

PREFACE

During the course of the research and writing process, it struck me that this project is actually about me. It is about all those people living in Western societies, born in wealth and security, and who wish to do something good for the poor and disadvantaged. It is about all of those who sincerely believe that it is possible to reshape and rebuild societal structures of inequality and make a better world by starting with themselves. Above all, it is about unintended and unforeseen consequences of “doing good”; it is about idealistic people who, despite their good intentions, sometimes establish the opposite of what they have aimed for. In sum, that’s me.

As readers will find, the unintended consequences and—at times—opposite outcomes of the community restaurant management’s attempts to build an inclusive local community became quite clear during my research. I want to emphasize here that the social work that was performed at the community restaurant under scrutiny meets an outstanding professional level. Moreover, the struggles of the management I present here are not unique to this specific organization; they represent the daily reality of many social organizations working in socially segregated urban areas. This book, therefore, does not necessarily claim that the restaurant management could have avoided these opposite outcomes and unintended consequences. In fact, it argues quite the opposite: It shows how—in the very act of community building itself—a mechanism of exclusion is called into being and becomes an inherent part of the

community building practice. It is this general mechanism, embedded in community work, that I want to highlight, rather than present any presumed “failures” of the restaurant management in Amsterdam. This book aims to shed light on and analyze in depth the paradoxes that are embedded in community building when it is performed as a top-down social intervention in working class neighborhoods.

My gratitude goes to my respondents and, especially, the restaurant manager. This book would not have been possible without their generosity and willingness to include me in their midst. I would like to thank Prof. Jan Willem Duyvendak (University of Amsterdam) for his bright mind, critical eye, and valuable comments on earlier drafts of this book, Oskar Verkaaik (University of Amsterdam) for his wonderful theoretical input, and Christian Broer (University of Amsterdam) for his trust and support. I am very grateful for the thoughtful, detailed comments and everlasting support of my sister, Esmé Wekker, and the language editing of Gail Zuckerwise and Bel Parnell-Berry (ProofNow). Furthermore, I would like to thank five people who have deeply inspired, guided, and influenced me since I started studying sociology: Bart van Heerikhuizen, Fatiha el-Hajjari, Lea Klarenbeek, Robbie Voss, and Ilios Willemars. It is because of them that I lost my heart to sociology and academia. Finally, my special gratitude goes to my beloved husband Rogier in ’t Hout and my wonderful children Rosa and Minne, for their everlasting support, for their sweetness, and for making me so happy.

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Top-down Community Building and the Politics of
Inclusion

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2017, VII, 93 p. 2 illus., 1 illus. in color., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-53963-8