PRAGUE OCCASIONAL PAPERS IN ETHNOLOGY

No. 2

**Urban Anthropology and the Supranational
and Regional Networks of the Town**

Edited by Zdeněk Uherek

/1993/

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This volume comprises a set of contributions presented in the workshop „The Town in Supranational and Regional Networks: Urban Anthropology and the Supranational and Regional Networks of the Town" which was held at the Second Conference of the European Association of Social Anthropologists in Prague /August 30-31, 1992/.

For the successful running of this workshop we are especially grateful to: Prof. Ladislav Holý /University of St. Andrews/ who took charge of the proceedings, to Prof. Ernest Gellner /University of Cambridge/ for all the advice given during setting up this workshop, and to Dr Rieke Leenders /University of Amsterdam/ who participated in the selection of appropriate contributors.

Prague, December 1992

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Coping with Urban Danger

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It was mainly between the late sixties and the mid-eighties that rises in crime levels were so startling. This was certainly the case in the Netherlands where from 1970 to 1985 the number of registered offenses, stipulated as such in the Dutch Penal Code, increased from an estimated 130 000 to 1 000 000 - a rise of more than 760% in one and a half decades. On the grounds of this escalation, it is even possible to calculate the chance of being the victim of a crime of some sort. In the Netherlands, a third of the total population runs the risk of joining the victim category within a year. Chances are considerably higher in the larger cities, and in Amsterdam the average percentage of around 50% can even go up to 60 or 70% in certain neighborhoods. The fact that this crime explosion is mainly an urban problem was concisely formulated by the Dutch criminologist Bovenkerk: "Depending on its level of urbanization, every country gets the criminality it deserves", he noted. "If we really want to eliminate crime, we will just have to evacuate the cities" [Bovenkerk 1990].

Criminology literature has presented a grand assortment of causes underlying this rise in crime but without anyone really having found an answer. This is not the question I address here. What I am mainly interested in are the effects. How do city people cope with the danger they are confronted with every day? What does it mean to them? What steps do they take to avoid danger? These questions have been prompted by a certain degree of dissatisfaction with the approach to victims upheld by current thought and written material about urban crime. It is only recently that attention has started to be focused on this aspect of criminal conduct. Many authors have tended to solely concentrate on one dimension and to depict victims as powerless, helpless and pathetic. No matter how important this dimension might be, victims and potential victims also take part in social activities and try, in whatever way they can, to safeguard themselves from the perils of city life. They do so by making themselves and each other streetwise, or rather "city wise", taking advantage of every opportunity to swap stories about what they or other victims have been through. Stories like these, added to a myriad of other sources of information about crime, constitute the ingredients of a mental topography of urban danger. This then serves as a guide in everyday city life, particularly in dealing with

the numerous strangers that city dwellers are surrounded by. This kind of mental map also serves as a point of departure for miscellaneous strategies on avoiding or neutralizing potential sources of danger. This point of view is primarily based on my research experience in Amsterdam, where I have interviewed a wide range of people on the subject of crime [Brunt 1988; 1989a; 1989b]. Before describing the stages in the coping process referred to above, I would like to focus on the nature of past experiences with crime in general.

Crime is not always what it seems

Ever since the sixties, opinion polls have indicated an increasingly widespread fear of crime [Skogan 1981]. This fear of crime is not an individual matter but a social problem that can have sizable effects. In the United States the mass middle-class exodus from the inner cities to the suburbs, which are considered far safer, is one of these effects. The same thing is taking place in the Netherlands, be it on a smaller scale. In the United States references are made to the role of color in this urban migration leading to "vanilla suburbs and chocolate cities". It is difficult to stipulate a direct connection between the fear of urban crime and the actual occurrence of criminal offenses. Any number of opinion polls [Merry 1981a] will show that people are mainly afraid of physical violence by strangers. This piece of information is quite surprising if we view it against the background of the more "objective" facts about what really happens to people:

- The risk of accidents in traffic and in the home is considerably greater than the risk of being the victim of a crime with severe physical repercussions.

- Most violence takes place between people who know each other, and often know each other intimately.

- Fear is greatest among the people who run the least risk.

- Fear is not necessarily more widespread in neighborhoods where crime is most rampant.

- People tend to feel their own neighborhood is safest.

In other words, opinion polls yield results that would not seem to demonstrate much of a relation to reality. There is however little reason to doubt people's word if they say they are afraid. Mention might be made here of the classic Thomas Theorem which holds that if people define a certain situation as realistic, they act accordingly even if outsiders tell them they are wrong. It is a fact that elderly people and women are particularly prone to a fear of crime. Instead of writing this

off as hysteria, it might be wise to bear in mind that this fear is frequently based upon an excellent assessment of the situation. Neither elderly people nor women are easily able to ward off the perpetrators of violent crimes, most of whom are men in the prime of life. What is more, elderly people run the extra risk of irreparable injury as a result of physical violence and women run the risk of being raped [Stanko 1990]. Besides this, fear can make people do more to protect themselves against danger of all kinds.

It is thus essential to determine as precisely as possible how people define situations as regards the risk of crime and violence. Merry [1981a] noted that instances of burglary without a face-to-face confrontation with the burglar are often not perceived or reported as such. In a situation of this kind, people tend to view the possessions involved as having been lost due to negligence or carelessness on their own part or on the part of members of their household. Confrontations with strangers do however tend to be classified as being of a criminal nature even if no offense has been committed. If a group of innocent youngsters gather on a street corner it is sometimes reported to the police as being a threatening act that should be dealt with. Violence between people who know each other is, however, rarely viewed as constituting a criminal offense. The interminable discussion on whether rape can take place within a marriage is a good illustration. Besides being the result of criminal offenses listed in the Penal Code, violence can also be committed by way of symbols or symbolic behavior. This was observed by Rainwater [1980], who referred to verbal hostility, for example shouting names at members of stigmatized groups on the street, and various forms of economic exploitation. "Crimes without victims" can also be perceived as manifestations of aggression and violence, such as vandalism and abuse of drugs or alcohol. Lastly, fear can be aroused by acts of a completely impersonal nature. News items or stories on the radio and television or reports in the newspaper about certain segments of the population or specific neighborhoods are all examples of this, as are certain acts on the part of government authorities or even of tourists. An example is the recent campaign in the Red Light District in Amsterdam where taking pictures of prostitutes was criticized as being a form of symbolic violence. Fear can also be aroused by status insecurity due to unemployment. This was recently described in detail by Engbersen [1990] in his study on the long-term unemployed.

Although Hannerz [1981: 30] points out that in the final analysis only people are dangerous, there are also non-human sources of danger. Skogan [1986] referred to situations or circumstances of this kind as "incivilities". This category covers the entire range of visual signals which indicate that things are not quite as they should be in certain neighborhoods or on certain streets, such as garbage on the sidewalk,

signs of arson, an unpleasant stench, inadequate shelter from the cold, noise, toxic substances or vermin. Rainwater [1980] added a second category consisting of relatively large-scale developments such as economic recessions, the threat of war, political chaos, mass migration or growing impoverishment. In the final instance, of course, these impersonal sources of danger can frequently be attributed to human conduct as well.

In theory, reasonably precise border lines might be feasible pertaining to such concepts as urban danger, fear, crime, violence and aggression but in actual practice they usually are not. The phenomena we use these terms to describe are often perceived as being multi-faceted - Hannerz [1981: 43] is referring to "an entire danger complex" - and it is only by way of patient and painstaking observation that we can begin to penetrate what they are all about. How do people defend themselves against urban danger? How do they act out their fears and feelings about living in an unsafe world? This is my point of departure in this article. I view people's attempts to manage danger as strategies. They develop certain modes of behavior to minimize the risk of becoming a victim of unwanted confrontations. To a large extent, the choices they make depend on the situations they find themselves in. The situation in the home differs in various ways from the situation on a busy square and the strategy a person opts for should be selected accordingly. In much the same way, there are differences between various parts of the city, times of the day or night and even between the various seasons. Strategies can not be freely chosen from an extensive repertoire always kept on hand for general use. Instead they are closely linked with role-discriminatory attributes [Hannerz 1980: 151 ff.] such as sex, age, ethnic background, social class, educational level and place of residence. They are social strategies, created and developed in interaction with other people and it is this interaction that gives them their significance. The things people tell each other play a central role in this interaction. Their own experiences, observations and insights are important; they exchange them and compare them with other people's in an ongoing creative process. Schematically speaking, urban danger and the perils of city life are mentally mapped out on the basis of this information and strategies are then planned on the basis of these mental topographies. I shall describe some of these strategies as such but first I would like to say a few things about the information on crime in general and the meaning of mental maps for the formulation of strategies.

Becoming acquainted with danger

As far as crime itself is concerned, there is a large extent of "pluralistic ignorance": except on the persons involved, and sometimes not even then, crime

often leaves no trace. For information about crimes and victims we thus mainly rely on second, third or nth-hand accounts. One of the effects is that fear and a feeling of living in an unsafe world are more widespread than the actual sources of danger that lead to them. Although various commonplace offenses are concentrated in specific parts of specific cities, the fear of being a victim of these offenses is prevalent throughout the cities and sometimes far beyond their outskirts. Of course, the dissemination of fear is also promoted by the spread of "fearful" population categories, particularly women and elderly people, all across the city.

Information about crimes and victims of crimes can be either "informal" or "formal". Informal information often comes from other people, some of whom we know, some we don't, in the form of crime and/or victim stories. These stories are told wherever people meet - on the street, in stores or bars and at parties, where they often serve to break the ice, or at more official get-togethers like neighborhood committee meetings. Stories of this kind are generally spread most efficiently and rapidly in social circles characterized by some degree of coherence, social control and solidarity - typically, the social circles where relatively few crimes occur. This is all the more reason to conclude that fears and feelings of living in an unsafe world are not confined to the actual victims of criminal offenses, as is sometimes suggested in newspaper items. In general, it is the stories that in one way or another are most in keeping with the listener's own personal experience and social circumstances that are apt to make the most impression. Newspaper items are one of the more formal sources of information. Material printed and distributed by specialized bodies such as the police, security companies, detective bureaus or insurance agencies can also serve as a source of information. In addition, there are the results of social science studies in this field, the official crime figures and a wide range of radio and television programs. There was in fact recently quite a commotion among the Dutch people when a research report was published claiming that in various senses, the Netherlands ranked high on the world list of "criminal countries". As far as radio and television are concerned, the vast number of series and serials focused on crime should be noted here, as should semi-documentary programs where the audience is asked to help the police locate dangerous wanted criminals.

Particularly, as regards the contents, form and function of the stories people swap at informal get-togethers, very little research has been conducted, most certainly regarding the 'victim stories'. An analysis of the comments people heard from desk clerks at the Warmoes Street Police Station in Amsterdam when they came to report a crime made it quite clear that many of these comments had a moralistic connotation. They included guidelines and recommendations on how to

behave, alluding to how people ought to take care of themselves in the city. What are dangerous spots? What are dangerous situations? Who are dangerous people and what do they do? [Wijnbeek 1988]. A more comprehensive study was conducted by Wachs [1988]. For years she collected the victim stories exchanged by women friends as they sat and had tea together. Victim stories differ by definition from crime stories, where the emphasis is on the nature of the crime itself and specific details about the perpetrators, in that they pertain to the experiences and reactions of people on the right side of the law. Why do people tell each other these stories? It is a way to vent the feelings of helplessness and powerlessness that are part and parcel of being a victim. It is not a question of oral documentaries but of drama. This means certain aspects are emphasized considerably more than others and the stories are quick to become moral narratives with a message. Wachs stressed a number of specific elements in the victim story.

The first element consists of the individuals who play a role. The victim is central but is generally presented as a relatively stereotyped character. In stories where the narrator is the victim there might be a man or woman of the world who had naturally taken all the necessary precautions but was nonetheless taken totally by surprise. If, however, the victim is some anonymous person or at any rate a person who is not in the room at the moment, there is more of a tendency to describe him or her as a country hick who acted in a rather naive fashion. In addition to the victim, the story has various other more or less stereotyped characters. A common character is the good Samaritan who helps and consoles the victim after the crime has taken place. A virtually classical role is also played by the passive bystanders. Numerous crimes are committed in the middle of the day, sometimes with hundreds of people standing around and watching, but without anyone daring to intervene or wanting to. The notorious 1964 New York case of Kitty Genovese, who was murdered while being watched by many of her neighbors, is a "classical" example [Hannerz 1981: 38]. As to the perpetrators, the repertoire is similarly a limited one. They are either the dim-witted brute or the trickster, a smart guy who often uses some kind of impersonation strategy. In accounts of actual events, attention is mainly focused on two components. Firstly, the already mentioned apathy of the bystanders. Secondly, the pure bad luck of the victim, who just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Victim stories often stress the fact that the perpetrator and the victim cross paths at the most ordinary spots in the world, in a train compartment or at a station, in an elevator or on the street.

Wachs not only examined the various components of victim stories, she also scrutinized their meanings and functions; their "message". First and foremost, victim stories provide specific information about the city and urban life. They

basically contain explicit accounts of how people in cities live together and what can be expected of certain city scenes, situations and events. They can be "cautionary tales" in that they frequently contain clear information about what the dangerous zones, neighborhoods or spots actually are in the city, which routes should not be taken at which times of the day or night and what kind of people are best avoided at all times. Victim stories also serve an educational purpose, containing guidelines about attitudes and conduct that are "street wise". From this angle, victim stories can be classified as "survival narratives": educational tales about how people manage to stay alive in the urban arena. Victim stories also serve a therapeutic function. By describing and working through them, the people involved have an opportunity to vent their anger and frustration and patch up their sorely damaged image of themselves. Another function victim stories can serve is as a source of entertainment. Like the gallows humor of urban comedian Woody Allen, victim stories can have the same effect as the magic mirror that distorts you at the amusement park. They implicitly convey any number of helpful hints about city life and city folks as well as contain elements of a more or less specifically urban world point of view. Public places are portrayed as sites of the kinds of risks and hazards a person would have to be very lucky to survive. Judging from victim stories, danger is associated with certain clearly defined conditions. Firstly, there is the ethnic, cultural and socio-economic heterogeneity of the population. Then there is the population density in the city, where it is consequently impossible to avoid unwanted confrontations with total strangers. There is also the cosmopolitan climate of the city; the fact that, because of the wide variety of attitudes, norms and values, there is no consensus of opinion about how people ought to act. There is an "anything goes" mentality in the city without clear rules to go by when judging one's own or anyone else's conduct. This is closely linked to the last condition, the indifference on the part of city dwellers and urban authorities about the kind of thing that happens in the city. It is the combination of all these points that keeps people informed about how they are expected to act in the city: watch out, be careful, don't trust anyone and be prepared for anything.

Various authors have written about this urban etiquette, the social origins of which were described by Kasson [1990]. Lofland [1973] noted that city residents tend to surround themselves with a "symbolic shield of privacy", ways of behaving that are designed to avoid as much contact with strangers as possible. This is achieved by minimizing eye contact, body contact and expressiveness in general. Harrison [1983] put it even more directly: If you want to survive, mind your own business. Especially for people at the bottom of the social ladder, urban danger can have far-reaching consequences. Rainwater commented that even choosing

one's friends can be a risky business. "There is always the possibility that a friend may turn out to be an enemy or that his friends will. The result is a generalized watchfulness and touchiness in interpersonal relationships" [Rainwater 1980: 194]. Under these conditions, raising children can be an uncertain and often frightening matter. The tendency to mainly blame unpleasantness on one's own circle of friends and relatives, neighbors and acquaintances leads to isolation and a general distrust of the outside world.

Mental topography of danger

The information people acquire about urban danger is incorporated into the cognitive or mental maps they use to find their way around in the city and city life, where information is also stored about specific neighborhoods and places, who lives where, and the history of the city. In his innovative study on the images city people use, Lynch [1960] demonstrated that maps of this kind contain instructions about how to read the cityscape. Which elements, such as landmarks, intersections, streets or neighborhoods, do they observe and how do they put them together to form a whole? Using these maps, people try and find their way around and avoid risks. Merry [1981b] felt the main purpose of this mental topography was to record what is safe and what isn't. She remarked that the map is adjusted and colored in over and over again, based on the new experiences of individuals themselves or of other people. Up to now, however, very little systematic research has been conducted in this field. Merry commented that the mental maps youngsters have in their heads are larger and more detailed than the ones older people set their course by, which is in keeping with the difference in the action radius of the two categories. In much the same way, one might assume that the form and content of mental maps vary with the ethnic background, sex or class of the individual and the extent to which his or her orientation is local or cosmopolitan. Merry did indeed note a considerable difference between the expanse of the mental maps of the black and the Chinese residents of the neighborhood she studied. In this connection, I also refer to Hall's study on the cultural determinant of spatial perception [Hall 1969] and the efforts Suttles [1968] and Anderson [1990] made to define how people draw borders around their territory and guard it. According to authors who work with the concept, mental maps function as a compass people use to steer their way through social traffic. Wolff [1973] referred to "monitoring" when he described how pedestrians get their bearings on the street. In order to avoid collisions with other people, it is important to keep an eye on the entire vicinity and this is done by looking in store windows and the windows of cars coming your way, which serve as rear view mirrors. "In spite of the cultural proscriptions against ambush, attack

from behind, and so forth", Wolff [1973: 44] observed, "apparently we have developed the habit of performing several operations that enable us to "watch our back" while moving through open spaces". The spots marked as "dangerous" on a person's mental map do not necessarily coincide with places that really are dangerous according to objective criteria. Spots can have a reputation all of their own. Merry [1981b: 413] noted that in addition to the actual existence of danger, the reputation of a dangerous spot is also determined by the architectural design, the things people say about it, expectations as to the conduct of people who live nearby in the event that something might happen and the reputation and conduct of people associated with the spot.

The perception of urban danger and the reactions to it join to constitute a complicated process which has barely received any sociological attention. From the scarce literature that is available on the topic, most of which comes from the United States, it can be concluded that large segments of the population suffer directly or indirectly from the effects of criminal offenses. Moreover, people have a wide range of strategies for defending themselves against urban crime. This information tends to coincide with the results of my own research. In the course of scores of interviews conducted in various parts of Amsterdam about people's experiences with petty crime, I have heard numerous victim stories. Now that I have reviewed the various forms of information about urban danger and the threat of urban danger, as well as the ways this information is incorporated into mental maps, I can make a few comments on how city dwellers defend themselves against this kind of danger.

Fear and defense

My list of the ways in which people try to defend themselves against urban danger and express their fears and apprehensions is primarily an inventory of a rather general nature. Strategies like these are largely dependent on the kind of situation people happen to be in. Merry [1981a: 186] noted that the "active" or offensive strategies people develop in their own neighborhoods, such as building up a certain reputation, can only be effective within a particular environment. Strangers are by definition unfamiliar with a reputation of this kind and can not be expected to take it into consideration. As to situation-linked factors of this kind, I confine myself for two reasons in this article to relatively general ones: certain situations can not always be clearly distinguished from each other and certain strategies have a wide application range and can largely overlap each other. I would like to start by focusing on the strategies people generally use if they live in a city. I will then briefly discuss several neighborhood-specific modes of conduct. Lastly,

I will devote attention to strategies used when people are on the streets or in other public spaces as a "stranger among strangers". The very word strategy alludes to some plan, some policy. In this connection, these associations might be misleading. It seems, in the course of time, people who at some point deliberately decided to adopt certain precautions before going out into a public space come to take these steps completely automatically. They have internalized a given pattern so that it has almost become second nature and the planning component gradually recedes into the background. When interviewing people about these situations, it is striking how often they first deny they are appropriate respondents. "I don't know much about it, I haven't had much experience with that kind of thing", is often their response to a request to interview them about the after-effects of crime. It is not until the researcher has given a few examples that they open up and share a richly varied assortment of experiences.

A. The besieged city

1. Avoidance. Judging from some news items, one might get the impression the only way people can defend themselves against urban danger is by adopting defensive strategies, particularly avoidance behavior. The elderly and women of all ages are apt to say they "never go out any more". In the course of the interviews I conducted in Amsterdam, this is what various respondents told me. But upon further questioning it appeared that a statement of this kind should not be taken that literally and is meant to describe a certain attitude rather than what actually happens. What the statement indicates is that people only go out if they absolutely have to, for example to go shopping, to go to the doctor or to visit relatives or friends. Even elderly people who, due to physical ailments or the absence of a close social network, do indeed spend most of their time confined to their homes, nonetheless go out now and then. What avoidance behavior amounts to in actual practice is that people try to make sure to avoid certain places in the city, especially at night. In a recent survey it was found that one in every four women between fifty and seventy years of age doesn't dare to go out alone when it is dark, against only a tiny percentage of men [Het Parool, December 11, 1991]. For some Dutch people the center of Amsterdam, or certain parts of it such as the Nieuwmarkt area or the Red Light District, are to be avoided at all costs. Avoidance behavior can also be focused on certain population categories. The two often overlap each other. There are people who do not want to come near drug addicts for fear of being molested and they consequently avoid certain neighborhoods because they are convinced that is where the drug addicts are who would be likely to bother them. Avoidance behavior can also pertain to certain situations. Elderly people are sometimes

reluctant to go out on the street when the schools in the vicinity let out. They are afraid of the hordes of schoolchildren who don't pay enough attention to pedestrians or who are fresh and aggressive to them. Viewed from this angle, avoidance behavior can not be separated from the second strategy, which involves taking safety precautions before leaving the house.

2. Safety precautions. In order to minimize the risk of unwanted confrontations, many people make sure they are always escorted whenever they leave the house. The American criminologist Skogan [1981: 29, 30], one of the few authors to focus explicit attention on reactions to urban danger, commented on this. The escort can be a friend, a neighbor or a housekeeper, but having an escort can also mean calling a taxi to pick you up at home and take you wherever you want to go. There are innumerable variations on this theme, such as the arrangement people make to call each other before they leave the house and after they get to their destination. Of course a prerequisite is that they are part of a relatively close network of friends or acquaintances. In an urban society, where by far the bulk of the households consist of single people, one often has to rely on more individualized safety precautions. There are the well-known strategies of not leaving the house before one's money has been concealed in "safe" spots on the body, for example in a sock or in a brassiere, or of never going out with more than a minimal amount of money. In the United States this is called "mugger money". In addition to these defensive strategies designed to avoid danger and minimize the effects of whatever dangerous confrontations might nonetheless occur, there are also the more offensive strategies. In one way or another, many individuals are now armed.

3. Urban weapons. In recent years a sizable arsenal of street weapons has appeared on the market varying from alarm guns and spray cans to a wide assortment of knives and clubs. Some of these weapons can be purchased in specialized stores and some are on sale in the informal circuit. As I was assured during various interviews, it does not even require much time or money to get real firearms. And yet the question remains as to how widespread the use of "official" weapons actually is. My impression is that many people rely on domestic utensils that might not have been designed as weapons but can easily serve that purpose. Wachs [1988: 8, 9] referred to them as "urban weapons". The advantage of these objects, whether a pair of scissors, a kitchen knife, a bicycle pump, an umbrella, a cane or even a grocery bag "loaded" with a can of baked beans that can be used to deal a fatal blow, is that they are not conspicuous and are not apt to give muggers or rapists "any ideas". At least this is usually the line of reasoning people use to justify carrying around weapons of this kind. Whether my respondents ever actually used these weapons

was something that remained a matter for speculation, be it sometimes wild speculation. The major function of urban weapons would seem to be a psychological one, the reassuring idea that one has taken every feasible safety precaution. Many people realize their weapons are not going to be much of a help in a real emergency. In practice it is nonetheless a fact that people are sometimes able to successfully defend themselves against rapists or muggers [De Haan 1991].

4. At home. City dwellers not only do their best to shield themselves from danger, they also want to safeguard their homes and possessions. In recent years, many a city home has come to resemble a besieged fortress, the border separating it from the public space barricaded by an impressive fence or gate, a row of locks and signs informing prospective trespassers of the electronic alarm systems that are still to come. Even a sign saying "Beware of the dog", once the prerogative of remote farmyards, has now become a familiar element of city life. An intercom system can serve to keep people who ring the bell from entering the house but nowadays there is a growing tendency to solely open the door for visitors who have announced their arrival in advance via a more reliable channel. In the lobby of apartment buildings there are often signs with a whole list of guidelines to convince tenants of the importance of the utmost caution. All this not only indicates an actual increase in the dangers entailed, it is also indicative of fundamental changes in the population's composition, in particular the sizable percentage of people who now live alone. About half of the total number of houses in the city of Amsterdam are being occupied by only one person. If a tenant goes out, there is no one left to watch the house, which leaves no other choice but to rely on mechanical and electronic devices. Not only has the use of protective measures mushroomed in the home, it is also increasingly common to protect other possessions that are normally left outside such as automobiles and bicycles. In principle, there are various routes that can be taken in this connection. The first route entails "target hardening", efforts to make access to the home as difficult as possible for strangers. The second involves "loss reduction", efforts to minimize the extent of losses, for example by insuring property or keeping valuables in a safe. After physical violence by strangers, experienced as a severe violation of a victim's personal integrity, the violation of privacy in the form of breaking and entering is widely felt to be one of the most serious offenses people can be confronted with.

5. Participation. Rainwater [1980: 196] noted that many people seem to have a need to view the immediate vicinity of their home as an area where they can feel safe and comfortable. The less threatened people feel in their own home and the less besieged they feel by the outside world, the stronger this need tends to be. In

some parts of residential neighborhoods, this condition is met with more satisfactorily than in others. It is here that processes develop which might be called "participation" in the sense that people join forces to protect their living environment from outside intrusions by way of consensus and cooperation. In instances where neighbors keep an eye on each other's apartments, participation can be of a limited and informal nature. Arrangements are common in the summer vacation, when people water each other's plants and feed each other's cats. It is a good idea for them to close the curtains and put on the lights in the evening, open the curtains and put off the lights in the morning, and empty the mailbox every day to mislead overly observant passersby. The initiative tenants of an area sometimes take to join forces is along much the same lines. On various streets in the Amsterdam Nieuwmarkt area, where there had been repeated burglaries and muggings, tenants distributed guidelines door-to-door about how to act in such an event. Local participation can also be of a more formal nature, e.g. in the form of an official neighborhood organization, a volunteer vigilance committee or security guards to patrol the area [Hannerz 1981]. Organizations of this kind generally work in close cooperation with the police. All these forms of participation will mainly be able to function in a social context characterized by relatively close-knit social networks, reciprocal solidarity and a certain extent of informal social control. In general, these are neighborhoods where street crime is not likely to be widespread.

6. Moving out. In popular, as well as more specialized writings, the link is frequently drawn between a rising crime rate and the mass exodus out of the inner cities. Numerous city neighborhoods, particularly on the east coast of the United States, can be increasingly viewed as "trash heaps", the homes of the most poorly educated segments of the population, long abandoned by the rest, where deterioration, degeneracy and crime are rife. Skogan [1986] noted however that this link has never been convincingly proven since thorough research placing crime and fear within the framework of neighborhood developments has yet to be conducted. What factors set the downward spiral in motion that leads, in the end, to a mass exodus of "respectable people"? In part, conditions are involved that neighborhood residents can exert little or no influence on, involving for example the nationwide economy. An economic recession, particularly in combination with demolition plans and forms of depreciation, for example in the event that owners allow their property to fall into disrepair, can lead to a downward spiral that is difficult to stop or alter. A rising crime rate reinforces people's fears which leads in turn to a reduction of social control, a weakening of social networks and the general undermining of the community as such. "Few residents will want to live in an area

characterized by mounting crime and fear". Skogan noted [1986: 207] in connection with the mass exodus that all this leads to in the end. The residents with the strongest financial position and who have the most enterprising mentality are, however, the only ones who can leave. The people who remain behind are mainly the older residents who are increasingly surrounded by new neighbors whose language they are often literally unable to understand. As Skogan [1986: 208] observed, "They find themselves surrounded by unfamiliar people whom they did not choose to live with. Loneliness and lack of community attachment are significant sources of fear among the urban elderly, especially among the women".

B. The besieged neighborhood

In addition to these relatively general strategies, a number of methods can be noted that pertain more specifically to behavior in residential areas. The source of much of this information has been Merry's ethnographic study on urban danger in a large city in the northeast of the United States [Merry 1981a]. Caution is generally called for when applying research results from other countries to the Dutch situation. The results of Merry's study do however largely coincide with much of what I myself observed in the course of my research in the Nieuwmarkt area in Amsterdam. This is undoubtedly also the case in other areas of Dutch cities, at any rate to the extent that, like the Dover Square area studied by Merry, they are characterized by a large extent of ethnic and cultural heterogeneity. In principle neighborhood strategies, in so far as this term is applicable, do not differ from the more general urban strategies but constitute a speific implementation. On the neighborhood level, a distinction can also be drawn between more or less offensive strategies and more or less defensive ones.

1. A confident attitude. For the residents of heterogeneous neighborhoods with a mobile population, it is important to demonstrate by their whole attitude that they feel at home there and are not members of the anonymous category of strangers who are the potential victims of pickpockets, assailants and muggers. By way of their appearance, their clothes, the way they walk, stand and look around, their gestures and the way they act, people try to give an impression of confidence. They do this under the assumption that it scares off potential attackers. Many people have the firm conviction that if you show that you are afraid, you have more of a chance of actually becoming a victim. And yet the extent to which these efforts are successful is closely linked to such role-discriminatory attributes as age, sex and ethnic background. Merry illustrated the extent to which the timidity of the Chinese in the Dover Square area contrasted with the matter-of-fact way black youngsters

took over the street corners. Ethnic differences of this kind can also be observed in the Nieuwmarkt area in Amsterdam, where the local Chinatown is situated.

2. Earning a reputation. For some people, making a confident impression can even involve carefully cultivating a "mean" reputation. In the Nieuwmarkt area there are some "Very Important Persons" [Hannerz 1981: 25] who other residents know they had better avoid if they don't want trouble. Their "heroic deeds" are recounted in conversations in the informal circuit and some of them are willing to go to any extreme to actively reinforce their frightening reputation. Take for instance the man who discovered a dent in the bumper of his parked car one morning. He slipped a pamphlet under all the doors in the vicinity asking for tips about who was responsible for the dent. Not only was there a generous reward for any useful tip, neighborhood residents were also informed of the punishment in store for the guilty person. The pamphlet made it very clear that the car owner was not a person to tamper with.

3. Cultivating special rules of etiquette. "If you can't beat them, join them" is an often used strategy and the aim is to develop appropriate rules of etiquette for dealing with "dangerous" individuals. Some of the shopkeepers in the Nieuwmarkt area added new items to their line of merchandise just to pacify the population of drug addicts, who would otherwise be a constant nuisance and source of irritation. The underlying idea in strategies of this kind is that criminals are not likely to attack people who know them since they can easily identify them and report them to the police. In some neighborhoods, the effectiveness of this line of action is the subject of heated discussions. There is not much faith in the police or the courts and there are cases where people have felt plainly intimidated by the implicit or explicit threat of reprisals. A well-known element in crime stories is that even if the perpetrators are caught, they are soon released again. Many people are absolutely convinced that the one rule that is observed without exception in criminal circles is that "squealers" can expect no mercy.

Although this romanticized myth, handed down from one generation to the next, is hardly applicable to modern forms of street crime, the belief in it is still widespread.

4. Inaccessibility. Not everyone is bold enough to brave urban danger in the ways described above. Merry observed that in the Dover Square area, the Chinese were more apt to make themselves as "inaccessible" as possible. In her criticism on notions about "defensible space" [Merry 1981b], this constitutes an important argument. You can construct apartment buildings in such a way as to provide the best possible view of the public spaces in the vicinity but you can not force the

residents to actually look out the window and monitor what is happening outside. Certain population groups literally and figuratively shut themselves off as much as they can from their surroundings. Engbersen [1990: Chapter 5] described a situation in Het Nieuwe Westen, a neighborhood in Rotterdam, where the long-term unemployed used a strategy of this kind. The social structure was characterized by anomie, according to Engbersen, and a high level of pluriformity and heterogeneity. There were numerous stabbings and burglaries, widespread vandalism and certain spots were known as "no go areas". By having an unlisted telephone number and removing their nameplate from the door, people made themselves as inaccessible as possible. "In order to cope with the tense living situation, the residents develop, in Goffman's terms, new social backstages. At the Rotterdam location, there are streets where hardly anyone has a nameplate on the front door. Many of the residents do not want to be recognizable or approachable. Having an unlisted telephone number and not putting up or removing a nameplate are strategies for maintaining "relational privacy" by withdrawing from social relations viewed as threatening or undesirable" [Engbersen 1990: 141, 142].

C. The besieged street

What has been noted above about neighborhood strategies largely holds true here as well, in that these are the strategies people use when they function anonymously in a world of strangers. On the street, avoidance behavior - particularly regarding places where a person could be cornered such as dead end streets, elevators, subway stations or staircases - is also indispensable if one is to keep from getting into trouble. In addition, many people do not go out on the street unless they are armed in some way. Since there is no need to discuss these strategies again here, I shall confine myself to several specific guidelines yielded by victim stories, interviews and in part the literature on the subject.

1. Inconspicuous behavior. One notion many city dwellers can not seem to get out of their head is that inconspicuous behavior is by far the best protection against assailants. According to my informants, this means you mind your own business, keep a straight face and look as if you are on your way to some specific place. This inconspicuous behavior also means you are not wearing any showy jewelry and you have concealed or camouflaged whatever desirable objects you might be carrying. In Goffman's terms, the aim you have in mind is "civil inattention". One of the most commonly heard notions in this connection is "As long as you don't attract any attention, nobody is going to bother you". In her study on the street conduct of urban females, Gardner [1980] referred to "blocking" in the sense that women have

learned to respond to remarks addressed to them in public by acting as if they don't hear anything and don't see anything. As one of Gardne's informants put it, they are "trained in autism". No matter how convincing this might sound as survival strategy, no empirical basis has ever been clearly demonstrated. Behavior that might seem inconspicuous to one person is not necessarily interpreted the same way by someone else and even so the question remains as to what criteria muggers and other assailants base their selection of victims on. It is quite possible that the former are much more interested in whether or not there is a good escape route, what the chance is of witnesses passing by and other features of the general surroundings than in what impression the victim's attitude seems to make (see also: [Merry 1981b: 417]).

2. Cooperation or resistance? What should you do if you are attacked, robbed or raped on the street? Because of the countless feasible responses, this question can easily lead to endless discussions. There are people who say they would rather fight to the death than give in, they won't budge an inch. And there are people who think you would be better off cooperating with your assailant in every way so as not to make matters worse. In practice, victims of violence often feel completely helpless and are temporarily stripped of their autonomy and integrity, at least momentarily. Under these circumstances, they have little choice but to cooperate with the assailant, despite what they might have preferred and despite the fact that it often leads to self-blaming afterwards. Gardner [1980] noted a strategy that women sometimes try: they attempt to change the whole tone of the situation, for example by appealing to the chivalry of the potential assailant. Women who pretend to be incompetent or naive appeal to men's traditional willingness to help and can thus transform a menacing situation into one of friendly cooperation. It is clear that this kind of strategy can only work under certain circumstances. A mugging is generally over before the victim has even gotten a glance at the perpetrator, making a choice between cooperation or resistance totally irrelevant.

Conclusion

Sociological research on victims' experiences in terms of strategies mainly serves a "revealing" function. It seems that potential crime victims are not just pathetic and powerless but have developed a sizable behavior repertoire to stand on their own against urban danger. In many instances, this repertoire is of a defensive nature, though there are cases where it is relatively militant and assertive. It is essential to scrutinize these strategies with far greater precision than has hitherto been exercised and to examine how they are related to the features and

circumstances of various population categories. Are defensive strategies indeed typical of elderly people and women, as has often been suggested? Is it true that younger people and men are more apt to develop offensive strategies?

Another question pertains to the effectiveness of various strategies. Not solely in the sense of solving individual problems in a satisfactory fashion but also in the sense of serving the purpose they were designed for. If you install certain kinds of locks, are you adequately protected in your home? If you always take along mugger money, are you adequately protected on the street? Are exercises in "autism" enough to protect you from rapists or do you just provoke them more? This question is closely related to yet another one: What are the juridical consequences of some offensive strategies? Are you in for trouble when you strike back at burglars or assailants? Just recently (spring 1992) an Amsterdam shopkeeper managed to ward off two armed men who tried to rob his store. Although the shopkeeper was wounded, he managed to shoot one of the robbers. To the outrage of many people, the shopkeeper was taken into custody and will be punished for his actions. How "careful" should you act in defending yourself? Not many people are aware of these implications and nobody seems to know which actions are legally feasible and which actions are not.

The answers to these questions could shed light on how direct the link is between fears and feelings of living in an unsafe world and the actual dimensions and intensity of crime itself. As crime can be viewed as a social drama with a cast of characters including the perpetrators, the victims, the spectators, the courts and social workers and other parties such as the police, perhaps we should take into consideration the fact that the violent crime drama is of completely different dimensions and consequences to the crime against property drama. This applies to the emotions experienced by all the parties involved and presumably to the kind of people the perpetrator and the victim are as well. If we are to address this issue there will have to be a considerable improvement in the quality of the data at our disposal. Victim data are often covered by a thick layer of emotions and more general crime data have often been bureaucratically processed for purposes of simplification and standardization.

Since any number of offenses are chiefly prevalent in cities, research into their effects can also provide insight into urban "etiquette" and the nature of the urban living climate or the climate of specific neighborhoods or districts. Many urban sociologists have expressed concern about the fact that ever since city dwellers have withdrawn "en masse" within the four walls of their homes to explore, develop and enhance their own personal lives, there no longer seems to be a proper balance between public and private life [Brunt 1989c]. Some of them feel this process of

privatization has cleared the way for mushrooming criminality whereas others feel it has been the other way round. A historical sociological survey of the changes affecting urban behavior might shed some light on this "what came first, the chicken or the egg" question.

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