survey, 855 or 27 per cent fully completed it - to obtain a representative sample, a weighting was done for sex and educational level. Eight per cent of respondents actually went to Haren.

youngsters came to Haren to have a party, either because they genuinely believed some kind of party was going to take place or because they were curious, wanted to take part in something special or defy authorities in showing up to party anyway. As one female participant noted with regard to the fact that they had come to the party that authorities did not want to happen: *'in the beginning it was all beautiful. Youths against older people. Haha. We prevailed'*, but *'Later, only scum remained'* (van den Brink *et al.* 2013: 105²⁹). Another participant: *'You arrive and it is real! You see a large crowd. That is cool. It's like: this is really big, a lot of people have come. There was a good atmosphere...'* (van den Brink *et al.* 2013: 105). It is not possible to know exactly how many people attended the project X event in Haren, there was a coming and going of people. Authorities estimated that this number over the day totaled to between 3,000 and 5,000 people.

At the moment of escalation at 20.49 hours, police estimated that there were less than 1,000 people at the crossroads, with a gradual build-up taking place in the hours before that time. Interviewed police officers indicate that the groups from which they were confronted numbered a few hundred people. The highest police estimate of the total number of people that actually were violent in the course of the evening is 300. After the first violent eruption, groups of from five up to several tens of youngsters committed acts of violence while the rest looked on or were merely present. Officers at the scene agreed that the violence directed at them was not really organized. This seems to confirm the fact that in the lead up to 21st September, police, using their regular intelligence sources, did not have information that any particular groups of youngsters or 'hooligans' were organizing to go to Haren to create public order disturbances.

When, in the afternoon of the 21st, rumors surfaced that hard core 'hooligans' from next door Groningen might be interested to go to Haren, police deployed two plainclothes officers with specific knowledge of this group to see whether they were present. According to their observation, this group (or individuals from this group) were not present at the crossroads at all. At a later stage, they did spot a group of several tens of these hard core supporters at another location in Haren; however, these supporters did not participate in the violence against the police. The hard core fans themselves stated in the press that they did not participate in the disturbances (they refused to be interviewed by researchers). In the week following the riot, police football coordinators from other Dutch police forces reported there were no indications that any hooligans known to them had been present in Haren. Video images also provide no such evidence.³⁰ There was also no evidence that individuals were coordinating violence by means of mobile phones or social media. An analysis of tweets sent on 21st September provides no indications that this medium played a role in a mobilization for violence. No weapons of any kind were brought along by those who acted violently, except for fireworks, objects used in the violence were those at hand. It is good to note that the violence, although severe, was not without bounds. It was mainly aimed at riot police and inanimate objects (cars, street

29 All quotes are translated from the original Dutch by the authors.

30 Images show only one individual with a flag from a football club (FC Utrecht) being present (but not being violent). It is well known that 'hooligans' do not display club colours. Within a few seconds after showing himself, he is being attacked by known hard core FC Groningen fans, so in this sense, they were involved in some violence, but not in the violence directed at the police or objects.

furniture, shop windows), but not at inhabitants of Haren.³¹ The few people within the crowd that actively attempted to stop the violence (videos show at least three individuals from within the crowd who tried, unsuccessfully) did not meet with repercussions. Some of the perpetrators even abided by requests of home owners to stop damaging their goods (van den Brink *et al.* 2013: 119).

Background of arrested suspects

More than half of 108 arrested suspects are between 18 and 25 years old and more than a quarter has not yet reached adult age. The most common age (mode) as well as the median age is 19 years and the mean age of those arrested is 19.6 years. With only two arrested suspects being female, the arrestees are almost exclusively male. Arrested suspects mainly (87 per cent) live in the three northern provinces of the Netherlands. The vast majority of the arrested suspects therefore had to cover only a relatively short distance (but only four of them were inhabitants of Haren itself). This fits with the finding of van den Brink *et al.* (2013: 108) that very few youngsters of Haren were involved in the violence and that the general feeling or norm among them was not to damage the place where they themselves lived.

Two of the 108 arrestees are registered in the Dutch police national Football Tracking System once following misconduct in a train transporting football fans. For this behaviour they received a fine, but no stadium ban. From other police documentation, it can be derived that two more arrested suspects have been involved in football-related delinquency. Although five other arrestees are thought to belong to groups of (young) fanatical supporters of three professional football teams in the north part of the country, none of them is considered to be actively involved in hooliganism. This means that none of the arrestees are known as hooligans by police at the moment project X Haren took place.

On the basis of official police reports and analysis of interrogation transcriptions, it has been assessed whether some kind of previous relationship existed between arrested suspects. Five small groups consisting of three or four persons each were identified. These findings stand in stark contrast with the profile of arrested suspects ($n = 34$) in the Hoek van Holland beach riot, where 23 members of the self-identified Rotterdam Youth Core RJK were seen to be present (with 12 of them being arrested). Seven of those were suspected of partaking in a criminal organization (aimed at creating disturbances) and five of them had received a stadium ban (Muller *et al.* 2010).

Criminal career

Looking at the 'prosecuted felonies' HKS system, 84 of the arrested suspects had no registrations and 24 (22 per cent) were registered for a total of 99 times, an average of four times. Fifteen of those had committed a violent crime at some point prior to the *project X* disorder. Seven of the arrested suspects were responsible for most of the registrations, having well over four each. Felonies registered mainly involve property crime (46 per cent) and violent crime (31 per cent). Again, data from the Hoek van Holland beach riot provide a stark contrast, with 76 per cent of 34 arrested

31 An assault on an 84-year-old man at his own home just outside the area where the riot took place falls outside this pattern. Despite a dedicated extensive police investigation, a suspect could not be identified.

suspects already having a HKS registration, and the average number of records in HKS amounting to seven for all involved in the disorder, and 12 (especially in relation to violence) for the 12 arrestees identified as belonging to the RJK (Muller *et al.* 2010). As a further comparison, Adang and Van der Torre (2008: 70) note that 56 per cent of 250 individuals arrested during New Year's eve disorder in the Netherlands were already registered in HKS an average of six times (especially in relation to violence) and Bruinsma *et al.* (2010: 41) report that 59 per cent of arrestees made during a riot in Utrecht were already registered in HKS an average of seven times (especially in relation to violence). Nationally, in 2012, 62 per cent of arrested suspects in the Netherlands was already registered in HKS, mostly for property crime (Kalidien and de Heer-Lange 2013). Nationally, 10 per cent of all felonies involve violent crime.

In all, 94 out of the 108 Haren suspects were found in the more encompassing BVH system, for a total of 626 records. Registrations found are mainly (26 per cent) concerned with groups of youth being checked by police officials or causing a nuisance, meaning that it is not certain they actually committed a misdemeanor. Vandalizing objects, spraying graffiti and the consumption of alcohol and drugs in public space are other acts for which persons were frequently registered (21 per cent). Sixteen percent of all records concerns violent acts like quarrels and disputes and 13 per cent is related to property crime (e.g. bicycle theft). Unfortunately, reference material (national averages) for BVH is not available, neither for the Hoek van Holland riot (Muller *et al.* 2010) nor nationally.

Arrestees' backgrounds

In as far as could be deduced from police documentation, the majority (74) of the arrestees did not seem to experience personal problems (e.g. substance abuse, psychopathology) or to display problem behaviour at school or at home. For a total of 34 arrested suspects (31 per cent), background information on problem behaviour during education and at home, personality and alcohol and drug habits were found. Thirteen arrested suspects had shown aggressive and problematic behaviour at school, five of them having been expelled due to their misbehavior. Of the arrested suspects showing problematic behaviour at school, three behaved unruly at home as well. Additionally, the behaviour of eight other arrestees was considered troublesome by their parents. This unruly behaviour ranged from walking away from home one or more times, not being susceptible to parental authority or trying to withdraw themselves from it, to threatening and assaulting their parents and siblings. For ten arrestees, there is information indicative of psychopathology. Especially indications of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (seven cases, or 6 per cent of all 108 arrestees) are referred to, sometimes combined with an inability to control aggressive impulses. The most recent estimated national average for ADHD is 2.9 per cent for children and 2.1 per cent for young adults, with the prevalence in males two to three times as high as that in females (Tuithof *et al.* 2010). For the Hoek van Holland beach riot, no comparable information on the background of arrestees is available.

Arrestees' actions and motives

— Analysis of the interrogation transcripts learns that most of the arrested suspects told they had come to Haren because of the party they expected (61 per cent) or out of curiosity (24 per cent). Only one arrestee acknowledges to having been present because disorder could result. For ten arrestees, their motives for being present are unknown, four arrested suspects were in Haren for other reasons and one arrestee denies having been present.

Arrestees have been arrested predominantly for throwing objects (e.g. cans, bottles, stones) towards police officers (78 per cent). To a lesser extent they have (as well) been arrested for vandalism and destruction of property (including arson; 18 per cent) or the looting of a nearby super market (19 per cent). Seven arrestees are accused of inciting other people to join in the disorder and five have been detained for disregarding police instructions. Sixteen individuals deny their involvement in the disorder, 76 give one or more explanations for their actions and for 16 arrested suspects the self-stated motives for their actions remain unknown. Of those that give an explanation for their behaviour, 47 per cent state they felt influenced by the behaviors of others and 'got carried away'. Of the 95 arrested suspects being asked, almost all (92 per cent) confirm having consumed alcohol. Twenty arrestees say they feel their substance use – especially alcohol – influenced their behaviour during the disorder. Nineteen arrested suspects felt actions of the police were unnecessary and disproportional, and used this to explain their actions. Sensation- and thrill-seeking, being tough, feeling worked up or behaving impulsively due to personality deficits (e.g. ADHD) are referred to a much lesser extent. For the Hoek van Holland beach riot, no comparable information on the arrestees actions and motives is available from interrogation transcripts. However, prior to the riot, police repeatedly received information (which proved to be correct) from covert sources that a large group of hooligans intended to riot at the event.

To summarize, the Hoek van Holland riot was characterized by participation of a number of repeat offender individuals, many of whom were known as hooligans by police, who knew each other and actively looked for a confrontation. By contrast, those arrested in relation to the disorder in Haren generally did not know one another and were not known hooligans. Some (those who video images show were most active) can at most be characterized as marginally involved in felonies and to some extent displaying antisocial behaviour or having done so in their adolescent years. This indicates that contextual factors might be more important to explain why disorder occurred in Haren and why police were attacked.

Contextual factors

— Contrary to the 2011 England riots, nothing in media accounts or in the interviews that were held alludes to specific grievances or state repression as factors in the project X riot. On the contrary, hedonistic behaviour by spoiled adolescents under the influence of alcohol was blamed mostly, in conjunction with the mobilizing influence of (social) media and inadequate anticipation by authorities. The film Project X obviously provided a contextual factor, and to this day, events are known as the Haren Project X riots. Van den Brink *et al.* (2013) argue that the Project X film fits in a tradition of adolescent movies and as such resonated with youngsters, but that the film itself played only

a minor role in events on the day itself. In the case of Haren, social media (especially Facebook and YouTube) did play a significant role in mobilizing youngsters. van Dijk *et al.* (2013) make clear that some traditional media (especially radio stations) played an active role in mobilizing for the event and that the media attention and social media activity fed into each other. However, national media attention did not lead to mobilization on a national level: the event in Haren was, as far as visitors were concerned, mainly a regional event. Whereas both traditional and social media played a role in mobilizing for the event, there are no indications that they played a significant role in the violence that erupted.

Van den Brink *et al.* (2013) argue how events in Haren fit with an existing youth culture characterized by drinking, dancing, partying and a craving for intense physical experiences where events function as a kind of 'moral holiday'. The likelihood of violence increases in a context that creates such a 'time out' feeling (van der Linden *et al.* 2004). This type of argument is similar to an explanation of the 2011 England riots as an expression of violent consumerism (e.g. Treadwell *et al.* (2012) suggest that '*consumer culture supplied rioters with a compelling motivation to join the rioting*'). It is clear that the youngsters gathered in Haren for a party and that a lot of alcohol was consumed. Having said that, there are many occasions where youths consume a lot of alcohol without violence erupting and while all of this set the scene for the events that unfolded in Haren, they are still not sufficient to explain the violence that occurred. After all, less than 10 per cent of those that had converged in Haren partook in the violence, meaning that the vast majority did not. These figures are in line with Adang (2011) who found that even in highly escalated situations, a maximum of 10 per cent (and usually much less) of those present are actually violent. At the crossroads, several elements contributed to the opportunity that arose for disturbances to start. Many youngsters gathered at the crossroads because it was close to house of the girl who sent out the original invitation, the place of the so-called party that was widely published on social media. Also, the largest number of media representatives were gathered there. The media served as an attraction point: every time a camera was turned on, a group of youngsters started jumping and singing in front of the camera. By default, this crossroads became the place to be. Where people had arrived individually or in small groups of friends, gradually spontaneously groups of young males formed that synchronized their behaviour by jointly jumping and singing together, at first especially when cameras were turned on, but later independent of camera presence or activity. However, there was nothing to do, there was in fact no party, and everybody seemed to be waiting for things to come. Gradually, the festive atmosphere turned more rowdy: '*People started to get bored and that's one thing went wrong. There was nothing to do*' (van den Brink *et al.* 2013: 106).

This was recognized by many of those present, for some of them this was reason to leave, which could be seen as a form of self-selection: those who remained group were looking for excitement. It was also recognized by the police officers who felt increasingly uncomfortable. Van Hasselt (2013) argues that Haren offered an accumulation of risk factors for recreational violence: there were a lot of people under influence with no entertainment and no facilities offered. This does not mean that escalation was inevitable.

Other areas in Haren where hundreds of young people had converged under the influence of alcohol (the designated area, the railway station) were not affected by violence at all, or only after the riots had been displaced as a result of police action. Once the violence escalated, clear (perceived) opportunities presented themselves to be violent with limited risk of retaliation: the number of police present was clearly not capable of controlling the situation. It is impossible to know whether or not a riot would have occurred that day in Haren had the seven riot police officers not arrived on the scene at the crossroads when they did.

Looking at the social context at the crossroads, we would suggest that more and more of the youngsters present started to identify as a common group, even though most of them were unknown to each other. This was mediated via increased synchronicity in joint jumping, singing and chanting. Through the reactions of those present, a kind of spontaneous norm developed about what was acceptable or desired behaviour. The bangs of firework every few minutes were greeted with cheers, as was the climbing of a traffic pole. The occasional throwing of objects, at first random, but later in the general direction of police officers did not meet with disapproval. Whereas at first, the crowd was spread out over the crossroads and neighboring streets, with police moving in between them, later police took up position behind the barrier, separated from the crowd. The police officers did not let themselves be provoked by crowd members, but the separation contributed to an 'us' versus 'them' group perspective. Although an occasional object was thrown in the direction of the officers behind the barrier, there was no pressure at all against the physical barrier or the police line. Occasionally, an officer approached the barrier and talked to one of the individuals present, and on a few occasions, an officer enters the crowd without problem. One could say violence at these unprotected officers was not normative in this situation. Only when the riot police arrived (without doing anything other than taking up position), did this change: violence directed at these officers in full riot gear did seem acceptable and things escalated rapidly. In terms of *opportunity*, our interviews show that it was clear to everyone present that these seven riot police officers were unable to take effective action against the crowd and that arrests had to await the arrival of backup. By that time, violent perpetrators will probably not have had the feeling that arrest was likely in the existing chaos. For some, it was a unique opportunity to be in charge: *'Now the roles are reversed. A kind of spontaneous anarchy. All of the sudden the police is no longer in charge. It was anarchy, the street was in charge and that had to be celebrated'* (van den Brink *et al.* 2013: 110). Most of the 16 youngsters interviewed by van den Brink *et al.* (2013) who were present in Haren were not involved in the violence: in the interviews, they distanced themselves from the violent perpetrators, seeing them as outsiders: *'they look different', 'they are not from here', 'it was nasty people'* and *'people from elsewhere with hoods and scarves'* (p. 104). However, other respondents described them as *'normal youths', young males 'who thought they were tough', 'not dangerous people'* and *'It is just impulsive behaviour, a kind of mischief'* (p. 105). Many of the respondents stressed the opportunity that existed: *'Now it is just possible, you can just act out', people were 'throwing stuff at police because they could', 'the number of police officers was minimal. There was just no authority'*. Those youngsters who did

not participate in the riot were not hostile to police (they were critical of police lack of control of the situation) and often felt sorry for the police who were clearly overwhelmed (van den Brink *et al.* 2013: 109–11).

Although the appearance of the seven riot police officers certainly was directly followed by the escalation, the start of the riot cannot be blamed on disproportionate or undifferentiated police action (crowd conflict is often blamed on police action, e.g. Stott and Reicher 1998), and there is nothing in the interviews or media reports that would indicate the escalation to be a reaction to some kind of frustration or action that was seen as inappropriate by (members of) the crowd. In fact, police was passive before the escalation and remarkably restrained after it. This is confirmed by the interviews with youngsters present (van den Brink *et al.* 2013: 111). It is true that, after police were present in larger numbers following the escalation, some eyewitnesses observed instances of disproportionate use of force by individual police officers and some of the arrested suspects pointed to police use of force as a reason for their own violence. At the same time, however, police officers assisted people who wanted to leave the situation.

Conclusion

This paper sought to address the question how events in Haren escalated, what individual, situational and contextual factors played a role. That a riot erupted in the affluent place of Haren was shocking, Haren is far from a deprived municipality, there was no politically contentious context, nor was there previous antagonism between police and youths. The big question was how and why events unfolded as they did, in a context that was seen as devoid of the usual potential causes for collective violence. Our analysis does not provide a clear-cut answer as to why police were attacked in this ‘issueless’, seemingly recreational riot. There were no indications that the riot erupted because members of the crowd had grievances against the riot police, or saw them as symbols of state repression. None of the numerous factors mentioned in the media or by authorities (e.g. the film project X, ‘Facebook’, social media in general, use of alcohol, youth culture, ‘hooligans’) are in themselves sufficient to explain the causation of the violence. Instead, a mixture of contextual, situational and individual factors played a role.

Our analysis of events and the comparison with the Hoek van Holland riot shows that there is a need to move forward the debate on the role contextual and individual factors play in the initiation and escalation of collective violence. The analysis of events shows that the initiation/escalation model, developed in relation to collective violence in the context of football and protest events, can also be used to explain other types of collective violence, such as the recreational project X riot in Haren. The importance to distinguish between initiation and escalation of violence is confirmed. In this case, escalation was quite sudden and triggered by the arrival of seven riot police officers, but this was preceded by an on-scene initiation process lasting more than two hours, where no real starting point could be discerned (the first evidence of an object being thrown occurred 1 hour and 37 minutes before the escalation). The situation at the crossroads presented an opportunity for those wishing to be violent with the following ingredients: youth culture, darkness, alcohol, the number of people present and inadequate measures by authorities. Some took advantage of the opportunity that presented itself, or helped

create that opportunity. Research into the 2011 England riots also pointed to the importance of opportunity (e.g. Guardian/LSE 2011; Morell *et al.* 2011). However, the opportunity present in Haren was not enough in itself to trigger escalation (even in combination with the preceding group formation). Something had to happen first before isolated acts of object throwing could turn into collective violence. It was the spontaneous 'charging' or build-up process that took place within the gathered crowd before the arrival of the seven riot police officers who made escalation ever more likely. In the course of this process, those taking initiatives received support and felt supported, and spontaneous norms about acceptable or expected behaviour seemed to develop. A process of self-selection occurred as those that felt uncomfortable with the changing atmosphere left. Other stayed, curious to see what would happen. As evidenced by synchronous jumping, singing and chanting, a social identity developed within the crowd, distinct from the police. The withdrawal of the police from the crowd and their taking up position behind barriers (well before the escalation) contributed to a setting where police and the crowd were not only physically but also psychologically separated from one another, contributing to an us versus them situation.

The contextual factors contributing to the escalation fit very well with the ESIM (e.g. Reicher 1984; 1996). At the same time, only a minority of those present actively involved themselves, showing the variability in the readiness to be involved in violence. The build-up involved spontaneous group formation of young males not necessarily knowing each other beforehand, but fitting with the *young male syndrome*. For those who were actively involved in the violence, our analysis shows that many of the violent perpetrators were first offenders without previously being prosecuted and with minimal previous police contacts. They seemed to be influenced especially by the contextual factors that were conducive to participation. Arrested suspects (or their lawyers) overwhelmingly indicated they were 'dragged along' and acting under the influence of alcohol. Of course, this could be seen as self-serving attempts to minimize their own involvement and even those that played a more prominent role or were more actively involved in creating a situation that could lead to escalation often used this excuse. The analysis of suspects however also suggests that a small minority (those most actively involved in the violence according to video evidence), were not simply representative of Dutch young males in general. Fifteen arrestees who had been in the frontline of the violence had been prosecuted before for violent felonies, and seven had been brought to justice at least four times. Some also displayed problem behaviour at school and/or at home. For these arrestees, aggressive and violent behaviour is not limited to event settings alone but is both continuous (from childhood into young adulthood) and consistent (in various settings). Information indicative of psychopathology (mainly ADHD) is present more often for arrestees compared to the estimated Dutch national average.

These findings mirror results of Farrington (2006), who studied individuals repeatedly being involved in public disorder, and Russell (Russell 1995; Russell and Arms 1995; 1998) who concluded that those likely to escalate a crowd disturbance may be characterized as impulsive or sensation seeking compared to those who are not. More generally within criminology, evidence is emerging that predispositions are related to the etiology of antisocial and aggressive acts (e.g. Raine 1993; Rowe

2001; Portnoy *et al.* 2013). Psychopathology in general, childhood ADHD psychopathology, current ADHD and increased impulsivity measures are specifically related to an increased risk of committing reactive violence (Helfritz and Stanford 2006; Retz and Rösler 2010). This suggests predispositions are of influence on (individual) riot behaviour.

This is not to say that we favor simplistic (and often ideologically driven) *riff-raff* theories of collective violence (cf. Reicher 2001). Our analysis of the project X riot clearly indicates the important role social context (including actions by authorities) played and it was not the case, as authorities initially assumed, that the escalation was the result of premeditated and organized action by hooligans. On the contrary, a relatively low number of arrestees had previous convictions. The contrast with the Hoek van Holland beach riot, where hard core hooligans were involved in premeditated violence, clearly illustrates the difference. Comparing the Project X public disorder to the Hoek van Holland beach riot suggests the existence of two different types of perpetrators at different ends of a continuum: incidental public order offenders and notorious troublemakers. Both types of perpetrators seem to differ not only in their frequency of offending but also qualitatively, i.e. in the extent to which contextual influences and predispositions influence public disorder behaviour. Each riot situation presents a unique intergroup context and, looking at the initiation/escalation model, has its own unique and dynamic mix of different (sub)groups with different social identities and with the presence or absence of young males of varying propensities and social backgrounds in situations with (potential) frictions and opportunities. The contribution of this paper, and of the initiation/escalation model, is that it helps to integrate different theories and to pay attention to the interactional and individual aspects of riots that usually receive less emphasis (Newburn 2015: 49). Further study into the characteristics of individuals who are repeatedly involved in public disorder is needed to further develop theory. This is a challenging enterprise, given that it is difficult to gather the necessary data.

***04.* Contextual and individual factors determining escalation of collective violence**

