The “Brick and Mortar” of Mobilization?

Storytelling and Materiality in Anti-Asylum Seeker Center Protests in the Netherlands

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Abstract

This article seeks to explain the emergence of a local protest movement against an asylum seeker center (“*asielzoekerscentrum*” or AZC in Dutch) in the Beverwaard neighborhood in the city of Rotterdam (NL). Based on the contradictory evidence found on the connection between material conditions and anti-immigration mobilization, this article seeks to expand the literature by viewing materiality through the lens of storytelling. Through a qualitative analysis of twenty-eight interviews with inhabitants, local politicians, civil servants, and social workers in 2017, this article illustrates how storytelling about territorial stigmatization and material deprivation played a role in mobilizing inhabitants against the establishment of an AZC in their area two years prior, in 2015. Overall, this article argues that it is not materiality per se but inhabitants’ reading of materiality through practices of storytelling that informed collective mobilization against the arrival of an AZC in a relatively deprived urban community.

Keywords: asylum seekers; deprivation; immigration; marginalization; materiality; the Netherlands; qualitative interviews; storytelling

Since the start of the European “migration crisis” in the summer of 2015, the Dutch government has ordered the establishment of a number of new asylum seeker centers (“*asielzoekerscentra*” in

Dutch, often referred to as AZC). This triggered various groups of local residents to mobilize against the establishment of these AZCs in their area (NOS 2016). Based on Charles Tilly's (1978) definition of mobilization as "the process by which a group goes from being a passive collection of individuals to an active participant in public life" (p. 69), this article conceptualizes anti-AZC mobilization as a specific form of anti-immigration mobilization. Concretely, anti-AZC mobilization refers to the organization of an aggregate of individuals from a local area (although in some cases also including outsiders) in opposition to the establishment of an AZC in their community. Although anti-AZC mobilization has occurred in a variety of local contexts with diverse characteristics (e.g., urban versus rural, relatively wealthy versus deprived, ethnically homogenous versus heterogeneous), this article seeks to explore only one instance of anti-AZC mobilization in a multiethnic, relatively deprived and marginalized neighborhood called de Beverwaard, located in the city of Rotterdam.

A common explanation behind anti-immigration mobilization that is particularly relevant to deprived communities is that material conditions trigger anti-immigration attitudes and/or violence, through mechanisms of relative deprivation (Braun 2011; Jäckle and König 2017) as well as ethnic competition (Savelkoul et al. 2011; Schneider 2008). However, existing empirical evidence provides contradictory results and fails to explain why some communities with high levels of deprivation do not mobilize against immigration (see, for example, Braun 2011, on ethnic violence).

In response to this current gap in the mobilization literature, this article seeks to expand this current work on materiality by arguing that the current literature does not sufficiently acknowledge the important role of storytelling in mobilization processes (Tilly 2002). As such, this article presents the findings of an interview-based study of anti-AZC mobilization and seeks

to provide an answer to the following research question: How does storytelling contribute to anti-AZC mobilization based on materiality?

Theoretical Framework

The following section will first present this article's approach to materiality, which encompasses both material conditions based on the distribution of resources as well as the context of the local physical space. Next, it will detail the theoretical foundations of this article's approach to materiality through practices of storytelling.

Materiality and Protest: Resources and the Physical Space

Concretely, this article's understanding of materiality is informed by existing work on the connection between materiality and anti-immigration mobilization and encompasses two components: (1) distribution of scarce material resources such as paid employment and housing, and (2) the materiality of the physical space in which people live their daily lives.

First, two commonly cited theories link access to material resources to anti-immigration mobilization: relative deprivation theory and ethnic competition theory. The first, relative deprivation theory, suggests that individuals living in economically and socially deprived conditions tend to blame immigrants for their problems, fueling anti-immigration mobilization and/or violence (Braun 2011). As such, scholars often use proxies, such as unemployment and education levels, to measure deprivation in attempts to find patterns between such proxies and levels of ethnic violence. Recent work by Robert Braun (2011), and Sebastian Jäckle and Pascal König (2017), however, show no significant relationship between deprivation and ethnic violence in Dutch and German municipalities.

The second, ethnic competition theory, is based on the assumption that intergroup competition contributes to the reinforcement of group boundaries along ethnic lines, which is a precondition for the emergence of anti-immigrant violence (Braun 2011). This leads to the expectation that higher numbers of (incoming) immigrants in a local area heighten levels of ethnic competition for both material resources and cultural values. This would then lead to higher levels of perceived threat among the dominant majority population on the basis of which anti-immigration attitudes (and/or violence) may grow (Savelkoul et al. 2011; Schneider 2008). Whereas some studies (Doosje et al. 2012; Kalogeraki 2012; Scheepers et al. 2002) provide support for this thesis, others do not (e.g., Braun 2011). Overall, current literature on the connection between socioeconomic conditions and anti-immigration violence and/or protest has to date failed to produce conclusive empirical evidence.

The second component of materiality concerns the materiality of the physical space, based on existing work that documents the deep connections between people's physical environment and their understanding of themselves in relation to different groups of "others." Previous work by Leeke Reinders (2015), for example, has shown that "disruptions in the socio-spatial environment" (p. 98) due to the entry of immigrant "others" may trigger feelings of intrusion, loss, and estrangement among its initial residents. As a result, the arrival of immigrant "others" can provide important reasons for anti-immigration mobilization.

Loïc Wacquant's (2008) work on "territorial stigmatization" provides another account of how physical space can affect residents of deprived urban spaces in particular. Concretely, this form of place-bound stigmatization refers to "the powerful stigma attached to residence in the bounded and segregated spaces, the 'neighborhoods of exile' to which the populations

marginalized or condemned to redundancy by the post-Fordist reorganization of the economy and the post-Keynesian reconstruction of the welfare state are increasingly consigned" (Wacquant 2008, p. 169). Wacquant argues that it is not only material deprivation but the stigma attached to living in a marginalized urban space and the consequential loss of control over self-representation and collective identity that deeply affect residents of deprived urban areas. Such stigma and the accompanying social indignity, he argues, "can be attenuated only by thrusting the stigma onto a faceless, demonized other" (Wacquant 2008, p. 239). Based on this notion of "transferring" stigma by demonizing the "other," this article seeks to explore the role of the marginalized physical context of the inhabitants of de Beverwaard in mobilizing them against the "other" asylum seeker.

Summarizing, existing theories provide some evidence of connections between issues of materiality and anti-immigration mobilization, but to date these fail to generate conclusive results that sufficiently explain why such connections are relevant in some contexts but not in others. Although these two theoretical perspectives show the importance of materiality in relation to anti-immigration mobilization in some contexts, this article argues that solely focusing on "objective" material conditions does not sufficiently explain anti-immigration mobilization. Instead, this article views both aspects of "materiality" through the lens of storytelling, as will be further explained in the next section.

Storytelling as a Mobilization Force

This article seeks to fill the existing gap in the mobilization literature, which as a whole predominantly focuses on "objective" material conditions as a mobilization factor and to date has

provided relatively little empirical grounding for the connection between storytelling, materiality and mobilization.

Concretely, this article maintains a definition of story adapted from David Boje's discussion of Ricoeur (1984), as an account of incidents and events undergone by varying amounts of people, which can be either real or imaginary (see Boje 2001, p. 2). This fluid definition means that stories can take many forms: they can range from just one word or phrase to hours of talk (Selbin 2010). As such, compared to the more rigid structure of narratives, stories are "the broader, deeper, more sprawling 'mess' that encompasses what it is people tell, that which matters most to them" (Selbin 2010, p. 42).

Based on Boje's observation that stories are "collectively produced" (2001, p. 1), this article recognizes the shared nature of storytelling and hereby focuses primarily on shared stories, which express elements of communal knowledge and provide a source of identification for a wider group of individuals. For example, Tilly (2002) argues for the importance of storytelling as a basis of mobilization by providing a shared story that can knit a diverse group of individuals together in the pursuit of one collective goal. Eric Selbin (2010) too argues that stories can be construed as "a form, even the primary form, of socio-political struggle." (Selbin 2010, p. 22). Although stories play an important role in mobilization, this article maintains that stories need to be told by humans in order to have any impact on social life. Concretely, when it comes to the issue of agency, shared stories are produced through storytelling practices in which humans are the primary agents.

Through merging both parts of the theoretical framework into one approach toward anti-AZC mobilization, this article asks if and how local practices of storytelling contributed to anti-AZC mobilization processes based on materiality, hereby differentiating between the distribution

of material resources and lived experiences of local space in the context of a marginalized urban space in the Netherlands.

Methodology

Data Collection

The interview data analyzed in this article is part of a broader ethnographic study. As such, the recruitment of interviewees was informed by the researcher's expanding network within the area and partially through snowballing via contacts in the neighborhood. In the period of September to November 2017, the researcher conducted twenty-eight interviews with municipality officials (Gemeente Rotterdam), local council members (Gebiedscommissie IJsselmonde), social workers, and local inhabitants. Since more specific descriptions of these individuals would compromise anonymity due to the small size of this community of people, suffice it to say that they have been conducted with five local politicians, seven civil servants, thirteen inhabitants, and three social workers. In order to capture some of the demographic and political diversity in the area, the sample of interviewees consists of men and women aged between their early thirties and their sixties, who are of white Dutch, Moroccan, Surinamese, Antillean, and mixed ethnic backgrounds (although the majority are white Dutch). Interviewees come from a variety of different socioeconomic backgrounds and hold different attitudes toward the establishment of the AZC in de Beverwaard (positive, negative, and neutral). Although the sample constitutes interviewees with different relations to the neighborhood as well as the anti-AZC protests, the main aim of the article is to identify shared stories that circulate in the area rather than to explore individual subject positions in relation to mobilization.

Interviews were conducted in the Dutch language and took one to one and a half hours in

most cases. Two separate open-ended interview guides had been created prior to conducting the interviews: one for inhabitants of de Beverwaard, and one for local officials and professionals such civil servants, politicians, and social workers. Although these guides provided some structure to the interview process, ample room was given to interviewees to bring up other topics if they felt this was relevant. Key topics of the interviews were drafted to elicit stories about anti-AZC mobilization and included the Beverwaard neighborhood and its relation to the city of Rotterdam, the anti-AZC protest events, immigration and multiculturalism, social media, mainstream media, the municipality of Rotterdam, local politics, and national politics. This interview guide was constructed based on the broader aims of the overarching research project, and as such, this article focuses only on those topics that elicited responses related to motivations behind anti-AZC mobilization and/or materiality. The exact order in which these topics were discussed and the time devoted to each topic varied between interviewees. Most interviews were conducted at De Focus, a community center, where the researcher was given access to an office if interviewees wished to speak privately. In many cases, interviews were conducted in a communal space, as this was the preference of most interviewees. Key findings of the study were communicated to inhabitants of de Beverwaard via an online report[1] published on the municipality of Rotterdam website. The publication of this report was also communicated to inhabitants by means of a local newsletter. Upon publishing this report, the researcher received positive reactions from several interviewees and no reactions from any other inhabitants. Overall, the feedback indicated that interviewees generally recognized their views in the published report.

Finally, it is important to note that steps have been taken to ensure that this project adheres to the ethical standards of the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) as well as the board of ethics at Erasmus University, Rotterdam. These measures concern the guarantee of

confidentiality and anonymity of interviewee data, the signing of an informed consent document prior to the interview, interviewees' right to withdraw from the study at any given moment, and safe data storage on a secured university server.

Data Analysis

This article presents a thematic qualitative analysis of the interview data, which produces a category-based presentation of the research data and reduces an expansive body of qualitative data to a comprehensive overview of main categories and subcategories (Kuckartz 2013). Although the thematic analysis of interviewees' stories produced a broad array of local stories in relation to anti-AZC mobilization, the findings presented in the following sections focus in particular on storylines related to materiality, in line with the main aims of this article. Concretely, the analysis presented in this article seeks to inductively identify shared stories about local materiality in relation to anti-AZC mobilization, driven by previously theorized processes of mobilization based on material conditions.

The initial stages of the broader analysis comprised of a combination of extensive note-taking in the field, discussions with interviewees and informants, as well as conducting, transcribing, and summarizing interviews. This collaborative approach was chosen in order to ensure that the analysis would follow the stories specific to the local community as closely as possible, in line with this article's bottom-up, story-driven approach. Throughout this initial analysis process, the researcher found that when inhabitants discussed mobilization against the asylum seeker center, they did so through one (or more) of the following main story categories: identity, voice, and materiality. The remainder of this article will focus on this latter category, which captures all stories about issues of resource distribution, as well as the physical context of

the neighborhood.

After this initial categorization, the researcher corroborated these three categories by thematically categorizing all interview data through two rounds of coding with QSR Nvivo 11 software. In doing so, she identified shared stories by constantly comparing and contrasting different interviews. The discussion of the findings will describe two key themes that emerged within the "materiality" story category, which illustrate how storytelling informed mobilization against the AZC based on issues of materiality. First, however, the case being studied will be briefly discussed in order to situate the findings in their broader social context.

Case Overview

Area Background and History: De Beverwaard

De Beverwaard is situated in the city of Rotterdam, currently the city with the largest percentage of migrants in the Netherlands: about half of the total population has a migration background. The most dominant migrant groups in the city originate from Surinam, the Dutch Antilles, Cape Verde, Turkey, and Morocco (van de Laar et al. 2006). Rotterdam is currently the city with the highest poverty rate in the country, with 15.3 percent of Rotterdam households living off a low income (CBS 2018). It has a strong working-class identity due to the historical economic significance of its harbor, but the city has been experiencing issues such as unemployment due to increasing automation and deindustrialization over the last few decades.

The Beverwaard neighborhood was largely constructed between 1977 and 1987 and consists of a mix of social housing projects and private housing. Today, about 50 percent of the inhabitants have a non-Western background (mostly from Surinam and the Dutch Antilles). The neighborhood is weak socioeconomically, like many other neighborhoods in the south of

Rotterdam: 17 percent of households in the area live off welfare, which is relatively high compared to the Rotterdam average of 12 percent[2] (Wijkprofiel Rotterdam 2016).

When it comes to crime and safety issues, de Beverwaard has a problematic past but is currently a relatively safe area. The Rotterdam Safety Index shows that, objectively speaking, de Beverwaard is close to the Rotterdam average in terms of physical safety (consisting of reported theft, violence, break-ins, and nuisance). However, the subjective safety perception of inhabitants (a score of 89, compared to the physical index score of 98), lies substantially below the Rotterdam average of 111[3] (Wijkprofiel Rotterdam 2016).

Case Background: Anti-AZC protests in Beverwaard

In October 2015, plans were announced to build an AZC in the area of Rotterdam Beverwaard that would provide temporary housing for six hundred asylum seekers. The AZC was planned to be built on a former baseball field, separated from the neighborhood by a large road. After being informed by this decision by means of a letter, the inhabitants of Beverwaard quickly organized to oppose the construction of the AZC in their neighborhood.

On October 15, 2015, the municipality organized an information meeting in a large tent on the empty field, which the AZC was to be built upon. The mayor of Rotterdam, Ahmed Aboutaleb, as well as Janet Helder, a representative of the COA (*Orgaan opvang Asielzoekers*, the Central Organ for the sheltering of Asylum seekers), and Frank Paauw, the chief of the Rotterdam police force, were present to inform the inhabitants about the AZC plans and to answer questions from the audience. Before and during the meeting, the mayor explicitly informed the inhabitants that the decision to place the AZC in the area had already been made by the municipal council and that this was only an opportunity to provide information about the

AZC. A number of special police force officers (*Mobiele Eenheid*, ME in short) were held on standby in case of irregularities. The meeting was initially suspended because the shouting crowd would not let the mayor speak. Later, three rounds of questions were answered by the mayor, Mrs. Helder, and Mr. Paauw. After the meeting ended, several protesters engaged in a violent encounter with the ME, which included throwing fireworks at police officers (Algemeen Dagblad 2015).

When attempts to block the AZC during the meeting on the 15th turned out to be futile, a group of inhabitants united in a committee called *Beverwaard Zegt Nee* (Beverwaard Says No, BZN in short). They collected signatures to demand a neighborhood referendum (RTV Rijnmond 2015a) and presented these to the local area committee (*Gebiedscommissie*). The *Gebiedscommissie* declined the request but agreed to hold an online opinion poll about the AZC in the neighborhood. On November 22, BZN (self-reportedly) offered between two thousand and three thousand signatures to two members of the municipal council, after which they held a ritual "funeral of democracy" in the Beverwaard area, where they buried a coffin that symbolized the democracy of the municipality of Rotterdam (RTV Rijnmond 2015b).

The municipality of Rotterdam continued to plan and build the asylum seeker center in Beverwaard and opened its doors to its first inhabitants in the summer of 2016. The center currently houses around four hundred asylum seekers. In order to pacify the inhabitants, Mayor Aboutaleb organized various smaller meetings with residents to listen to their concerns and explain the decision. The municipality has also invested roughly one million euros in the neighborhood as compensation and has appointed a special neighborhood concierge whose tasks include monitoring the sentiment in the area and forwarding concerns to the local police (Bakker 2016). Since the start of the construction process in early 2016, inhabitants have largely

demobilized, and no large protest events have been organized since. Regardless, the action group BZN still exists and claim they will mobilize if they deem this to be necessary.

Findings and Discussion

Based on the analysis of the interview data, this article addresses two themes that illustrate how storytelling contributed to anti-AZC mobilization based on materiality. First, (hi)stories about territorial stigmatization and marginalization of the neighborhood, provided reasons to mobilize against the AZC. Secondly, storytelling about poverty and deprivation as well as the perceived unfairness of the distribution of resources were found to drive anti-AZC mobilization.

Before we discuss these two themes, it is important to note that since early 2016, no protests against the AZC have occurred in de Beverwaard. As a result, this article covers stories that were primarily relevant to mobilization in the context of the autumn of 2015 as well as stories and concerns that remain relevant to residents today, although they are no longer translated into collective action. The interview data suggest that the absence of active mobilization from the start of 2016 onward was due to inhabitants' growing beliefs that their collective action was ineffective, based on their interactions with a local political system that was unwavering and rigid in relation to their demands. In other words, this suggests that mobilization is not only informed by (storytelling about) materiality but is simultaneously constrained by the material reality of local structural inequalities and power dynamics, an issue we will return to in the second theme discussed in this article.

(Hi)stories of Unsafety and Crime—Stigmatizing Stories about the Local Space as a Catalyzer of Protest

In discussing the anti-AZC protests with citizens, politicians, and civil servants alike, many interviewees pointed toward the importance of the history of the neighborhood, which still affects perceptions of safety in the area today. In short, de Beverwaard experienced a peak in crime in the 1990s and early 2000s, which interviewees largely ascribe to the relocation of a group of predominantly Dutch-Antillean inhabitants to de Beverwaard, who were moved there for the purpose of city renovation. This continues to affect how people talk about and identify with their local space today, as inhabitants repeatedly lamented how the negative and unsafe image of the area persists over time. Such stories about unsafety and the local space as a "dumping ground for poor people" resonate strongly with Wacquant's concept of territorial stigmatization (Wacquant 2008, p. 168). Inhabitants' subjective experience of safety lags far behind the improved objective safety of the area (Wijkprofiel Rotterdam 2016), which indicates that unsafety in de Beverwaard today "is felt mainly at the level of representations and collective sentiments" (Wacquant 2008, p. 210) in part as a result of persistent stigmatizing stories about the local space. This white male inhabitant describes how the anticipation of asylum seekers arriving in the local space generated a shared sense of fear of returning to a troubled past and hereby contributed to protest:

> But in any case, we got an AZC. And coincidentally also in a neighborhood … that is building up, and then we bomb that back—that is how it was perceived—bomb it 10 to 15 years back in time. Because we—at least the—the mostly—and I also saw that in the beginning—I saw all the misery come towards us. Because that [asylum seekers] is going

> to roam around the neighborhood, there will be shop theft, we already have to deal with crime, and—and maybe harassment and rape, you don't know, well, and that is the fearful image that grew around that time. And there was a lot of resistance against it.

As such, the history of the materiality of the physical space signifies what could potentially happen when a group of newcomers settle in the area, and for some inhabitants, this triggered a mental connection between recent history and a group of six hundred arriving refugees. The physical space serves as a constant reminder of the recent safety issues in the area, as this male inhabitant of a mixed ethnic background describes:

> Thankfully things are going in the right direction, so—concerning incidents, shootings and stabbings it is—it's becoming—yes, it's getting less. It's all fairly fresh though, we're talking about only a few years ago. … I seem to be living in the worst part of the neighborhood, there have been quite a few shootings in my street, with machine guns and everything. … The bullet holes are still in the walls, but thank god this hasn't happened for the last five years.

In this manner, the direct physical environment, including this inhabitant's own home, is read by inhabitants as a story of physical unsafety, which some inhabitants translate into mobilization against the establishment of the AZC, based on the idea that the newly acquired stability in the area is fragile and needs to be protected from potential disruption. This civil servant, for example, describes the expression of fears she heard among inhabitants:

> They're Muslims, they're extremists, they're members of IS, they are rapists, they are … they will harass our children, our children need to get on the bus to school at the corner of the AZC. … Can my child still go to school alone, can my child … Can I still lie in my garden in a bikini?

Local (hi)stories of unsafety and territorial stigmatization of de Beverwaard were linked to (largely media-driven) fears of the arrival of refugees in the area, which indicates how local and national stories about immigration can converge. This strongly resonates with Reinders (2015), who found that people link specific locations in their neighborhood to mental connections between the past and the present and between the self and the "other." Although it remains important not to dismiss or justify the strong Islamophobia present in these constructions of Muslim refugees as "rapists" and "criminals," it is equally noteworthy to stress that these sentiments seem to have largely subsided since refugees have arrived in the area, and none of the fears were proven to be realistic. In other words, when the physical presence of asylum seekers in the local space contradicted fearful stories about "history repeating itself," these stories lost their mobilization potential.

Even though the safety level in the area had drastically improved in the last few years, these improvements in particular triggered resentment on the part of inhabitants, as they felt like their hard-won peace and quiet would yet again be taken away from them by a combination of government decision-making and a group of outsiders. This civil servant explains how some inhabitants shifted from a general sense of surprise and almost disbelief over the improved conditions to anger over the decision to place an AZC in their slowly recovering neighborhood:

> In 2010 we were a "Safety Risk Area." We have managed to rebuild it to a modal, safe neighborhood. The Social Index lagged behind, but was improving, because we collectively [the municipality, police, legal services, and housing corporations] invested tremendously, have done so much regarding poverty, children, domestic violence, misery, cleanliness, and safety. That neighborhood was literally and figuratively lifting itself up. And many residents had to admit, with gritted teeth, "Damn it, it is improving.. And now this!" [The AZC]—that is one of the sounds we heard permanently.

A social worker similarly explained how the establishment of the AZC in de Beverwaard gave inhabitants the feeling that they were "not allowed to do well" by local authorities. This deep sense of marginalization and powerlessness exemplifies how storytelling about material conditions and unsafety in an area can have a strong impact on how decisions over the use of local space are received in a community. At the same time, however, many interviewees did attempt to make a distinction between their objections to the placement of the AZC in their physical space (along with their animosity against the local government) and their attitude toward asylum seekers in general. In other words, most inhabitants expressed the belief that refugees fleeing from war need to be accepted into the Netherlands, but "not in my backyard." Overall, this indicates that anti-AZC protests should not be merely framed in terms of general ideological anti-immigration sentiment but need to be connected to the materiality of the local space.

Summarizing, this first theme illustrates how the materiality of the physical space contributed to anti-AZC mobilization, through processes of storytelling. As such, it was not the

materiality of the territorially stigmatized space but the way in which it was read, shared, and told by inhabitants through local practices of storytelling that drove collective mobilization against the AZC. As fear of spatial disruption and unsafety caused by asylum seekers has proven to be unrealistic after the AZC opened its doors to its inhabitants, storytelling about territorial stigmatization and local history has largely lost its mobilization potential among inhabitants. However, the second theme discussed in this article will address a more persistent storyline that remains relevant to a wider group of inhabitants today, even though it is no longer translated into active mobilization.

“What about Us?”—Resource Distribution, Local Poverty, and Unfairness

In addition to the materiality of the local space, materiality in the form of resource distribution also contributed to anti-AZC mobilization, through storytelling about “unfairness” with regard to the distribution of social housing and benefits as well as a wide range of other material resources and services such as bicycles and healthcare. This resonates strongly with ethnic competition theory (Savelkoul et al. 2011; Schneider 2008). This article, however, argues that it is not the materiality of resource distribution per se that drives anti-AZC mobilization. Instead, it points toward the ways in which feelings of “unfairness” about resource distribution became recognized as shared grievances through practices of storytelling, which fueled collective mobilization against the AZC.

First, de Beverwaard is a socioeconomically weak neighborhood, in which, relatively speaking, many people live in social housing units. There is, however, a shortage of social housing in the city of Rotterdam, resulting in long waiting lists, as this white male inhabitant describes:

> I know for sure that 90 percent of the refugees will stay where they are [as in: will not return to their country of origin]. That happened the last time around, and it's the same now. And that's not a problem, but what bothers me is that I had to be on a waiting list for eight years for a house, and they get them—every other week they get—you see a new one [refugee] moving in. They don't speak Dutch, it's completely furnished by Woonbron [the social housing organization], all second-hand couches from the charity shop. And I had to build everything from the ground up. … The real *autochone* people, who have been on a waiting list like me, for eight or fourteen years, it makes them pissed off! Someone from Syria comes here and a month later he's living in a renovated home. That is unfair, you can't do that to people.

As this excerpt exemplifies, stories about social housing, and in particular, feelings of unfairness concerning the priority that asylum seekers receive at the cost of Dutch citizens, were important reasons to mobilize against the AZC.

Not just social housing but other issues of resource distribution in the area fostered feelings of unfairness and resentment among inhabitants. Here, the physical presence of asylum seekers in the local space is key, as it allowed for direct comparisons between the living conditions of poor inhabitants and asylum seekers. Such comparisons then, spread rapidly through local storytelling within the neighborhood. For example, a number of people living in de Beverwaard have no means to either buy a bicycle or pay for public transport. Bicycles are a key

component of Dutch urban life, and the distribution of bicycles to asylum seekers hit a nerve among some, as this civil servant explains:

> At some point a cycling plan was facilitated so they [asylum seekers] received bicycles, let's say ten bicycles, and someone volunteers to teach them how to cycle. And those people [inhabitants of de Beverwaard] can't even pay for a bicycle themselves, and it leads to feelings of unfairness. My personal opinion is that we need to provide asylum in the Netherlands, but I also understand this sentiment. So I think it is good to be more aware of this, that we also have work to do with regards to our own poverty problems—the people.

Although not owning a bicycle was not new to some in the area, the fact that asylum seekers in their own area did receive them triggered stories that often spread "like wildfire," according to several interviewees. This in turn led to shared feelings of unfairness and indignation among broader groups of inhabitants, even those who did not personally suffer under deprived socioeconomic circumstances. In some cases, such direct comparisons went as far as comparing shopping carts in the supermarket, as this civil servant describes:

> You have to blame someone. People think that asylum seekers get a lot, they peer into the shopping carts of asylum seekers and say things like, "They all buy A-brand [generally more expensive quality brands] products, I can't do that." … There's a sentiment that people in the AZC cannot have more than inhabitants.

The previous two quotes, both from civil servants with working experience in the local area, show that they are indeed aware of inhabitants' feelings of unfairness, not only in relation to the asylum seeker center but also in a broader sense. The local government's attempt to alleviate issues of local deprivation in the form of a financial injection into the neighborhood's public resources did not land well, as this white male inhabitant explains:

> Aboutaleb had promised that he would invest in de Beverwaard, well I don't see much of it—there would be an investment of two million euros. I don't know what they invested it in, but I don't see it. … The only thing I see is the two large flowerpots at the Hoogvliet [the local supermarket], that are there all of a sudden. But the subsidies of [a local soup kitchen for people living below the poverty line] are about to be cut, so I think, what is he investing in? Is it just an investment in the AZC, or in the neighborhood, like he [Mayor Aboutaleb] had promised?

The interview data shows that the local government's attempt to compensate the inhabitants in some material way in many cases only contributed to their feelings of unfairness. In a sense, this shows that the anti-AZC protests were also an expression of a broader resistance to the current power structure in which the local government decides on resource distribution in relatively deprived areas such as de Beverwaard.

Overall, it is important to note that most interviewed inhabitants did not blame asylum seekers for this perceived unfair distribution of resources but argue that these resources should be available to all people in need, Dutch citizens and refugees alike. Local stories about material deprivation are generally much more longstanding and deep-seated and more or less "activated"

by the arrival of asylum seekers. This social worker expresses this widely shared sentiment in the form of a vivid story, which he found to be prominent in de Beverwaard:

> You're at the back of the waiting line, and then a bunch of refugees arrive and they get to cut in front of you. That injustice makes people angry, and I can understand why. I can't tell them "you're wrong." Sometimes you can explain with facts, things like, "They [refugees] don't receive more welfare money than your daughter," you can explain things like that. And then they say, "Okay, okay," and they get it. But the fact that they cut in front of the line and you get pushed back even further—that is a problem that we need to deal with in the Netherlands. And that is where their anger touches the asylum seekers. But it's more about how politicians deal with it, how this is organized in the Netherlands, because they are not likely to blame a refugee that he is at the front of line, because he can't help that, as a refugee.

This striking image of being at the back of a waiting line is a key feature of Arlie Hochschild's (2016) work on American Tea Party supporters, in which she exposes the "deep story" that drives conservative backlash in the United States. This "deep story" similarly entails (white, working class) American citizens patiently waiting in an unmoving line toward the American Dream, when they see people pass them by and cut the line: women, immigrants, and black people. They feel betrayed by their government for helping these others while abandoning them and ridiculed by the people passing them by. They begin to feel like "strangers in their own land," the title of Hochschild's (2016) book. This social worker's strikingly similar story of getting pushed back in the line shows an interesting parallel between the Dutch white working

class and the American Tea Party. This is not too surprising, as Justin Gest (2016) too describes a “transatlantic working class marginality” in which “white working class people sense that they have been demoted from the center of their country’s consciousness to the fringe” (p. 15).

Hochschild’s (2016) description of “feelings of betrayal” toward the government are also present in de Beverwaard because, as mentioned earlier, inhabitants look toward (local) government as well as charitable organizations, such as churches, as those who are to blame for the unfair distribution of resources. In other words, most resentment is not directed at asylum seekers but at the institutions responsible for handing out resources. This white male inhabitant said that:

> There is lots of yelling about “they [asylum seekers] get so much, they get this, they get that, they get bicycles, they get clothing, and they get money.” And it annoys people, I get that. But who gives them those things? It’s not the asylum seekers’ fault. They get those things from the churches. Churches that we haven’t seen around here for years, being all popular over there [at the AZC], because it is—it is a little less these days, but it was very on-trend to flaunt with “look what I do for asylum seekers.”

Summarizing, this second theme shows how the materiality of resource distribution fed into anti-AZC storytelling that revolved around a sense of unfairness as well as resentment toward local government for perpetuating this unfairness. This article argues that existing theories of relative deprivation and ethnic competition apply to this particular case but that shared storytelling explains how and why the distribution of material resources drove anti-AZC mobilization.

Concretely, it was not the pre-existing patterns of structural material inequality per se but the ways in which individual feelings were shared through storytelling and thus became relevant at the neighborhood level that drove mobilization. As a result, inhabitants directed their mobilization efforts toward their local government, who were considered responsible for perpetuating the structural material deprivation in the neighborhood, rather than the incoming asylum seekers.

These findings therefore indicate the importance of local storytelling in trying to understand the dynamics at play in the relatively small amount of cases in which citizens mobilize against immigration, compared to the widespread presence of anti-immigration attitudes among Western European populations (see for example Jäckle and König 2017; Mudde 2010). Overall, this article argues that materiality may contribute to anti-AZC mobilization, primarily if is it translated into relevant and shared local stories.

Conclusion

This article has argued how local storytelling played a key role in mobilizing inhabitants of de Beverwaard against the establishment of an asylum seeker center in their area. As such, it goes beyond existing theories that focus on objective material conditions as explaining anti-immigration mobilization and illustrates the important role of storytelling in facilitating anti-AZC mobilization. It is important to mention that this article's focus on materiality does not negate or dismiss the Islamophobia and xenophobic attitudes expressed by some interviewees. Instead, it aims to expand the existing body of theory to include the lived experiences of materiality, hereby highlighting how shared practices of storytelling about material issues may compel people to mobilize against the establishment of an AZC in their area.

Summarizing, this article has argued how storytelling about materiality underpinned the anti-AZC protest movement in two distinct ways. First, the materiality of the neighborhood space and the territorial stigmatization of de Beverwaard as a marginalized area in particular informed anti-AZC mobilization through processes of storytelling and in turn fed back into people's stories that portray their area as a "social purgatory" (Wacquant 2008, p. 237). Second, storytelling about shared experiences of poverty and deprivation as well as the perceived unfairness of the distribution of resources was found to inform anti-AZC mobilization, which in turn feeds back into the ways in which people understand their local area as fundamentally poor and deprived.

Although the qualitative, in-depth approach of this article has produced rich insights, it also has its limitations. First, the local approach of this study limits the applicability of its findings to other locations, and more research on storytelling in other contexts needs to be done in order to solidify and expand its key contributions. Second, when interviewing local politicians and civil servants in particular, one needs to take into consideration the potential of strategic and partial representation of past events. As such, their accounts of local affairs need to be approached with some caution.

Future studies could address storytelling and materiality in the context of other protest movements against asylum seekers. Even though the content of local stories will vary based on factors such as the socioeconomic status and ethnic composition of neighborhoods and towns, the underlying mechanism of the connection between storytelling and mobilization is not limited to the context of de Beverwaard and can be applied to other (e.g., less deprived or ethnically homogenous) areas. Additionally, considering the overwhelming amount of studies on anti-immigration mobilization focus on positive cases, it might be equally insightful to ask why in

some (particularly marginalized and deprived) areas people do not protest.

Finally, it is important to reflect on the ways in which this article might inform future policy and local interventions concerning the placement of asylum seeker centers in (relatively deprived) urban neighborhoods. Specifically, this article has highlighted the importance of actively engaging with the relevant histories and stories of local communities in order to better understand the concerns and needs that might drive their local resistance to the arrival of ethnic "others." In addition, it illuminates the urgency of addressing relative deprivation in certain neighborhoods in order to foster thriving and harmonious multiethnic urban communities.

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Notes

1. The report is freely accessible at https://www.rotterdam.nl/wonen-leven/asielzoekerscentrum/.

2. All statistics in this paragraph refer to the year 2016.

3. All values are compared to the Rotterdam average in 2014, which is set to a value of 100.