

# **Police and Citizens in Conflict:**

## **Exploring Post-Confrontation Interaction from a Relational Perspective**

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This paper introduces a relational perspective to the analysis of the interaction process from confrontation to cooperation between police and civilians. Exploring a case of riots between Dutch youths of Moluccan descent and the police during New Year's Eve, which was followed by a peaceful celebration one year later, a process of reconciliation between the two groups is reconstructed and analyzed. By means of a comparison of the relationship nature before and after the confrontation and an in-depth analysis of post conflict interaction, it is shown how institutional, group and individual interactions affected the change from confrontation to cooperation.

**Keywords:** conflict resolution, group relations; police-civilian interaction; reconciliation

### **1. Introduction**

During the celebration of New Year's Eve (NYE) 2007-2008, the Moluccan neighbourhood<sup>1</sup> of Tiel was the stage of a large confrontation between police and local youths. The confrontation was centred around the lighting of a celebratory bonfire which was, like previous years, forbidden by the municipality in line with regional policy. During the years prior to NYE 2007-2008, the police and fire department had already struggled to put out the fire in this neighbourhood due to the actions of Moluccan and possibly Moroccan youths, but this time around the youths had been more heavily prepared. In addition to wearing protective padding, they had brought Molotov cocktails and other projectiles, which they threw at manned police vehicles. The night was extremely foggy and sight was limited. These factors

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<sup>1</sup> Moluccans are a minority population within the Netherlands, originally hailing from the Eastern part of Indonesia. After the Dutch colonization of the East-Indies was abrogated in 1949, a large number of Moluccans, most of whom had served in the Royal Dutch Indonesian Army (KNIL), were forced to demobilise in the Netherlands. Since their accommodation was supposed to be of a temporary nature, for a long time the Moluccans were treated as second-rate citizens, which caused strong tension and conflict between the government and the Moluccan community. Tension was highest in the seventies when Moluccan youths high jacked a train. When it became clear that the Moluccans would not be returning to their native homes, the government tried to integrate them with the general Dutch society. Several small neighbourhoods, of which the neighbourhood in this case is one, were built and appointed to the Moluccans and became important focal points to their community (Smeets & Steijlen 2006)

combined forced the police to retreat from the neighbourhood. At least two officers and one civilian were injured. There was damage to public and private property amounting to approximately 25.000 euros throughout the city<sup>2</sup>. Just one year later, the same neighbourhood experienced a peaceful and festive NYE celebration. What happened between these two opposites to change the situation?

The police hold a central position in society maintaining public order and dealing with the prevention and repression of violence. In some cases they can even become actively engaged in violent confrontations with the public, both as a target and as a perpetrator. However, in contrast to the civilians that are involved in confrontations and who may choose to deny, forgive or ignore that something happened – possibly by avoiding further contact (see for example Jussim, Ashmore, & Wilder 2001, Pruitt & Kim 2004) –, the police are mandated and expected to engage in confrontations and deal with them in a professional manner. The Dutch police is known for their tradition of community policing by a central position of the relationship between themselves and civilians. For them, confrontations are expected to be dealt with by falling back on their relationships, even when their own actions were at the root of the conflict. The central position of relationships in times of conflict is reflected in various police research (e.g. Van de Brink and Bruinsma 2010, Adang et al. 2010, Otten et al., 2001), as well as in other disciplines (e.g. Kriesberg 2009, Malloy 2008, Reicher et al. 2007, Rusbult et al. 2005). Moreover, the role of community policing, especially as a way to prevent conflict, is described in numerous publications on policing in (e.g. Kappeler and Gaines 2011, Palmiotto 2011, Marshall 1992). However, we are not aware of any literature that studies the dynamics of post conflict interactions and relationships.

In a previous article (van de Klomp, Adang & van den Brink 2011), the authors argued that the way in which conflicts unfold are influenced by pre-existing relations between the actors in question. Adopting such a relational perspective on conflict management showed great explanatory potential when analysing the effectiveness of the police strategies that were used. The riots they wrote about were prevented from spreading by using a strategy of empathy and enforcement, which relied on the relationship that existed with the local population. To explore the explanatory potential of such analyses, a deeper and more structured empirical insight into the nature of the relationship between police and civilians is required.

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<sup>2</sup> Sources: 06 January 2009, evaluation working group & 25 januari 2008, 'Jaarwisselingschade gemeente Tiel 25 mille', De Gelderlander.

One area in which such work *can* be found, is in the scientific discipline of ethology. In their book *Natural Conflict Resolution* Aureli and De Waal (2000, eds.) introduce a way of looking at conflicts from a relational, and highly empirical perspective. They introduce the aptly named Relational Model, in which the analysis of interaction between conflicting parties is central to the question of conflict resolution. They argue that interaction after confrontation is decidedly meaningful, just like the confrontation itself holds meaning for the relationship between the two (or more) parties.

‘The first implication of the Relational Model, then, is that it allows for the full integration of competition and cooperation. This integration is not just an alternation between the two, or an uneasy coexistence; conflict and its resolution may actually contribute to a fine-tuning of expectations between parties, a building of trust despite occasional disagreement, hence a more productive and closer relationship than would be possible if conflict were fully suppressed. The reparability of relationships permits aggression to have a testing quality.’ (De Waal 2000, p.29)

Confrontation can even be said to be a highly social behaviour as De Waal (2000, p.588) shows for non-human primates. Aggression can become quite common in relationships without endangering them:

This paradoxical finding can be explained by assuming that the more compatible or secure a relationship, the more the threshold for conflict can be lowered without posing a threat to that relationship. [...] These high rates may reflect the reduced cost associated with aggression in a society in which reconciliation is easy.

Aureli and De Waal (2000) argue that, next to security and compatibility, the value of a relationship to the actors is also an important factor in determining whether a process of reconciliation is initiated. They predict that the tendency to initiate aggression increases with the number of opportunities for competition, the resource value and the reparability of the relationship, while it decreases with the risk of injury and the value of the relationship. When the mechanisms of conflict resolution between two opponents are more developed, individuals will be less reluctant to engage in open conflict. It would be most interesting to see whether this hypothesis is also applicable in the case of human beings.

Coming back to the case, then, we will attempt to see whether a relational perspective offers greater insight into the social processes that take place after a conflict between police and civilians and if there is something going on that could be called reconciliation. For this

purpose, Yarn and Jones (2009, p.65) provide us with a helpful working definition of reconciliation:

[...] reconciliation refers to the establishment of cooperative relations between persons, either individuals or groups, who have been at variance without regard to whether they have had a prior cooperative relationship.

In this perception of reconciliation there is an emphasis on the possibility of a relationship that did not start out as a cooperative union. Furthermore, there is explicit mention of the different levels at which a relationship can exist, either individual or group-based. Because our study is particularly oriented on interaction at the group-level, this is an important issue to consider. Baron (2008, p.275) states that ‘we need to deal with the social-psychological reality that *the individual is in the group and the group is in the individual*’, meaning that there is an interdependence between individual and group-level experience. But is there also interplay between individual and institutional Post Conflict Interaction (PCI) at the group-level? Inspired by the Relational Model, therefore, we will address these issues and attempt to answer the following questions:

- Was there a change in the way the relationship between the police and civilians was experienced before the confrontation and after cooperation was (re)established, as predicted by the Relational Model?
- How did the change in behaviour from violent confrontation to peaceful cooperation come about and how did individual and institutional forms of interaction between the parties affect this change?

## **2. Methodology**

In analysis of PCI, three main parties can be distinguished; the police, Moluccans and the municipality<sup>3</sup>. We conducted in-depth, unstructured interviews with thirteen respondents; four police, one municipal worker, the mayor, and five civilians, three of whom were of Moluccan descent and two of Moroccan origin<sup>4</sup>. The respondents were left free to choose when and where to begin in describing the conflict at hand. The interviews lasted between one and two-and-a-half hours each. They were recorded and transcribed verbatim afterwards. Some of the

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<sup>3</sup> Because they became actively involved in the process between the police and the Moluccan community.

<sup>4</sup> Moroccan respondents were involved in the PCI-process due to the alleged participation of Moroccan youths in the riots and the fear that the conflict could spread to their neighbourhood.

respondents were interviewed on multiple occasions if new questions presented themselves. Furthermore, a media-scan of national, regional and local newspapers, as well as local and regional news-websites, was performed to gather relevant reports that were written about the confrontation and its aftermath (e.g. the resulting criminal investigation) or more general information about local police- community relations. Additionally, relevant public policy documents were collected for analysis. The interview data were analyzed using the qualitative software program ATLAS.ti. This process was performed by the first two authors simultaneously, who set up agreed rules of analysis, but performed the analysis separately.

### ***2.1 Measuring Relationship Nature***

In order to answer the first research question, the authors established a measure of Relationship Nature (RN). Several steps can be distinguished within this process. Firstly, both authors selected text fragments<sup>5</sup>, which they believed to give an indication of the RN before or after the confrontation. During several meetings the authors narrowed the selection down to those fragments which they both considered to be relevant. Subsequently, four categories were established within which the RN statements could be placed: ‘group’, ‘individual’, ‘policy’ and ‘law’. These categories are reflections of the level (micro or meso) at which the RN was evaluated by the respondents. Both authors analyzed the categories ‘group’ and ‘law’ and while the first author analysed statements in the ‘policy’ category, the second author focused on ‘individual’.

Statements were divided according to whether they concerned the situation before the conflict arose or after cooperation had been re-established. Statements referring to the period in between were excluded from the analysis of RN to avoid conceptual confusion between PCI and RN. There are only two cases out of 129 in which a statement regarding the RN is taken to reflect the RN before the confrontation by the first author and the RN after the confrontation by the second author. In nearly all of the cases, therefore, agreement is visible in the assessment of the categorisation ‘before/after’ between the authors (Cohen’s Kappa = ,969 with p-value < ,001).

Secondly, the selected statements were categorised as either reflecting a ‘negative’, ‘ambivalent’ or ‘positive’ RN. To minimize conceptual confusion between their analyses, the authors reported back to each other on several occasions and compared a selection of statements to fine-tune the way in which they attributed these labels. Nevertheless, it should

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<sup>5</sup> Ranging from approximately two to ten lines of text.

be noted that there is a rather large discrepancy between the sentences on which the authors based their evaluations: in 55% of all cases both analysing authors had selected the exact same fragments, in 45% they had selected other fragments from the text blocks identified earlier<sup>6</sup>. For the statements that were selected and assessed by both authors (N=129) there was a high correspondence rate (Cohen’s Kappa = ,754; p-value < ,001). Zooming in on the specific distribution of the assessments (see table 1), two things stand out. Firstly, the highest discrepancy between the authors was found in the statements assessed to be ‘ambivalent’ in nature by author 1, which were seen as ‘negative’ by author 2 (N=12). This incongruity may reflect a slight difference in interpretation of the categories between the authors. Secondly, there is no such discrepancy visible between the two extremes of the assessment scale (positive/negative). In other words, there are no cases where the statement is judged to be positive by one author and negative by the other.

**AssessmentAuthor1 \* AssessmentAuthor2 Crosstabulation**

Count

		AssessmentAuthor2			Total
		Negative	Ambivalent	Positive	
AssessmentAuthor1	Negative	61	3	0	64
	Ambivalent	12	31	2	45
	Positive	0	2	18	20
Total		73	36	20	129

Table 1

**2.2 Qualitative analysis**

In order to answer the second research question and chart the changes from confrontational to cooperative behaviour, the authors analyzed the data pertaining to the period between the two NYE's and produced an overview of the PCI. The qualitative software program ATLAS.ti was used to structure the labelling process. The data were analysed looking for the presence or absence of cooperative and confrontational behaviour. On this basis, and in this particular case, three stages within the PCI process were identified: confrontation followed by avoidance; institutional cooperation; and operational cooperation. Subsequently, for each of

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<sup>6</sup> This difference in selection is largely due to the fact that the text fragments which were initially chosen for assessment were still rather sizeable, which led the authors to evaluate the fragments on the basis of different sentences contained within. In retrospect, it would have been prudent to start with a more refined selection of text fragments to be able to compare the assessments between authors more closely.

these stages, authors one and two conducted a qualitative analysis of the meso- and micro-level of interaction respectively and of the interplay between these levels.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1 Relationship Nature

We will now compare the relationship between the two variables, the ‘negative/ambivalent/positive’ assessment of RN (variable 1) and ‘before/after’ the confrontation and cooperation (variable 2). For this purpose we have included the aforementioned categories that were evaluated by the authors independently, because we are no longer comparing these evaluation between authors but rather at two points in time for each author separately.

Firstly, combining all the categories by adding ‘individual’ and ‘policy’ with the data of the other author results in a complete picture of RN as analysed by both authors. Figures 1 and 2 give a graphical representation of these analyses and a comparison between the analyses by two authors. Both tables show a distinct change from a negatively slanted RN to a more positively RN.

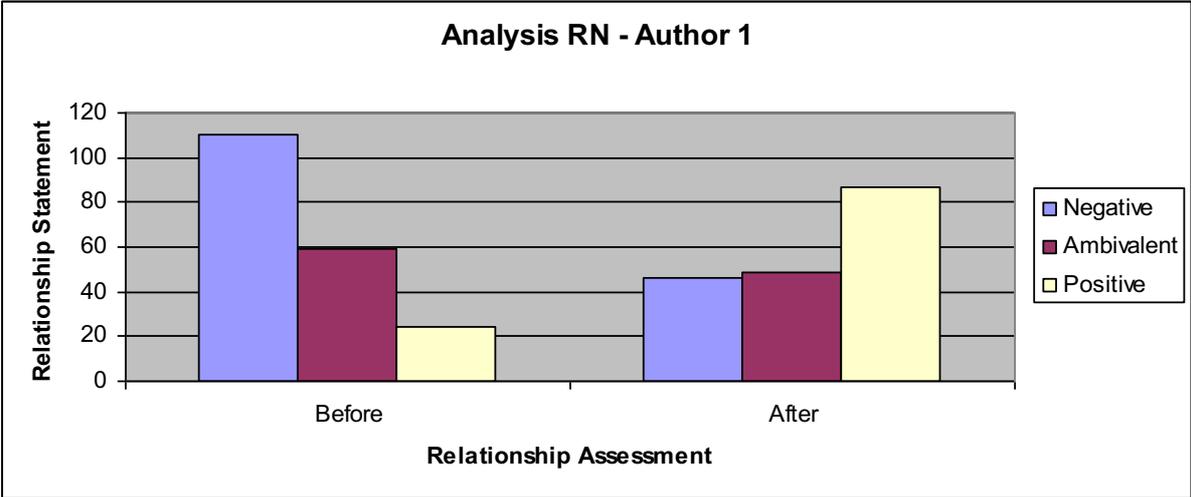


Figure 1

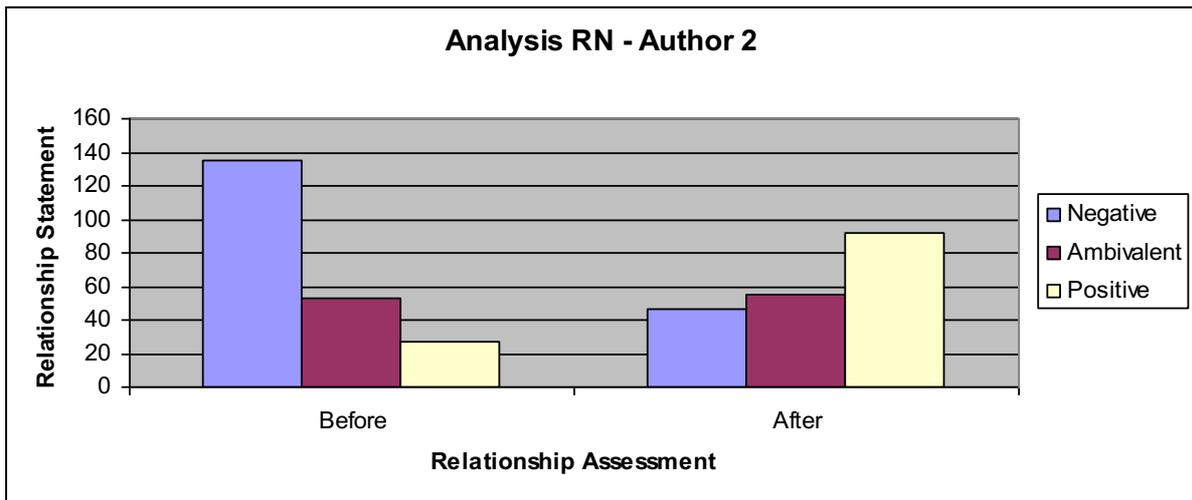


Figure 2

The individual analysis by the first author (N=262), which contains ‘group’, ‘law’ and ‘policy’, shows that there is a significantly more positive evaluation of the RN after cooperation has restarted than before the confrontation occurred with a Pearson’s Chi-Square of 17,590 and a p-value < ,001 with 2 degrees of freedom). The analysis by the second author (N=310 see table 8), which includes ‘individual’, ‘group’ and ‘law’, also shows a more positively experienced RN after cooperation had been established. Again, Pearson’s Chi-Square with a value of 73,563 is significant with a p-value < ,001 and two degrees of freedom).

Our measurements of the RN before the conflict and after the establishment of cooperation, one year later, indicates that there is a notable change in the ways that the respondents experience their relationship. This raises the question what happened in between these points in that caused two initially conflicting parties to come to cooperate in a constructive manner?

### ***3.2 Qualitative analysis***

In the following section of the paper, we will first give a brief overview of the PCI between the relevant parties; the police, Moluccans and Municipality. This is followed by an in-depth analysis of the three stages, identified in the PCI process<sup>7</sup>: confrontation followed by avoidance, institutional cooperation and operational cooperation. The analysis is concluded by

<sup>7</sup> As mentioned before, the stages were inferred by means of the presence or absence of cooperative and confrontational behaviour.

a section concerning the trial run for the newly constructed cooperative bonds; NYE '08-'09. In the analysis of the different stages, special attention is paid to the ways in which contact between (representatives of) the parties evolved on both micro- and meso-levels of interaction.

### *3.2.1 Overview of events*

The authorities are shocked by the excessively violent nature of the confrontation in the Moluccan neighbourhood of Tiel<sup>8</sup>. Several Police officers indicated to have feared for their lives. Within 12 hours after the riot, mental and physical healthcare services are offered to the police officers who were present at the scene. The public prosecutor is informed of the events and asked to start a criminal investigation into the violence against public servants and the destruction of public property (including a police vehicle). The chief inspector and the mayor have a closed meeting on January 2<sup>nd</sup>, during which they decide to address the events in the Moluccan neighbourhood as an example of the way in which public order is disturbed during NYE. Before the mayor addresses the issue in his New Year's speech on the 8<sup>th</sup> of January, the board of the local Moluccan association contacts his office and a local newspaper in order to make a public statement attributing partial responsibility for the events to the parents of the youths in question. The mayor mentions their initiative in his speech as a positive step forward, but also condemns the actions as 'planned and extreme riots' in a contribution to a regional newspaper the following day<sup>9</sup>. The day after, in the same newspaper, the chief inspector calls for charges of manslaughter in a public meeting with the municipal council<sup>10</sup>.

On the 30<sup>th</sup> of January the police start an investigation in the neighbourhood, calling for witnesses to come forward. The chief inspector informs the mayor that the police will not be attending a meeting with the board of the Moluccan association on the 31<sup>st</sup> of January because the police are too deeply invested in the criminal investigation. Prior to the official meeting however, the mayor and chief inspector (at their request) do have a separate and

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<sup>8</sup>Under the supervision of the Mayor of Tiel, the public prosecutor and the chief inspector, the police team of Tiel is responsible for public order maintenance and law enforcement of Tiel's 41.5000 inhabitants. The town is located in 'Gelderland-Zuid', one of the 25 independent legal police regions in which The Netherlands until 2012, was subdivided. Gelderland-Zuid was divided in three districts. De Waarden –the district of focus- was subdivided in two teams of which Team Tiel (approximately 30 police-officers, led by a chief inspector) was subjected to the present research.

<sup>9</sup> 09 januari 2008, 'Jeugd was uit op rellen', De Gelderlander.

<sup>10</sup> 26 januari 2008, 'Politie: 'Geweld oud en nieuw poging tot moord'', De Gelderlander.

informal meeting with the chair of the Moluccan association, during which they ask him to assist the authorities in their search for the offenders. Neither of these meetings, nor a subsequent meeting in February, have the desired effect. It becomes clear that the Moluccan board has been put under pressure by the community to distance themselves from the authorities due to the authorities' insistence on severe punishments.

During the following months, the minimal contacts between both parties consist of the police's attempts to gather information for the criminal investigation. This is actively obstructed by members of the Moluccan community who threaten an eye-witness. At a meeting in May, the municipal council informs the mayor of their worries concerning the cumbersome nature of the criminal investigation and they let him know that in their perception time is of the essence in the prevention of renewed escalations during the next NYE. The Working Group for NYE, which is led by the municipality and is used to start NYE preparations well in advance, on the 21<sup>st</sup> of May writes up a number of possible scenarios and measures that can be taken. These scenarios explicitly rule out an increased number of police or heavier use of force due to fears of further escalation and constraints in manpower.

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of June, two Moluccan youths are arrested for suspected participation in the confrontation. The arrests are made at their school for fear of resistance and public disturbances if they had been taken from their homes. Approximately two weeks later, on July 3<sup>rd</sup>, the first formal meeting between the Moluccan board, the municipality and the chief inspector takes place at the offices of the municipality. At this meeting the parties explain their actions and confront each other with their behaviour over the past few months. Afterwards, it is decided that a scenario which is aimed at a shared organisation of festivities in the neighbourhood to prevent renewed escalations, is the best way forward.

After a series of meetings between municipal representatives of the Working Group NYE and board members of the Moluccan association, an agreement is reached concerning the division of labour, costs and responsibilities in organizing NYE festivities for the Moluccan community. In exchange for municipal subsidies to organize the events, the Moluccan representatives agree to take up responsibility for social control for the duration of the festivities. This includes the organization of a Moluccan safety patrol to keep watch over the neighbourhood<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> The safety patrol was visibly present by means of the orange safety jackets the members wore. They were responsible to hold an eye on public order and had the authority to reprimand undesirable behaviour, but were not allowed to use force.

On the 24<sup>th</sup> of November, the two police officers who join the NYE Working Group, a municipal representative and the Moluccan representatives, meet for the first time and make their first agreements on cooperation during NYE '08-'09. During subsequent meetings, which have a sudden increase in frequency, the plans are fine-tuned and written up in the form of a covenant, which is signed by the chief inspector and the chair of the Moluccan association.

With the exception of a small fire, which is immediately reported and put out by the Moluccan security coordinator, NYE '09-'09 progresses peacefully in the Moluccan neighbourhood. In his New Year speech, the mayor mentions the cooperation between the various parties as an excellent example of collaboration between government and civilians, and gives special thanks to the Moluccan association.

### *3.2.2. Stage one: confrontation followed by avoidance*

The first responses of both groups shows that they were in agreement that the norms of their relationship had been breached during the past NYE. However, their initial reactions were quite different. The board members of the local Moluccan association attempted to reach out to the authorities. They sent an e-mail to the office of the mayor, stating that they regretted the way in which Moluccan youths had behaved during NYE and voiced their opinion that responsibility for the events was also to be attributed to their parents. Whereas the Moluccan association was mainly focused on the prevention of future incidents, the police and the authorities were primarily concerned with the consequences of the recent past. The chief inspector explained:

As chief inspector there are two things you can do. You can say: 'I'm going to take my responsibility as a police official and invest in that relationship with an eye towards the future'. But there were colleagues who had feared for their lives, and there could have been casualties. So I decided, together with the mayor, to be outraged and angry. [...] In my opinion, that didn't leave a lot of space to say 'let get in touch with these people'. No, first I'm going to really let them have it<sup>12</sup>, [...] so that they know they've crossed the line.

(Chief inspector)

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<sup>12</sup> In Dutch: '*op hun vestje spuwen*', literally translated as '*spitting on their vests*', indicating disapproval of certain behaviour.

From an analytical perspective, the words of the chief inspector give a clear indication of the various, conflicting concerns that arose immediately after the confrontation. From his words it is clear that he was negotiating multiple social identities in making his decision. In this case, he identified most strongly with the police, having just been attacked by the Moluccan group, and he apparently felt the need to defend his group-identity.<sup>13</sup>

Analyzing the events from a meso-level perspective, the police were, at this point, intent on restoring the order and balance of power in the relationship as they imagined it should be. Firstly, because working in such conditions had been very dangerous and damaging both in a physical as well as an emotional way; secondly, because they had been forced to retreat from the neighbourhood, failing to maintain or restore public order. Since the events happened in the public eye, the police wanted to send a clear message that such behaviour could not be tolerated under any circumstances. Therefore, a thorough and uncompromising criminal investigation became their adopted strategy. Their confrontational message was endorsed publicly when the chief inspector called for charges of manslaughter while addressing the municipal council in a public forum.

As such, the authorities, including the police, approached the first meeting with the Moluccan association as a way to send their message to the Moluccan community. This served to satisfy the demands for retribution that were felt and heard in the police organisation, but it also created a situation in which there were wholly incompatible goals and interests between the two groups that made cooperation impossible. A focus on the micro interactions during the meeting offers further insight into this outcome. Going into the meeting, the board members of the Moluccan community were prepared to accept responsibility for the events as representatives of their community in order to prevent future disturbances and possible repercussions. According to the Moluccan representatives, a large part of the community, especially the older generations, were unhappy with the way in which the youths behaved. The board members did take the actions by the youths seriously, in part, because they were afraid of losing control over the group<sup>14</sup>, but also because they felt a sense of shame over the fact that their community was associated with such events. Moreover, they

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<sup>13</sup> This behaviour is in line with Social Identity Theory as described by Tajfel and Turner (1986), which states that people hold multiple social identities which become prevalent in accordance with their situation and their perceived membership of relevant social groups. They argue that these social identities are important for purposes of self-esteem.

<sup>14</sup> Their own chairman, after all, had also been hit by a projectile during NYE and it was not clear whether this was an accident

wanted to prevent further escalations because the association relies, to a large extent, on funding by the municipality for their continued existence. The representatives also indicated, however, that they believed the police had provoked their youths into behaving in a violent manner and that they had not been heard when they previously requested subsidies to organise activities for the youths during NYE. As such, they were surprised to find that the authorities would not admit to what they perceived to be their share of the blame. Rather than entering into a discussion with regard to preventative action, they felt pressured to cooperate in the investigation against their own people and felt offended by the way in which their chairman was treated.

[The mayor] had underestimated our chairman and really put him under pressure, saying something like 'you'd better make sure we catch those youths' [...]. He was really only interested in getting our assistance in apprehending those youths. Well, in that case, you're barking up the wrong tree.  
(Moluccan board member)

Looking at the meeting from a relational perspective, it becomes clear that the lack of consistent contact between the two groups had led to a fairly large measure of unpredictability of behaviour. In the opinion of the Moluccan representatives, the authorities had provoked them by the manner and nature of their demands, lacking empathy and respect for their initiative despite their position in relation to their community.

Furthermore, soon after the meeting, it became clear that the Moluccan board members may have been too hasty in offering up apologies as representatives of the Moluccan community. When the authorities became aware of the fact that the actions of the board members were being questioned by their own community, they also started to question their trustworthiness as reliable representatives with influence over the Moluccan group. Again, the police were confronted with a discrepancy between their expectations and the reality of their relationship with the Moluccan community. In order to maintain their position in their own community, the board members could not align themselves with the authorities even if they wanted to do so. A move towards cooperative relations was out of the question at this moment, with retribution weighing heavy on the minds of the authorities and self-preservation as a priority to the Moluccans.

The unsuccessful meetings that took place in January and February were followed by a period of avoidance. Contact was limited to a focus on the criminal investigation by the police. The Moluccan response to this investigation was very tight-lipped, impeding the

attempts by the police to come to a quick resolution of the case. Throughout these months, therefore, no real change came about in the way in which the two groups regarded or treated each other. There was a stand-off centred around the progression of the investigation, which did very little to change the interests and goals of either group. Nevertheless, the police maintained their efforts in the investigation. The district chief comments: *'I don't think penal law really solves all of these problems, but in this case there was no other option, we had to re-establish the norms'*. This process took place with limited to no contact at the individual or group level. Reinstating the norms, therefore, became dependent on the outcome of the investigation. Whether this would have a strong impact on the group of Moluccan youths in order to prevent future incidents was questionable, especially considering difficulties the police had in finding and apprehending the culprits of the past NYE.

Meanwhile, the municipal council started to ask questions concerning the length of the investigation and the lack of contact between the groups. Looking ahead to the next NYE, the council expressed their concerns regarding the adopted strategy. At this point, however, the main concern for the police was not to establish a more cooperative relationship with the Moluccan group. Judging from the words of the district chief, intergroup contact was even perceived to be a threat to the effective and decisive continuation of the investigation. In a sense, personal contact between the groups was actively avoided and discouraged by the police at this stage. Nevertheless, half a year had passed since the events of NYE, and while there had not been any contact between the parties of an appeasing nature, the immediacy of the anger that was initially displayed by the police appeared to be receding. The chief inspector comments on the feeling that a balance had to be struck between retribution and the need to move forward:

At a certain moment it becomes tricky, because on the one hand, you're dealing with a criminal investigation in which you'd like to grab a hold of all of them... On the other hand, you will also need to cooperate with those same people, from the same community. That's what I've come to realise, you have to return to a decent work-relationship. A contact-relationship. The trick is then to make a distinction between the two. You can hold on to that anger and be persistent about pursuing and punishing the suspects, but you can do so internally. [...] you'll come to realise you won't be able to apprehend everyone that assaulted you and you'll have to tone it down.

(Chief inspector)

At this stage, however, the decision to try and invest in the relationship with the Moluccans appeared to come from a rational and professional point of view, rather than from a personal

readiness to move on. The nature of their work demanded that the police should invest in more cooperative relations with the Moluccan community because they had long since recognized the threat that taking a strongly repressive approach could lead to an even more dire situation.

Concluding, the first stage is characterized by a heavy emphasis on confrontation between the groups at the institutional level. The criminal investigation took place at a safe distance and caused a lack of immediate interaction between police and Moluccans. Interpersonal interaction did take place between the authorities. The municipality was the first of this group to reinitiate contact with the Moluccans to restart the conversation<sup>15</sup>. From a functional as well as a relational perspective, this is not entirely surprising since they were most frequently engaged in working relations before the confrontation as well. In the process, while the first steps towards more cooperative relations between the police and the Moluccans had not yet been taken, the barriers that were previously in place were being removed by ending the criminal investigation at a strategic level. Since the investigation was being wrapped up, this allowed for intergroup contact in theory, but it would take some time before such contact became a reality.

### *3.2.3. Stage two: institutional cooperation*

The second stage of the PCI begins with the meeting between the mayor, chief inspector and board members of the Moluccan association on July 3rd. For the first time since the meeting in February, which had failed to bring the parties closer together, a new meeting was planned. It was, in a general sense, aimed at finding a solution for the underlying tension between the parties. Recalling the micro interactions, respondents described the first part of the meeting as a rather tense affair. The past incidents were discussed as well as the kind of emotional impact they had had on the individuals involved. Only after this exchange, the mayor steered the meeting toward a point of transition in which the parties could express their desire to move forward and put what had happened behind them. The actors came to an agreement that there was indeed a necessity to work together towards a peaceful NYE. They proposed to unite their efforts in the organization of a party by the Moluccan association with the financial backing of the municipality.

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<sup>15</sup> At this point, municipal workers were discussing the possibility and negotiating the financial side of NYE festivities with the Moluccan representatives.

Respondents describe the meeting on July 3rd as one where cooperation was more easily negotiable than during the last official meetings, in January and February. Analyzed from a micro-perspective, then, the meeting was a pivotal point in stimulating the subsequent process of cooperation regarding the preparations of the planned NYE festivities. However, while cooperation was established, this resulted in increased contact but only via the municipality as an intermediary. After the meeting, the chief inspector did ask the two police officers who participated in the NYE working group to join the talks between the municipality and Moluccan association, but this was deemed premature as long as the plans regarding the division of labour, organization, costs and responsibilities in organizing NYE festivities had not yet been negotiated. In other words, the plans were yet to be backed up at the institutional level by the municipality. As such, since cooperation between individual members of the police and Moluccan community was seen to be untimely by the municipality and police, micro-interaction between the police and Moluccans was postponed as long as possible.

#### *3.2.4. Stage three: operational cooperation*

The third stage of the PCI process is characterised by increased micro-level contact between the police and the Moluccans. It was not until November 24th that the first face-to-face meeting between Moluccan board members and the two previously appointed police officers took place at the Moluccan community centre. The officers indicated that they were quite anxious for this meeting to go well, but did not know what to expect.

We went to the lion's den, that how we experienced it. We said to each other, 'if only we can make it back home alive', so to speak. It's just to give an indication of how tense things got with regard to that meeting: will we score or will we be even further from home?

(Neighbourhood Police Officers)

From a relational perspective their uncertainty and feelings of insecurity, which even made the officers question whether they should wear their uniforms to the meeting or not<sup>16</sup>, gives a strong indication of how unnerving it can be to re-establish contact after a confrontation. When we zoom in and analyze the interactions during that meeting, the first minutes were laced with tension from both sides of the table. A verbal confrontation regarding the riots took place in which both groups vented their frustrations. On the side of the Moluccans this meant

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<sup>16</sup> They eventually decided to wear their uniforms rather than civilian clothing.

expressing their opinion that the police had provoked the youths in question and neglected to acknowledge their concerns regarding a lack of activities for the youths during NYE. They addressed the way in which the police communicated their plans and policies for the neighbourhood, which the Moluccans believed to be disrespectful, mostly due to the impersonal nature of such communication<sup>17</sup>. For the police, on the other side, the verbal confrontation was an opportunity to give voice to the anger and fear they had experienced due to the way in which they, and their colleagues, had been treated. Although the confrontation was one of harsh words, it did serve to clarify and personalise the positions of those around the table. One of the neighbourhood officers explains:

Well, the police finally got a face when we sat down at that table. When we told them that our wives weren't too happy about us fighting, visors down, in the middle of the night for a handful of euros. So yes, that definitely helped to ease the tension<sup>18</sup>.

(Neighbourhood Police Officer)

The November meeting had a similar sequence of interactions as the one on July 3rd: after an expression of anger and frustration, the attendants switched to a negotiation of their planned cooperation for the upcoming NYE. From a micro perspective, the personal nature of the way in which these experiences were shared seems to have generated more empathy for the other group amongst the individuals that were involved. The police officers had an especially strong conviction in their working relationship with the Moluccan security advisor and coordinator. They called him 'the security guy' and although he was not, in fact, a member of the Moluccan board, he had been called in because of his military background and his previous experience in security matters. He had access to an extensive network of contacts inside and outside of the Moluccan community and, as the officers noted, was '*obviously an informal leader*'. The 'security guy' initially empathised with the police, having analysed the situation in which they had found themselves during the previous NYE from their perspective and the legal restrictions under which the police had to operate when dealing with such situations. Additionally, he showed a certain no-nonsense attitude that meshed well with the attitude of the police officers. The relationship between one of the officers and the advisor was a very important factor in building confidence regarding the merit of the plans they were creating.

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<sup>17</sup> I.e. the zero-tolerance policy with regard to celebratory bonfires had been communicated through the local door-to-door newspaper.

<sup>18</sup> In Dutch: 'Dat werkt wel *ontwapenend*', literally translated as 'disarming'.

The first meeting had gone well and gave rise to a number of subsequent meetings, a development about which one of the officers stated '*If you talk to people six times in a row, you're also building trust.*' Nevertheless, they also remembered the backlash that the board of the Moluccan association had to endure the first time they tried to cooperate with the authorities back in January. This made the influence of the board members in their own community and their reliability as effective partners in the cooperation a somewhat questionable factor in the eyes of the police. As such, this stage of micro-level interactions became very important: fruitful cooperation depended on the trustworthiness and persuasiveness of the individuals around the table.

Because a baseline level of trust had been established at the micro-level due to the process of interpersonal contact and negotiation, it allowed the individuals involved to move ahead as planned. However, as the police officers in question reported, they realised that such trust did not yet extend to the group-level. Colleagues still expressed their concerns regarding the plans for the upcoming NYE and warned them of the perceived treacherous nature of the Moluccan group. From a relational perspective, although the fact that both parties were willing to proceed with the plans for NYE was in itself a sign of good faith and another step towards successful cooperation, the trust that had grown between the representatives from both groups was still built on untested foundations. To counteract this uncertainty, the parties in question felt that the rules for their cooperation needed to be formalised in order to allow for a certain level of clarity and accountability. As such, PCI was continued at the meso-level. A covenant was formulated which was indicative of a certain distrust between the groups, but it also served to symbolise their commitment to the plans they had made.

For the police, one of the main points of concern was the fact that they would have to rely on social control from within the Moluccan group to prevent possible disturbances. Both parties had agreed that the presence of riot police could potentially lead to another escalation, and while their units would be prepared to act, they would remain out of the direct proximity of the neighbourhood unless the youths would attempt to start another bonfire or cause other public disturbances. However, this also meant that they would have to count on the Moluccan representatives to be open and communicative regarding any possible infractions of the rules.

For the Moluccans, the covenant symbolized a formal assurance that they would be given room to regulate their own festivities, which resonated with their need for respect and autonomy in their own neighbourhood. Although the police had rejected the proposal by the Moluccan board to start their own civil watch for the duration of the events, they did give them some leeway in controlling their own youths. Analyzed from a meso-level perspective,

the covenant served as an institutional safety net in case the plans would fall through. In this way, both parties could enter into the cooperation, but they still controlled the limits of their willingness to compromise and put faith in a partner that they did not yet fully trust.

It should be noted that the movement to promote cooperation between the police and the Moluccans, did not incorporate one particular segment of the local Moluccan community, namely the Moluccan youths. The far less social and cooperative communication strategy that they were subjected to, is reflected in the local newsletter;

‘Youths have to realise that we know who they are,’ emphasises the mayor, who speaks of a ‘hard core’ of approximately 20 to 30 youths. The chief inspector stated: ‘We’re taking the anonymity away from at-risk youths. That way, youths who tend to tag along but haven’t yet committed any offences will see that it doesn’t pay to be troublesome.’

(Local Newsletter, 19-12-2008)

Since the contact and negotiations had not taken place between the police and the Moluccan youths, the authorities had to rely for a large part on the trustworthiness and influence of the Moluccan representatives and their followers. In a sense, a separation was now forming between two groups that did not run along the lines of Moluccans vs. police, but rather between those who were working towards a peaceful NYE and those who were not.

### *3.2.5. The proof of the pudding*

Despite the fact that both groups were now looking towards the upcoming NYE with increased optimism, trust between the parties was still an untested quality of the relationship. The last doubts could, therefore, only be removed by the practical test of the agreements that had been made. PCI ends with the successful and festive '08 - '09 NYE celebrations, which were the real trial run for the newly forged union between the police and the Moluccan representatives. The peaceful nature of the celebration of NYE in the Moluccan neighbourhood seemed even greater due to the fact that disturbances did occur in other neighbourhoods<sup>19</sup>. The Moluccan organizers performed their duties without a hitch, which served to illustrate that the trust that was placed in the cooperation was not misplaced. For doing so, they were commended by the mayor, who mentioned the cooperation with the

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<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, overall there was approximately 10.000 euros less damage than in the previous year (source: evaluation working group 06 January 2009).

Moluccan neighbourhood as a shining example for the future of the town in his New-Year's speech.

From a relational perspective, the actual NYE celebration was an affirmation of the trust that was built in the previous weeks. What was based on faith had now been strengthened by practical experience. It reinforced the interpersonal bonds between the representatives of the parties involved, but more importantly, it also allowed for the larger groups to experience the same trust that had been building between their individual representatives. On a micro level, then, it can be argued that the positive experience in the joint organization and regulation of NYE was also a step forward in the perception of the other as a trustworthy and cooperative partner. At the meso-level, the agreements between the police and the Moluccans had proven to be reliable and had allowed the parties to go forward despite a lingering mistrust. However, the fact that this process had taken place between a limited number of representatives of both groups, and did not include the youths that were at the heart of the previous disturbances during NYE, does beg the question whether the process will hold at the group level. In that regard, only time will tell but representatives from both groups are hopeful. Until 2011-2012, NYE celebrations in the Moluccan Neighbourhood went by without significant incidents.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Even though the Relational Model is based on a wealth of previous research, this is the first attempt to apply the same ideas on an institutionalised setting in the social sciences. Therefore, giving definitive answers to our research questions, at this point, may be a bridge too far. Nevertheless, this first case study provided us with interesting findings to explore the questions more thoroughly and to test some of the assertions of the Relational Model.

Firstly, was there a change in the way the relationship between the police and civilians was experienced before the confrontation and after cooperation was (re)established, as predicted by the Relational Model? While our analysis of the data may require some fine-tuning, especially regarding the comparability of the evaluations, it was clear that the experience of the RN by both parties took a positive turn after cooperative relations were established. Both the quantitative and the qualitative data show a more positive outlook on the relationship between the police and the Moluccan group after their cooperation. To be clear, this is the difference between the situation *before* the confrontation and *after* the cooperation, not a comparison with the phase of PCI in between. As such, this case study gives a clear confirmation of the prediction by the Relational Model that relationships can become stronger

than before a confrontation has occurred despite, or perhaps, because of that very confrontation. This adds weight to seeing a move from confrontational to cooperative relations as a process of reconciliation and is in line with the definition of the Relational Model and Yarn and Jones (2009). The case also shows that reconciliation can be a long-term process with ebbs and flows rather than beginnings and endings. The question remains whether the lack of inclusion of the Moluccan youth in the process prohibits full-fledged group-level reconciliation.

To answer the second question, how the change in behaviour from violent confrontation to peaceful cooperation came about and how individual and institutional forms of interaction between the parties affected this change, it is important to recall the other assertion of the Relational Model. It is predicted that the nature of a relationship between parties should influence the social process that follows after a confrontation. A more positive relationship with higher perceived value, compatibility and security in the eyes of its parties, should make (re-)establishing cooperative relations easier. However, the model does not delineate exactly how the nature of a relationship is established, since a measure of the Relationship Nature is relative by definition. Relative to the wishes of the parties to the relationship: what type of relationship is desired? And, as a matter of comparison, relative to other relationships: is this relationship more or less likely to achieve a process of reconciliation than others? Whereas the second notion remains to be explored in comparative research, we should be able to address the first.

In this case, both the Moluccans and the police were initially content to have a somewhat distant and formal relationship: as long as they did not bother each other they implicitly agreed to ignore each other. Because the moments where there was contact -mostly during NYE- were particularly negative, it translated into a negatively experienced RN. This was most clearly the case in the interaction between the police and the Moluccan youths. Despite the negatively balanced RN, our qualitative analysis also shows that the actions by the youths were not representative for the Moluccan group as a whole. This ultimately became one of the factors which allowed for a move towards cooperative relations, because an important part of the group was amenable to such a process, namely the older generations of the Moluccan community. Nevertheless, the lack of prior positive contact and experience in dealing with each other, resulted in some serious trust-issues and formed barriers along the way. As expected in line with the predictions of the Relational Model, reconciliation appeared to be achieved in the end. It remains to be answered to what extent a negatively experienced RN may pre-empt a move towards cooperative relations. It will be important to establish the

factors (e.g. value, compatibility or security) that influence the experience of the RN more closely. On the basis of this paper and the previously mentioned study of the riots in Ondiep (Van de Klomp, Adang & Van den Brink, 2011), we might even argue that adopting a relational perspective allows for a more constructive way of dealing with conflict, but again, that remains to be tested.

One other prediction in line with the Relational Model may help to explain how the barriers in this case were overcome. Aureli and De Waal (2000) suggested that the tendency to initiate aggression increases with the resource value and decreases with the risk of injury (among other factors). In this case, it could be argued that the Moluccan youths and the police were fighting over the same resource; control over the progression of NYE. Specifically, the confrontation was centred around the lighting of a bonfire. More generally, it was an issue of control and public order; who is in charge in the Moluccan neighbourhood? This issue is not fully resolved in favour of either party, but it is made less prevalent by the alternative celebration of NYE. Additionally, the risk of injury had become greater in the perception of the police and the Moluccan community. The police had been surprised by the violent display during NYE, but were now fully aware of the danger. Nevertheless, they also believed that an increased use of force would only lead to an escalation of the confrontation. The Moluccan representatives wanted to prevent further damage to their reputation and also feared for legal and financial repercussions from the authorities. Along with a certain amount of pressure from third parties (especially the municipality) and the certainty of a rapidly approaching NYE, these concerns influenced the parties to seek cooperation more rapidly. Therefore, it would be interesting to see whether the concept of injury should be broadened to encompass such, less physical, concerns in an institutional setting.

Distinguishing between individual and institutional forms of interaction in the PCI-process, the case shows a clear difference between the roles both forms play. The meso-form of interaction first takes the form of a formalised method of confrontation in an attempt to re-establish power relations from the side of the authorities. What we would call an (unsuccessful) attempt at reconciliation by the Moluccan representatives, is repelled by this approach. It would be interesting to further explore whether the distance that is created between the parties by such formal proceedings may also play a part in the prevention of renewed escalations. Additionally, in this case, interaction at the meso-level also seemed to serve to set the rules for the cooperation in the absence of trust as experienced at the group-level.

On the micro-side of the PCI, in this case trust between the parties is only formed and brought to fruition when individuals from both sides of the conflict interact on a face-to-face basis. Direct personal contact became the engine of cooperation between the parties. Which forms of contact, and which specific kinds of behaviour are necessary to achieve cooperation after confrontation will have to be established in more detail. However, looking at the outcome of confrontational interaction at the individual level, it would be rather questionable to say that only positive forms of interaction may lead to cooperation. Most meetings between the two groups started by venting some of the frustrations that were felt by the individuals around the table and only slowly progressed towards more friendly forms of interaction. Was this a micro-expression of the process that also took place on the meso-side: a setting of boundaries to let each other know where the limits are and how interaction may proceed? Or was this more of an emotional discharge and a moment to exchange empathy? Again, this is something to be explored in future research.

We conclude that a relational perspective offers important clues in understanding the interaction from confrontation to cooperation. We call such a process reconciliation. Throughout the analysis of this case study, we have come to find that reconciliation can be a lengthy process with specific moments of contact that mark the change from confrontation to cooperation. It is yet to be established if such moments follow set patterns and if factors like emotion and identity play a similar role in different cases. We have found that there is a distinction in the role of institutional, group and interpersonal interactions and are curious to find out whether this is the same in other cases. To answer the questions that remain and to explore the explanatory potential of the Relational Model, we eagerly call for more case studies and comparative research.

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