

# **The Making of the Banlieue**

**An Ethnography of Space, Identity and Violence**

The Making of the Banlieue - An Ethnography of Space, Identity and Violence

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# The Making of the Banlieue

An Ethnography of Space, Identity and Violence

*La construction de la banlieue. Une ethnographie de l'espace, de l'identité et de la violence.  
(avec un résumé en français)*

*De constructie van de banlieue. Een etnografie van ruimte, identiteit en geweld.  
(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)*

Proefschrift

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**Doctorat**  
**Sociologie / Histoire Internationale et Politique & Conflit**

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THE MAKING OF THE BANLIEUE  
An Ethnography of Space, Identity and Violence

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# Contents

<b>Acknowledgments</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>13</b>
The French case: a European exception?	15
Reified images of the banlieue and its young inhabitants	20
Beyond the dichotomy of ‘outside clichés versus inside reality’	22
A journey from Paris to the <i>cité</i> , a dialogue between theory and empirical data	24
<b>Chapter 1</b>	
<b>The External Making of the Suburban Crisis: State Frames and Practices of Governance from the 1950s to the Present</b>	
<b><i>A Journey through the Decades Seen from Paris City Centre</i></b>	<b>29</b>
1.1 Preparing the analysis: frames, practices and violence	31
Governmentality: frames and practices of governance	31
Violent events as turning points of founding phases	33
1.2 The changing governing frames and practices in four phases	36
Phase 1: 1950-70s from newly constructed sunny apartments to segregated stressed inhabitants	37
Phase 2: 1981 <i>rodéos</i> in Les Minguettes	41
Phase 3: 1990 Vaulx-en-Velin/Mas du Taureau	43
Phase 4: 2005 Clichy-sous-Bois and beyond	49
Conclusion	58

<b>Chapter 2</b>	
<b>Ethnographic Research: Discovery of the ‘Field’</b>	
<b><i>Walking from the RER Station into the Heart of Cité 4000sud</i></b>	<b>61</b>
2.1 Exploring ethnography	65
Discovery of the ‘field’	66
2.2 Doing ethnography	70
Data collection: participant observation, interviews, neighbourhood mapping	73
2.3 Trust and tensions	77
The ‘zoo’: observing and the observee	77
Obstacles and golden rules?	81
A fly on the wall?	85
Conclusion	86
<b>Chapter 3</b>	
<b>The Internal Place-Making Process</b>	
<b><i>At the Bottom of the Balzac Building</i></b>	<b>89</b>
3.1 French ghettos?	92
“A sociological absurdity”	93
“A sociological reality”	94
From a fixed definition of the ghetto to a liquid process of place-making	95
3.2 The <i>Balzac</i> drama: a multi-actor struggle about space	99
3.3 The internal place-making process: routines in everyday life	104
Routines of naming and narratives	107
Routines of ‘trainer’	112
Routines of surveillance	114
Conclusion	116
<b>Chapter 4</b>	
<b>Us and Them: Social Identification Strategies and Dynamics</b>	
<b><i>In Front of the Budget DIA-supermarket</i></b>	<b>119</b>
4.1 Identities: definitions and tools	121
4.2 Studying ‘jeunes des banlieues/cités’	125

4.3 Three sets of social identification strategies	129
Dissociating strategies – Positional moves	131
Transforming strategies – Blurring, adding and transvaluing	133
Associating strategies – Inscribing victimhood and street life	139
Navigating strategies	145
Conclusion	149
<b>Chapter 5</b>	
<b>Manifestations and Interpretations of Violence</b>	
<b><i>Burning Cars and Dealing Drugs behind Le Mail</i></b>	<b>151</b>
5.1 Violence: towards a better grip on a slippery concept	153
5.2 The manifestation and interpretation of violence	158
5.2.1. The manifestation of violence	158
Repertoire 1: Audience-oriented violence	160
Repertoire 2: Backstage-oriented violence	166
5.2.2. The interpretation of violence	169
5.3 The effectiveness of violence: the presence of absence	175
Conclusion	183
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>185</b>
<b>Annex 1: List of in-depth interviews</b>	<b>219</b>
<b>Nederlandse Samenvatting</b>	<b>221</b>
<b>Résumé en français</b>	<b>225</b>
<b>Curriculum Vitae</b>	<b>229</b>



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# Introduction

*“After a certain length of time has passed, things harden. Like cement in a bucket.  
And we can’t go back any more.  
What you want to say is that the cement that makes you up has set,  
so the you you are now can’t be anyone else’.  
I guess that’s what I mean’, I said uncertainly.”*

Haruki Murakami, *South of the Border West of the Sun* (1999: 13)

This book tells the story of 4000*sud*, a French suburban neighbourhood north of Paris. It is about the everyday lives of its inhabitants Jean, Marie, Sofyan, Abdel, Duna, Idriss, Fadilah and many others: stories about inequality, unemployment, poverty, discrimination, injustice and violence; stories about neighbourhood pride, solidarity, and compassion but also neighbourhood aversions, antagonisms and suffocation. Through these stories, this book studies and disaggregates what is widely perceived as one of the most urgent and recurrent problems in contemporary French society: ‘*La crise des banlieues*’ – ‘The Crisis of the Suburbs’.

The French *banlieues* became especially world-(in)famous for a 2005 episode of violence that erupted in the north Parisian suburb Clichy-sous-Bois after the death of two teenagers who were electrocuted in a power substation where they were hiding from the police. The violence lasted for 21 days, included around 300 suburban neighbourhoods across all of France, and left about 10,000 charred vehicles and 300 burnt-out public and private buildings (Rivayrand, 2006: 56). Especially affected were the so-called *Zones Urbaines Sensibles* (ZUS), neighbourhoods known for their above-average number of poor, unemployed and migrant inhabitants<sup>1</sup>.

The 2005 episode of violence was not the starting point or the final round of the suburban crisis. Rather, it was just another, albeit particularly illustrative, chapter in an enduring story of French suburban unrest. Violent events had already occurred in the *banlieues* in the 1970s (see e.g., Kokoreff & Lapeyronnie, 2013; Dikeç, 2007; Bachmann and Le Guennec, 1996) and after 2005 various incidents of suburban violence were to erupt again<sup>2</sup>.

Throughout the years, the violence came in different forms, ranging from so-called *rodéos* (car races) and collective car burnings, to clashes between young people and police, to intergroup fights and territory conflicts between drug dealers. Some of these episodes were long-lasting, widespread and intense, causing extensive damage; others were less violent, remained limited to one or a couple of neighbourhoods, and extinguished within hours or a few days.

Over the past decades, the 4000*sud* neighbourhood was the site of many of these violent eruptions. Only a few kilometers away from 4000*sud* lies Paris city centre, with the Eiffel tower, the luxurious Champs-Élysées, the carefully laid out parks and their impeccable lawns, with the French national motto ‘*Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*’ (Liberty, Equality, Brotherhood) carefully carved out in the facades of many impressive state buildings. On the walls of the high-rise apartment buildings in 4000*sud*, however, a very different slogan is inscribed in graffiti: ‘*Nique la France, Nique la Police*’ (Fuck France, Fuck the Police). These two worlds are physically so close but psychically, as it seems, so far apart. It is a contrast that calls out to be examined.

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<sup>1</sup> For an analysis of the 2005 events, see for example: Kokoreff, 2008; Slooter, 2007; Lagrange & Oberti, 2006; Roché, 2006; Mauger, 2006; Mucchielli & Le Goaziou, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> The episodes in November 2007 (Villiers-le-Bel), July 2009 (Firminy), July 2010 (Grenoble) and July 2013 (Trappes) are among the ones that received the most political and media attention.

Using 4000*sud* as an emblematic case-study, this book ethnographically explores the *making* of the suburban crisis, viewed both from the outside perspective of the state and from within through interpretations, meanings and practices of 4000*sud*'s inhabitants, especially the young. My aim is not so much to define what the *banlieue* is or who its young residents are, but to understand the process of becoming: the constitution, transformation and contestation of these places, the dialectics between the categorizations and identifications of its young inhabitants, and the role that violence plays in these processes. The book can be read as a journey in time and space: a journey through the decades, and a journey from the city centre of Paris to the heart of the suburbs. Borrowing a phrase from sociologist William Foote Whyte (1981 [1943]: 323), it aims to be “a moving picture instead of a still photograph”. This introduction is intended to serve as a preparation for that journey.

### The French case: A European exception?

From a broad West-European perspective, the French unrest of the past decades is by no means exceptional, as illustrated by recent incidents of (sub)urban violence in ‘migrant neighbourhoods’ in, for example, Amsterdam (2007), Copenhagen (2008), London (2011) and Stockholm (2013). Although the scale of these violent episodes differs, the images of burning cars and fierce clashes between young people and police are rather similar. Also, more mundane forms of ‘disruptive’ youth practices are on the daily news across Europe. It therefore seems possible to speak of a broad, structural development of violence rather than merely of one-off incidents in single countries.

Moreover, the media and political debates in the aftermath of these violent episodes resemble one another: cacophonies of expert voices all trying to explain why youngsters in France, the Netherlands, Denmark, the UK, or Sweden resort to violence. Among the most frequent explanations are social exclusion, physical isolation, poverty, unemployment, discrimination, (neo)colonialism, racism, the failure of integration (models), cultural, ethnic and religious differences, (radical) Islam, and pure criminality. In short, in the struggle to identify causes, the stress is on the urban, social, cultural, or criminal roots of violence.

Despite similarities in both the manifestations of this European violence and the subsequent contestation about its root causes, I will argue that the French case can also stand out as an exception<sup>3</sup>. In comparison to other European countries, the dominant French public and political narratives label these acts of violence much less openly in *ethnic* and much more explicit in *spatial* terms. This tendency can be illustrated by a brief look at two more or less similar acts of violence in Western Europe, one in the Netherlands, the other in France, about which the dominant narratives projected onto the images differ considerably.

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<sup>3</sup> Simply taking the French case as representative for the rest of Western Europe, such as Wacquant, for example, proposes in his book ‘Urban Outcasts’ (2008) is therefore problematic.

*Sunday afternoon, mid-October 2007*  
*Amsterdam, the Netherlands*

Bilal, a 22-year-old man, enters a police building at the August Allebéplein in the western part of Amsterdam. He jumps over the front desk and stabs a female police officer. A colleague, who tries to protect her, is stabbed in the neck and shoulder. The female police officer shoots Bilal, who dies shortly afterwards. The police officers are hospitalized but survive. The event leads to a tense atmosphere in the city, with cars burning in Amsterdam during the weeks that follow.

The death of Bilal and the subsequent car burnings are prominently covered in the Dutch media and in political debate. In these discussions, Bilal's ethnic and religious identity is emphasized. He is Moroccan, or at least Dutch-Moroccan. He is Muslim. Government representatives claim that Bilal had links with the so-called *Hofstadgroep*, an Islamist network based in Amsterdam and The Hague. However, relatives of Bilal have a different explanation. They send out a statement<sup>4</sup> stressing that Bilal suffered from psychological disorders, voices in his head and suicidal tendencies. Was this the result of a 'crazy' young man? An act of Islamist terrorism? Or another illustration of 'typical Moroccan youth behaviour'? These are the central questions that journalists and politicians pose.

In search of accountability for Bilal's death, rumours start to spread in this Amsterdam neighbourhood that Bilal had made his way to the police office simply to report impolite treatment, and some say he was killed intentionally by the police. The local and national governments try to force back such conspiracy theories and appeal for calm, but to little avail. On television, the Amsterdam chief of police warns about 'Parisian-style fuss'. The Minister of Interior Affairs at the time, Guusje ter Horst, quickly discounts such a scenario and declares that "the scale is not in proportion to what happens in Paris"<sup>5</sup>.

*Sunday afternoon, the end of November 2007*  
*Villiers-le-Bel, France*

Six weeks later and about 500 kilometers south of Amsterdam, 15-year-old Mohsin and 16-year-old Laramy drive on a small motorbike through Villiers-le-Bel, a suburb north of Paris. They get into an accident with a police car and are killed in the crash. As in the Netherlands weeks earlier, the media, politicians and experts dive into the event. Also as in Amsterdam, in Villiers-le-Bel different readings of the 'accident' arise and rumours spread both

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<sup>4</sup> See for the full text: <http://www.depers.nl/UserFiles/File/bilal.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Both police chief Welten and Minister Ter Horst referred to the 2005 episodes of violence in France. See for example: Dutch news paper *De Volkskrant* (18 October 2007): "*Ter Horst verwacht geen Parijse toestanden*".

locally and nationally. Family members and friends of the boys state that the police were driving too fast and some say they deliberately ran into the boys with the intent to hurt them. Conversely, the police claim that they did not notice the boys. Furthermore, they state that Mohsin and Laramy were driving too fast, without protective headgear, and that they failed to give way to the police car at the crossing of the accident. The same night car burnings and fierce clashes start. Police and firemen are attacked and shot at. Violence spreads to a number of other neighbourhoods across the country, but extinguish within a few days.

Nicolas Sarkozy, president of the French Republic at the time, states a couple of days later, at a meeting with 2000 police officers, that the unrest is not the result of a ‘social crisis’ but of the ‘*voyoucratie*’ (hoodlumocracy) in the *banlieues* (Moran, 2012: 43-44). In other words, violence is not the result of social problems, but of banditry and the power of the hooligans/street kids in the *banlieues*.



Figure 1: Burning car in the Netherlands, *Marokkanenprobleem?*



Figure 2: Burning car in France, *La crise des banlieues?*

The Dutch and French media pictures of flaming cars are almost identical (see Figures 1 and 2)<sup>6</sup>. However, the dominant subtitles differ in the political and public debates attached to these pictures. Whereas Bilal’s Moroccan origin is stressed in the Netherlands, the *banlieue* where Mohsin and Laramy lived is accentuated in France. The above two vignettes are not selected randomly, but are emblematic for broader framing tendencies in the two countries. The Dutch debate focuses more explicitly on particular *ethnic (or religious) identity groups* that resort to violence, whereas the French focuses predominantly on the *place* where violence occurs, with those who turn to this type of violence in France first and foremost categorized as ‘*banlieusards*’ or ‘*jeunes des banlieues*’ (youngsters from the *banlieue*). The dominant narratives thus promote different boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’, boundaries

<sup>6</sup> Source Figure 1: <http://weblogs.nrc.nl/discussie/2007/>  
Source Figure 2: AP

that include and exclude, either along ethnic lines or along the borders of the city (Slooter, 2014; 2011).

Of course, the above distinction is neither absolute nor fixed. Instead, it should be seen as a tendency that changes over time. I do not claim that episodes of violence in the Netherlands<sup>7</sup> or elsewhere in Europe are not discussed in relation to particular (sub)urban neighbourhoods. Neither do I claim that in France ethnicity and religion are absent in the debate. Violence is linked in France, too, to migrants, ‘Arabs’ and ‘blacks’ or ‘Muslims’, sometimes implicitly, at other moments more explicitly. Right wing political parties, such as Marine Le Pen’s *Front National*, especially make such explicit references to migrants. Moreover, the religious dimension reappeared quite prominently in the public and political debate in the aftermath of the shooting of the editors of the satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* and the related fatal taking of hostages in a Jewish supermarket in January 2015<sup>8</sup>. Anthropologist Didier Fassin (2015: 6) situates these events in a more enduring development of an anti-Muslim climate and claims that ‘stigmatizing Muslims and blaming Islam has become common practice among intellectuals and politicians’ in recent years. Fassin illustrates his point by referring to the publication of Michel Houellebecq’s novel *Soumission* (2015) and Eric Zemmour’s essay *Le suicide français* (2014). Both books contain Islamophobic discourses and became bestsellers in France.

Nonetheless, I will argue that there is a general tendency in which violent or disturbing acts, such as car burnings and clashes between young people and police, are captured in different dominant narratives in France and in the Netherlands. The common titles of the debates strikingly give it away: the Dutch focus on a contested ‘*Marokkanenprobleem*’ (the problem of the Moroccans)<sup>9</sup>, while the French recurrently discuss ‘*La crise des banlieues*’ (the crisis of the suburbs).

The French emphasis on space, rather than on communities (see also Dikeç, 2007), can be partly explained by the French ‘universalist’ (or ‘republican’) tradition, which is often distinguished from British or Dutch multiculturalism. Universalism and multiculturalism prescribe opposing strategies for politically and institutionally addressing differences in society. The French universalist tradition imagines the Republic ideally as ‘one and indivisible’ and emphasizes individual citizenship. Ethnic and religious classifications are thereby generally avoided out of fear of the

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<sup>7</sup> In the Netherlands, some areas in the bigger cities, such as Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht, are quite prominently represented in the media and political debate as unruly, problematic neighbourhoods. Moreover, the Dutch government has developed and implemented policies that pay special attention and give financial support to particular neighbourhoods, such as the so-called ‘*Vogelaarmijken*’, ‘*Pracht*’ or ‘*Krachtwijken*’.

<sup>8</sup> Also other events, such as the shootings of French soldiers and Jewish civilians by Mohamed Merah in 2012 in Toulouse and Montauban, and the beheading, allegedly inspired by Daesh, close to Lyon in June 2015, contribute to the centrality of religion in the French debate.

<sup>9</sup> See Bovenkerk (2014) for a recent comparative study that investigates the roots of the high crime rates amongst Moroccan youth in the Netherlands, while other European countries do not, or only to a lesser extent, seem to experience such a ‘criminality problem’ with second and third generation Moroccan migrants.

creation of independent communities and the subsequent disintegration of society. Universalism, in its purest form, is in favour of a strong and strict adherence to the core Republican values of *égalité* and *laïcité*<sup>10</sup> (see e.g., Jennings, 2000). The former proposes to treat each individual citizen (and not groups of citizens) as equal, while the latter turns religion into an exclusively private affair in order to keep the public domain entirely secular, resulting in a strict separation of state and church. Both pillars of French universalism prevent the discursive and institutionalized recognition (and therefore also the blaming) of ethnic or religious communities. Discussions of ethnic statistics, for example, touch a tender spot in France, as these contradict the core of the universalist ideals.

In contrast, multiculturalism, more prominent in the Netherlands and Great Britain (see e.g., Jennings, 2000; Favell, 1998; Hargreaves, 1995), acknowledges that national society is composed of several communities and implements policies to deal with and actively support these social and/or cultural variations.

In the past decade, multiculturalism has been severely critiqued and even declared ‘dead’ by a number of political leaders in Europe. Over the same period, universalism has been a continuing topic of debate and critically scrutinized in France. The public, political and intellectual discussions in France about the renewal and/or ‘multiculturalisation’ of republicanism are ongoing and policies such as the implementation of ethnic statistics and positive discrimination (affirmative action) are recurrently discussed. Terms such as ‘visible minorities’ and ‘social diversity’ are nowadays used more often in France, whereas until the recent past these notions were nearly taboo. Nevertheless, the fear of ‘communitarianism’ and the consequent disintegration of society, partly fed by a regionally divided France in the past (Chambon, 2004), is still present today. The core values of *égalité* and *laïcité* may be constantly debated and redefined, but are still of key importance and can be seen, I will argue, as protection mechanisms that avoid or at least temper a debate on violence in ethnic or religious terms. Seen from that context, the labels ‘*banlieue*’ and ‘*jeunes des banlieues*’ are politically functional and can (at first sight) be used and applied ‘safely’ as they do not seem to hurt the integrity of Republican ideals (Dikeç, 2007: 124). Paradoxically, however, one could argue that the spatial framing of violence has in the end contributed to create exactly what it tried to overcome: spatial and social divisions in society. Over the past decades the *banlieues* and the ‘youngsters from the *banlieue*’ have become reified places and identity categories.

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<sup>10</sup> *Égalité* is part of the national motto “*Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*” (Liberty, Equality, Brotherhood) inherited from the French Revolution and mentioned in the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen. *Laïcité* is introduced after the 1905 law on the separation of church and state.

## Reified images of the *banlieue* and its young inhabitants

Whereas the term *banlieue*, often translated as suburb, refers in the more literal sense to all areas that surround the centre of a city, the everyday understanding of the *banlieue* is much more delineated. Over the past decades, the *banlieue* has come to denote those suburban areas that are poor and densely populated; those places that contain many neglected social housing projects and a higher number of migrant and/or Muslim inhabitants. *La crise des banlieues*' is about Clichy-sous-Bois, La Courneuve and Villiers-le-Bel, not about the west Parisian *banlieue* Neuilly-sur-Seine, for example, one of the richest areas in France, nor about Versailles, perhaps technically a *banlieue*, with its glittering royal palace. Paradoxically, as Hargreaves (1996: 610) indicates, "... a place characterised by the media as fundamentally deviant and alien is in fact the urban norm", as a large majority of the population of greater Paris lives in one *banlieue* or another.

Important to note is that the *banlieues* that are generally labeled as 'poor' and 'problematic', and are counted as being part of the suburban crisis, often include neighbourhoods that are economically and socially diverse. The two pictures on the next page (figure 3) show rundown social apartment buildings with rank-growing weeds and well-maintained middle class houses with front gardens. The picture with the apartment block corresponds with the common stereotypical image of the *banlieue*. Yet the two pictures are actually taken in the same *banlieue* (Clichy-sous-Bois in 2007), though in different areas. Certain poor *banlieues*, such as Clichy-sous-Bois and La Courneuve, each have over 30,000 inhabitants and contain several neighbourhoods that differ widely in population, architecture, and average income. Hence, despite the broad label, the suburban crisis, in the end, refers to *some* neighbourhoods in *some* *banlieues*. These neighbourhoods are often more precisely referred to as: *cités*, *quartiers sensibles*, *quartiers pauvres*, *quartiers défavorisés*, *quartiers populaires*, *quartiers prioritaires*<sup>11</sup>.

In a similar vein, the category '*jeunes des banlieues*' refers in everyday understanding not to all young people that live in the French suburbs. Instead, there is a much more dominant detailed and delineated profile: migrant ('noir', 'Arab', 'Muslim'), male, poorly educated, dangerous, coming from a lower socio-economic working class family, and living in a social housing project. A research report of the *Association de la Fondation Étudiante pour la Ville* (AFEV)<sup>12</sup> confirms the general negative attitude towards 'youngsters from the *banlieues*'. The researchers asked a representative group of 1000 French citizens to give their opinion about young people in French society<sup>13</sup>. The results show that 73% are positive about

<sup>11</sup> The 751 districts labeled by the state as *quartiers sensible* and the more recently defined 1200 *quartiers prioritaires* are not located only in suburbs. 'Paris *intra muros*', for example, also includes a number of these neighbourhoods.

<sup>12</sup> See for the full research report: [http://www.afev.org/communication/Observatoire2011/Afev\\_rapport\\_observatoire2011.pdf](http://www.afev.org/communication/Observatoire2011/Afev_rapport_observatoire2011.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> The question posed was: "Would you say, based on their behavior and their actions in society, that your view on youngsters is very positive, mostly positive, mostly negative or very negative?"

youngsters (4% very positive, 69 % mostly positive); 23% are mostly negative, and 4% are very negative. The second question inquired about their view on ‘youngsters from the popular [working class] neighbourhoods’<sup>14</sup>. The percentages of positive attitudes drop drastically: only 39% are still positive (3% very positive, 36% mostly positive), and the numbers rise dramatically at the other side of the spectrum: 51% are mostly negative, 10% are very negative. Some interviewees state that their negative attitude towards youngsters from the popular neighbourhoods is based on the image of them that is diffused by the media (24%), while others (also 24%) justify their opinion by pointing at ‘the fact’ that these youngsters are delinquents, and by referring to violence, drugs, and aggression.



Figure 3: Two different neighbourhoods in banlieue Clichy-sous-Bois<sup>15</sup>.

The questionnaire not only shows that people perceive these particular youngsters more negatively than their peers who live outside the popular neighbourhoods, it also reveals that these youngsters have become a meaningful ‘category’ in French society. A question about ‘suburban youth’ would make less sense in the Dutch context (it would most likely be replaced by a question about attitudes towards ‘Moroccan youth’).

With manifestations of violence on one hand, which can be seen across Western Europe, and a strong focus on the spatial character of the problem on the other hand, the French case could be situated on the crossroad of European and North American academic discussions. Much more than in other European countries, French scholars compare their national ‘problem neighbourhoods’ with the North American ghetto. That ghetto is presented as a gloomy prophesy (e.g.,

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My translation: « *Diriez-vous des jeunes, au travers de leurs comportements, de leurs actions dans la société, que vous en avez une image... très positive/ plutôt positive/ plutôt négative/ très négative ?* »

<sup>14</sup> Exact question: “And more precisely, with regard to youngsters from the working class neighbourhoods, would you say that your image is very positive, mostly positive, mostly negative, very negative?” My translation: « *Et, plus précisément, concernant les jeunes issus de quartiers populaires, diriez-vous que vous en avez une image... très positive/ plutôt positive/ plutôt négative/ très négative ?* »

<sup>15</sup> Pictures are taken by the author in 2007.

Jazouli, 1992; Dubet & Lapeyronnie, 1992) and more recently as an already established reality in French society (e.g., Lapeyronnie, 2008 – see Chapter 3 for a more elaborate discussion on this topic).

### **Beyond the dichotomy of ‘outside clichés versus inside reality’**

The strong association with violence and the widespread negative attitude towards particular neighbourhoods and its (young, racialized, gendered) inhabitants is a classic theme in North American urban sociology literature. In 1943, Chicago School sociologist William Foote Whyte, in his famous book *Street Corner Society*, tells stories of an Italian community in a Boston slum called ‘Cornerville’. In the introduction to the book Whyte states:

One may enter Cornerville already equipped with newspaper information upon some of its racketeers and politicians, but the newspaper presents a very specialized picture. If a racketeer commits murder, that is news. If he proceeds quietly with the daily routines of his business, that is not news. If the politician is indicted for accepting graft, that is news. If he goes about doing the usual personal favors for his constituents, that is not news. The newspaper concentrates upon the crisis – the spectacular event. In a crisis the 'big shot' becomes public property. He is removed from the society in which he functions and is judged by standards different from those of his own group. This may be the most effective way to prosecute the lawbreaker. It is not a good way to understand him. For that purpose, the individual must be put back into his social setting and observed in his daily activities. In order to understand the spectacular event, it is necessary to see it in relation to the everyday pattern of life (Whyte, 1943: xvi).

In other words, Whyte argues that the dominant outside portrayal of Cornerville and its inhabitants is distorted, as it is removed from the community’s internal daily life. From the outside, Cornerville looks disorganized and chaotic, but once inside Whyte discovered a social structure and an organized pattern of life. Outside clichés versus inside reality is a contradiction that is equally pertinent in the French context today.

Political scientist Paul Brass (1996: 1) points to a similar discrepancy between outside frames and local context. He argues that “the power to define and interpret local incidents of violence, to place them in specific contexts based on local knowledge, have been removed from the local societies in which they occur”. He further claims that outside ‘authorities’ provide ready-made contexts and frames in which local events are placed, which in the end may result in “an ‘official’ interpretation that finally becomes universally accepted, but which is often, if not usually, very far removed, often unrecognizable, from the original precipitating events” (ibid: 15).

In order to gain a better understanding of the making of the French suburban crisis and its episodes of violence, which is the main aim of this book, I follow Brass and Whyte in emphasizing the crucial importance of a careful study of the local context. Only then is one able to uncover the complexities that are hidden behind the widely diffused spectacular yet at the same time simplistic pictures of suburban violence. Despite the enormous amount of academic research that has been done on the French *banlieues* over the past decades, true ethnographic accounts based on long-term research stays in the area and providing detailed descriptions of everyday life are relatively rare (for exceptions, see e.g., Boucher, 2010; Lapeyronnie, 2008; Marlière, 2005; Lepoutre, 2001). The broader empirical aim of this book is to disaggregate the often homogenous depictions of violence, the *banlieues*, and its young inhabitants. It thereby aims to contribute to a better understanding of the dynamics of everyday life in a French suburban neighbourhood.

At the same time, the ideas of Brass and Whyte can easily seduce the researcher to focus entirely on the local level (something that I will resist). The ideas of Brass and Whyte may suggest that ‘the true image’ of violence, the ‘true’ representations of the *banlieues*, and the ‘true’ faces of the *banlieusards* can only be found at the local level. This can set the stage for a narrow, unilateral line of thinking and a normative undertaking to debunk clichés about violence, the *banlieues* and its (young) inhabitants. If I were to follow this path, I would be substituting one reality for another, replacing the ‘outside clichés’ by solid *local* definitions of the ‘*banlieue/cité*’ and an ideal type profile of the ‘young residents of the *banlieue*’ based on local knowledge. However, my main analytical aim is not to study what *is*, but to analyze the process of *becoming*; that is, to understand the *making* of the *banlieue* crisis. Rather than dissolving it, I will problematize the discrepancy between the general Frenchman who fills out a questionnaire about young people from the popular neighbourhoods and the kid who actually lives there; between the narratives that are staged in the political arena and the local stories of everyday life.

The underlying core assumption of this book is that ‘*banlieues*’ and ‘young residents of the *banlieue*’ are not given or fixed notions or entities, but are made and remade over time through social interaction. Although the suburban *cités* may be physically, socially and psychologically isolated, they are not islands in an empty ocean but are in constant contact with the outside world. Liebow’s remark in his classic work *Tally’s Corner* about street corner black men in the USA (1969:209) is illuminating here: “This inside world does not appear as a self-contained, self-generating, self-sustaining system or even subsystem with clear boundaries marking it off from the larger world around it. It is in continuous, intimate contact with the larger society”. It is exactly this relation between ‘larger society’ and the ‘inside world’ that will be central to this book.

In the coming chapters, I will elaborate on the relevance of studying this relation and situate my analysis in larger academic debates. For now it is important to emphasize that I will study *how* the *banlieues* and its inhabitants are internally and

externally constituted, contested and transformed, and the role that violence plays therein. I will thereby take into account both the ‘outside clichés’ and the ‘inside reality’ and study how these feed into each other and contribute to the making of the ‘suburban crisis’. It is this deeply contested dialectic between external categorization and internal self-definition that I deem important in understanding this process.

### **A journey from Paris to the *cité*, a dialogue between theory and empirical data**

The journey that will be presented in this book can best be described as a dialogue between the two central fundamentals of social research: theoretical ideas and empirical evidence (Ragin & Amaroso, 2011). It is a dialogue between young people that hang out at the street corner and ideas that are rooted in (urban) sociology, anthropology, human geography and criminology. While most other research on ‘the *banlieues*’ restricts itself predominantly to one discipline, the ideas in this book will deliberately cross disciplinary boundaries. When working from a variety of analytical vocabularies it may be easy to fall into the trap of theoretical cherry-picking or inconsistent eclecticism. I am aware of that risk and I will explain my choices for particular theoretical pathways and address the affinities and tensions underlying the various analytical frames that I combine in this book as I move along. At the same time, a multi-disciplinary theoretical approach enables me to use a comprehensively equipped analytical toolkit to study the making of the suburban crisis from various perspectives on space, identity and violence. It enables me to come in the end to a ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973), grounded in an interpretative epistemological stance and a structurationist ontology (Giddens, 1984).

My empirical data comes from news items, journalistic accounts, policy papers and national statistics, but is gathered most importantly through ethnographic research in *cité 4000sud*, a neighbourhood of the north Parisian *banlieue* La Courneuve (see Chapter 2 for a more elaborate discussion of my methodology). As young people are most central in the public, political and academic debates on the French suburban crisis, data collection (participant observation, in-depth interviewing and neighbourhood mapping<sup>16</sup>) was deliberately and predominantly focused on *4000sud*’s young inhabitants (12-30 years old). The voices presented in this book are not only skewed in terms of age, but also the gender distribution is asymmetric. The observations conducted for this study took mainly place at the street corner, a place that is dominated by young males (see Chapter 3). Their stories and practices have therefore a more prominent place in this book. That does not mean that girls are absent in the coming chapters. I have tried, as much as possible, to include their perceptions and experiences, and will discuss the different

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<sup>16</sup> See Chapter 2 for an explanation of this data collection technique.

positions that boys and girls have in the neighbourhood. Nevertheless, I was less able to thoroughly study and had less access to the inner world of young female residents. This could be considered as one of the major limitations of this study and invites for a further exploration of gender issues in the *cités* (see e.g., Lapeyronnie, 2008). My focus on the street corner also means that this study is less able to directly reflect on developments in other (and most likely related) areas, such as family life and educational settings.

Furthermore, it is important to emphasize that this book is not specifically about *banlieue* La Courneuve or *cité* 4000*sud*. Rather, I use this emblematic case to better understand the processes that are key to the suburban crisis. La Courneuve is one of the 40 *banlieues* that constitute the northeast Parisian 93-district, Seine Saint-Denis. Although the suburban crisis is generally associated with a wide range of areas across the Republic, most prominent in the debate are the suburbs of Paris and in particular those of '*neuf-trois*' ('nine-three', short for the 93-district). The 2005 episode of violence started and was the most intense in this area, resulting in a further deterioration of its reputation. As 4000*sud*, La Courneuve and Seine Saint-Denis play such a prominent role in the academic, political and media debates about suburban violence in France, I consider it an appropriate place for my analysis.

Many other suburban sites in France could also have been selected to study the same processes. That is not to say that these neighbourhoods are simply interchangeable and that they should be treated, described and analyzed as part of a fixed national category. Although *cités* across the country may be confronted with similar stigmas and problems, local reactions and dynamics may vary from neighbourhood to neighbourhood. From 2007-2011, I have visited a number of other *cités*, for example, in *banlieues* Clichy-sous-Bois, Montfermeil, Drancy, Bondy and Aubervilliers in the 93-district; Mantes-la-Jolie, to the west of Paris; Villiers-le-Bel to the far north of Paris; and in other parts of France: Les Minguettes, a suburb of Lyon and three '*sensible*' neighbourhoods in Flers (Normandie). Some I have visited only briefly, others I have observed longer and more closely (see Slooter, 2011; 2007). These visits have made me aware not only of the many similarities among these neighbourhoods but also of local differences. Some neighbourhoods are more divided along ethnic lines, while others have a more homogenous population. Some are highly marked by violent events and have received abundant media and political attention, whereas other neighbourhoods suffer less from 'local traumas'. Some sites are more strongly influenced than others by a flourishing drug trade and related problems. The presence of active local associations varies and large-scale urban renovation projects have started in some neighbourhoods whereas others are still waiting, with degenerated apartment buildings. All these local factors may influence the dynamics of daily life in each specific place.

The current study should therefore be seen neither as an insight solely into 4000*sud*, nor as an ideal-type that can readily, without adjustments, be applied to all other suburban areas in France. Instead, thinking through my 'local' data on a more

abstract level will help to overcome the ‘specificity trap’ and provide a broader insight into the processes under study.

As earlier indicated, the following chapters can be read as a journey in time and space, as a moving picture, as Whyte proposed, instead of a still photograph. O’Reilly (2012: 6) says something similar: To understand social life, a ‘snapshot’ of today will not suffice, it is also a historical process. I will therefore start in the past and (predominantly) from the ‘outside’. In the first chapter I will focus on how the state’s reading of three violent events (in 1981, 1990 and 2005) has contributed to the making of the *banlieues* and the categorizations of its young inhabitants. My reconstruction of the past decades shows how the *banlieues* and its inhabitants became predominantly defined and diagnosed as ‘a problem’ through political representation; and how these discursive representations became institutionalized as they were enacted in policy ‘solutions’.

The second chapter travels to *cité 4000sud*. It is an introduction to the neighbourhood and to some of its inhabitants, but it deals predominantly with my central methodology. I will discuss my understanding of ethnography, explain how I conducted ethnographic research, and reflect on my own role in this research.

In the subsequent chapters I explore, mainly (but not solely) from the ‘inside’, how young residents react to the place-making processes, identity categorizations and readings of violence that are imposed on them from the outside. The theoretical and empirical exploration of Chapter 3 deals with the local making of the neighbourhood. Drawing on theories rooted in cultural and human geography, sociology and anthropology, I will disaggregate the place-making process and demonstrate how space is constantly claimed, appropriated and transformed by various actors. These places are created and maintained from the ‘outside’, but also ‘on the ground’ through discursive and practical routines embedded in everyday life. I will specifically discuss how young residents create, negotiate, change and contest the boundaries, ordering, meaning and organization of their neighbourhood.

Chapter 4 deals with social identity dynamics ‘on the ground’. I use analytical tools that I have derived mainly from sociological and anthropological theories. Rather than ordering young people into ideal type identity (sub)groups, I will focus on the boundary making processes and the collective and individual strategies that young residents of 4000*sud* apply to deal with the negative categorizations that are imposed on them. I will not try to pin down *who they are* by giving them a label, but instead try to lay bare *what they do and say*, including how they cope and negotiate. I argue that young people navigate life through various strategies and that they negotiate their social identities.

Chapter 5 seeks to situate and understand violence in the local setting in which it unfolds. I will attempt to disaggregate the process of violence by seeing it both as ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’. The ‘objective’ manifestation of violence includes two repertoires of violence, each with their respective acts, actors, targets, timing, place, organization and visibility. The second part of this chapter will pay

attention to the ‘subjective’ local meanings and interpretations that are attached to acts of violence.

In contrast to some ethnographic accounts that are merely descriptive, this book tries to find a balance between detailed scenes of everyday life and in-depth theoretical explorations. It attempts to develop and explore in every chapter a dialogue between images and ideas (Ragin & Amoroso, 2011). This book gives voice to little heard stories that take place in the periphery, in the margins of society. It explores diversity by disaggregating categories (*banlieue*, *banlieusards*, suburban violence) that are often portrayed as fixed or uniform. And it attempts to advance theory by identifying patterns, connections and dialectics to arrive at the end at a better understanding of the *making* of the *banlieue* crisis. These ambitions are of course tempered by the many limitations of this book. I am aware that my broad and multi-disciplinary approach leaves many questions unanswered and many theoretical and empirical pathways unexplored. In the coming chapters I will address a number of these shortcomings and make some suggestions for further research (of which the above mentioned underexplored gender issues is just one example). In the end, I can therefore only hope that the explorative journey presented in this book inspires and offers ideas and pathways to build further on.



# Chapter 1

The External Making of the Suburban Crisis: State Frames and Practices of Governance from the 1950s to the Present

*A Journey through the Decades Seen from Paris City Centre*

*“De enige vorm van zingeving die is overgebleven voor de postindustriële middenklasse is te vinden in de pornografie van het geweld. In de angst en in de ontembare fascinatie ervoor vindt deze middenklasse betekenis. De afbeelding en esthetisering van geweld heeft voor deze middenklasse de plaats van het gebed ingenomen. Nu alle goden onttroond zijn en alle autoriteiten ontmaskerd, is er nog maar één werkelijke autoriteit overgebleven, staat er nog maar één god overeind, een democratische god, beschikbaar voor hen die bereid zijn niet terug te deinzen voor de consequenties: het naakte geweld. De bourgeoisie consumeert deze pornografie van het geweld als een gekoelde rosé?”.*

Arnon Grunberg, *Onze Oom* (2008: 554-555)

Alcohol, boredom, youth delinquency, suicides, and various other social psychological problems were ascribed to the north Parisian *banlieue* La Courneuve in 1971. The map, depicted below, was made by the Institute of Planning and Urbanism of the Parisian Region (l'IAURP – *l'Institut d'aménagement et d'urbanisme de la région parisienne*) and purports to reveal the 'pathologies' of a number of suburban neighbourhoods north of Paris.

Forty years later, La Courneuve is the place where Jean, Marie, Sofyan, Abdel, Duna, Idriss, Fadilah and many others live. It is the place where they do their shopping, go to school, where they play Monopoly and soccer. La Courneuve is also the place that is regularly associated with topics such as youth delinquency and boredom. Jean, Marie, Sofyan, Abdel, Duna, Idriss and Fadilah will play important roles in the coming chapters. They can be seen as the main characters of this book. But before travelling to La Courneuve in an attempt to offer insight into their daily lives, I will in this chapter first look from a state-centric perspective to what today is called '*La crise des banlieues*'. When did this 'crisis' start? How did it evolve? And what role does violence play in it?



Figure 1.1: 'Map of pathologies per community' (*Carte des pathologies par communes*) of Institute of Planning and Urbanism of the Parisian Region (l'IAURP). Source picture: Tissot & Poupeau, (2005: 4).

The aim of this chapter is to analyze the genesis and main transitions of the suburban crisis by drawing on a Foucauldian governmentality approach. In order to make a brief reconstruction of the suburban crisis, I will subdivide it into four founding phases, starting with modernist ideals and the physical construction of

social housing neighbourhoods, which eventually leads to the notorious reputation those neighbourhoods have today.

To be able to understand what today is called *La crise des banlieues*, the 1971 map of PIAURP (figure 1.1) provides a starting point for my exploration. The symptoms of *La crise des banlieues* became increasingly visible in the 1970s. The map not only reveals some of the social and psychological problems that were considered pressing back then, but also explicitly connects these problems to particular places, and not to others. It highlights certain boundaries, and not others. The map claims that the places it identifies are different. Pathologic. Exotic. There's something wrong 'over there', compared to a 'normal and healthy here'. The policy maker, journalist, researcher and television viewer may easily zoom in on these pathologic *banlieues* and perceive their boundaries as unproblematic. 'Here' and 'there' are then compared without ever questioning the spatial categorization itself.

The seminal work of anthropologists Gupta & Ferguson (1992: 16) emphasizes the importance of making a shift from a "project of juxtaposing preexisting difference to one of exploring the construction of difference in historical process". In line with this idea, I see the 'pathological communes' or the '*banlieues* in crisis' not as given entities but as social and political constructs. Hence, rather than studying the suburbs as a 'natural' category, I will interrogate the production of difference, the process of inclusion and exclusion that leads to an imagined 'inside' and 'outside'. In a similar vein, I will not simply examine 'youngsters from the *banlieue*', but will explore in this chapter how they become categorized as such. How do they become associated with particular areas? How do they become 'fixed in place'?

In order to answer these questions, I will first take a brief look at two analytical tools, derived from a governmentality approach, to help in approaching the subject matter. Subsequently, I will show how the state's 'reading' of three violent events and its subsequent techniques of governing over the past decades have contributed to the making of the *banlieues* and the categorization of its (young) inhabitants. By doing so, I will argue how these spaces become increasingly defined and diagnosed as problematic places inhabited by criminalized or victimized youngsters.

## 1.1 PREPARING THE ANALYSIS: FRAMES, PRACTICES AND VIOLENCE

### Governmentality: frames and practices of governance

Governmentality or 'the art of government' was coined and reflected on by Michel Foucault in a series of lectures in the late 1970s. As Weidner (2009:407) argues: "the governmentality approach to studying social and political life is perhaps best understood not as a full-blown theory but rather as a certain methodology for

approaching a specific problem-space, namely: how, on the basis of what rationalities and through what kinds of techniques and practices are subjects governed?" The approach studies the *how* of governing or "the conduct of conduct" (Weidner, 2009: 389).

What is important to note is that Foucault shifts our attention from the state as a natural and unified power-holder that simply imposes its will, to its techniques of governing, the "continual definition and redefinition of what is within the competence of the state and what is not" (Foucault, 1991: 103). Rose (2000: 323) elaborates on this point by arguing that "'the state' is neither the only force engaged in the government of conduct nor the hidden hand orchestrating the strategies and techniques of doctors, lawyers, churches, community organizations, pressure groups, campaigning groups, groups of parents, citizens, patients, survivors and all those others seeking to act upon conduct in the light of particular concerns and to shape it to certain ends". Hence, the notion of governmentality should not be seen as limited to the state but provides a broader framework that includes various projects of governing, which range from the global, to the community, to the neighbourhood, to the family and to the self. Indeed, as Kiersey & Weidner (2009:357) explain "... governmentality can refer to *any* programmatic attempt to govern subjects, whether by structuring the field of possibilities for subjects and/or influencing the development of the subject itself". These projects of governing may be isolated from each other, coincide or conflict. Moreover, the techniques of governance should not only be understood as negative, or as entirely driven by repression. Instead, as Ferguson & Gupta (2002: 989) assert, the emphasis should be on its productive dimension.

Authors drawing on the analytical notion of governmentality thus study an assembled variety of projects of knowing and reading the social world, on various scales, and analyze the techniques used to maintain that social world through forms of policing and (self)disciplining. Dikeç (2007: 22-23) highlights the intrinsic interplay between these two key aspects of the governmentality approach, calling it "the mutual constitution of objects of governance and modes of thought – mentality – which then makes specific forms of intervention possible". By drawing on Lemke (2001), Dikeç continues: "The emphasis on the mutual constitution of specific forms of representation and intervention is indicated by the semantic linking of 'governing' and 'mentality'. This implies that governmental practices cannot be considered independently of the formation of the objects and subjects of governance".

What concrete tools to study *La crise des banlieues* can we derive from this approach? First, the governmentality approach focuses on the necessity for any governance project to *know* the population and territories it seeks to govern; it is about the legibility (or readability) and simplification of the social world that it aims to control. Hence, the first tool that I distinguish deals with the 'languages of description' that interpret the social world, and identify categories of persons and spaces that are subjected to governance (see Rose, 2000: 322-323). I will use the related concept of framing, elaborated by Goffman (1974) in the early 1970s, as an

instrument to advance my analysis. As Snow et al. (2007: 387) argue, “the idea of framing problematizes the meaning associated with relevant events, activities, places and actors, suggesting that those meanings are variably contestable and negotiable and thus open to debate and differential interpretation”.

The second tool refers to the ‘technologies of governance’ or the practices that will constitute ‘the conduct of conduct’. These practices are closely related to the frames that categorize and spatialize, that include and exclude. These practices turn “boundaries in the mind into terrains and jurisdictions on the ground” (Apter, 1997:1). Fairclough (2003) would probably call this transition, from framing to ‘enactment’ in governing policies and programmes, the ‘materialization of discourse’. This second tool demonstrates the ways in which interpretations are turned into institutionalized practices.

### Violent events as turning points of founding phases

The next step in the organization of my analysis is to map how this process of ‘framing/representing the problem’ and ‘intervening’ has gone through a series of stages over the past decades, each beginning with what I call an iconic violent event. Of course, others have also studied the development of the suburban crisis (see e.g., Kokoreff & Lapeyronnie, 2013; Bonelli, 2008; Dikeç, 2007; Avenel, 2007; Wieviorka, 1999; Bachmann & Le Guennec, 1996; Jazouli, 1992; Dubet, 1987). At the forefront of this field of study are, in my view, the books of sociologists Michel Kokoreff & Didier Lapeyronnie (2013) and that of human geographer Mustafa Dikeç (2007). I will briefly review the timeframe they have covered in their work and how they subdivided the development of the French suburban crisis into three central stages. Subsequently, I will explain how my analysis differs from theirs.

Kokoreff & Lapeyronnie’s book *Refaire la cité. L’avenir des banlieues* is informed by decades of qualitative research on French suburban issues (see, e.g., Kokoreff, 2008; Lapeyronnie, 2008; Kokoreff, 2003; Dubet & Lapeyronnie, 1992). Their subdivision of the suburban crisis into three developmental phases is primarily based on the changing conditions and atmosphere in the *cités*. They characterize their first phase (mid-1970s-1990) as a period in which traditional forms of social and political organization around workers unions disappeared due to deindustrialization (see also e.g., Wieviorka 1999; Dubet, 1987). Key to this phase is the decomposition of what is often called the *banlieue rouge*, the working class neighbourhoods that were traditionally strongholds of the Communist Party. Kokoreff & Lapeyronnie claim that inhabitants of the suburban neighbourhoods, despite the difficulties that they encountered during this period (ibid: 20)<sup>17</sup>, were

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<sup>17</sup> One of the signs of that optimism and hope was the 1983 March for Equality and Against Racism (*Marche pour l’égalité et contre le racisme*), also known as ‘*La marche des beurs*’. A walk from Marseille to Paris that started off with a small group of people and ended fifty days later in Paris with about 100,000 participants. The walk was organized (partly) as a reaction to a number of racist murders (see Chapter 2 for the example of Toufik Ouannes who was killed in July 1983),

rather optimistic about integration into the larger society and indeed generally had the feeling that they were already part of it. The second phase (1990-2001), according to Kokoreff & Lapeyronnie, was a period in which the relative optimism of politicians and social workers as well as inhabitants of the suburban neighbourhoods was replaced by pessimism and feelings of powerlessness (ibid: 22; see also e.g., Linhart, 1992). During this phase the social organization of the neighbourhood was no longer based on labour structures but rather on two interrelated alternatives: the private sphere and ‘the street’. People increasingly withdrew from the social, political and civic life around them and focused more and more on their private life and living quarters (ibid: 25). Young residents filled the social vacuum by claiming the streets and consolidating a street culture. The neighbourhoods were increasingly perceived as affected by drug trafficking and urban violence (ibid: 27). The third and final phase (2001 – 2013) was marked by a further ‘closure’ of the suburban neighbourhoods into what can be characterized as the ghetto<sup>18</sup>, which is seen by Kokoreff & Lapeyronnie as the product of a political vacuum - the absence of a widespread and acknowledged political representation of the *banlieue*'s inhabitants.

Geographer Mustafa Dikeç organizes his study differently, taking the shift in state policies and the way in which space is conceived (2007: 23) as a marker for his three phases. His subdivision is founded on empirical evidence derived from reports, circulars, laws and decrees, newspaper articles and a number of interviews both with urban policy makers and local associations. In Dikeç's first phase (1981-1989) the French government implemented its first urban policy measures. Especially in the beginning of the decade, locally-based and locally-informed initiatives and policies were encouraged. Although the *banlieues* were linked to problems such as rising unemployment, they were not yet seen as a “threat in and of themselves” (ibid: 65). The second period (1990-1992) was, according to Dikeç, marked by ‘surveillance’. The planning and organization of urban policy was increasingly transferred from the local to the national level and therewith became more bureaucratic and static. During the third period (1993-2006), the *banlieues* were, according to Dikeç, increasingly seen as a problem and urban policies became much more repressive. Whereas the neighbourhoods in the early 1980s were perceived to be ‘at risk’ themselves, Dikeç claims that by the third period they were

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and incidents of police discrimination, and took place in a political context in which the right wing party *Front National* celebrated its first victory in the municipal elections of 1983. The success of the march demonstrated that people living in the suburban neighbourhoods were still able to organize themselves in order to claim equal treatment and to fight against racism (ibid: 21; see also e.g., Dubet & Lapeyronnie, 1992; Jazouli, 1992). A year later, in 1984, the influential SOS-racisme, an anti-discrimination organization, was established.

<sup>18</sup> Whether the label ‘ghetto’ is appropriate here is heavily discussed among sociologists. I will elaborate on the ‘ghetto-debate’ in Chapter 3. The five central symptoms of the present-day suburban neighbourhoods are, according to Kokoreff & Lapeyronnie, “isolation of the population; increased internal violent conflict, and in some areas the presence of large-scale drug trafficking; the broken communication between men and women; the establishment of religion that structures daily life; and the distance and hostility towards institutions” (2013: 29).

mainly seen as a threat to the integrity of the Republic (ibid: 95). In other words, a transition from “neighbourhoods in danger” to “dangerous neighbourhoods” (ibid: 93), leading to a criminalization and repression of certain populations and places, legitimized by an emphasis on the “‘values of the Republic’ and the ‘authority of the state’ allegedly under threat from ‘communitarian’<sup>19</sup> groupings and the formation of ghettos in the *banlieues*” (ibid: 31).

Both Dikeç’s and Kokoreff & Lapeyronnie’s accounts rely, either implicitly or more explicitly, on governmentality approaches. Both stress the importance of political language, vocabulary, interpretations and policy practices in the creation of problematic places and subjects to be governed. Both identify three central stages in the development of the ‘*banlieue*-crisis’, though their analytical lenses and the turning points from one phase to another differ. Whereas Kokoreff & Lapeyronnie’s development stages are primarily based on the changing experiences at the local level (the changing atmosphere in the *cités*), Dikeç’s turning points are based on changing policies at the state level.

I agree with much of the reasoning in both accounts and they overlap to a great extent with the phasing that I will describe below. However, my analysis differs in two respects. First, I propose to start earlier: in the mid-1950s, with the physical construction of the high-rise social housing buildings in the suburban areas and the changing interpretation of these neighbourhoods soon afterwards. As I will elaborate below, well before the mid-1970s and early 1980s (the starting points of Kokoreff & Lapeyronnie and Dikeç), crucial seeds of what later became known as the suburban crisis had been planted.

Secondly, my analysis does not see local changes or state policies as the founding moments for the *banlieue* crisis. Instead, it focuses on three violent events that have become iconic. It is my assertion that violent events, as compressed and highly emotional moments, are frequently the spurs that call for legibility and technologies of governance. Moreover, violent events connect the local with the national, the *banlieue* and the state. Through television screens, newspapers and internet, the violent event that occurs in a suburban area enters the living room of those Frenchmen who have never physically been in these areas. The state then reacts to the spectacle, diagnoses the problem, and enters the suburbs, for example, by mobilizing massive police forces, or by a presidential or ministerial visit to the neighbourhood. The violent event does not necessarily bring the ‘inside’ and the ‘outside’ closer together; in fact, it will probably more often lead to increased polarization. Nonetheless, it relates the two, even if in an antagonistic way.

The above scenario corresponds with the observations of David Apter (1997: 5), who claims that: “Political violence feeds on divisions, makes them into fundamentals and elevates even trivia to the level of loyalties. It polarizes affiliationally and doctrinally. It feeds on intolerance by making race, ethnicity, religion, language, class, doctrine, nationality, etc., decisive in ‘reordering’. It

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<sup>19</sup> By ‘communitarian’ groupings, ethnic or religious group formation is implied.

separates actors and audience, victims and voyeurs, but reunites them again on its own terms”.

As explained in the Introduction, I argue that in the French case, however, those divisions are not in the first place labeled as racial, ethnic, religious, linguistic, class-based, doctrinal or national, but most explicitly as spatial (though not denying significant racial, ethnic, religious and/or class-based undertones). In addition, I suggest that it is not (political) violence in and of itself, but rather interpretations and representations or ‘framing’ of violent events, and consequent policy enactments, that feed on these divisions.

## 1.2 THE CHANGING GOVERNING FRAMES AND PRACTICES IN FOUR PHASES

The above discussion provides an analytical lens through which the crisis of the suburbs can be viewed and studied. As indicated earlier, I will start with the physical construction of the social housing projects in the suburban areas in the 1950s. Each subsequent phase was heralded by an iconic violent event, and will be studied by using the two analytical tools that I have derived from a governmentality approach: (1) ‘reading’ through framing, and (2) policy practices that aim to order, police and discipline. To structure somewhat more the political framing of violent events, I will distinguish between diagnostic and prognostic framing (see Benford & Snow, 2000)<sup>20</sup>. Diagnostic framing identifies the problem and attributes blame. Hence, it questions *why* a social phenomenon occurs and *who* should be held accountable for it. Prognostic framing, in turn, “involves the articulation of a proposed solution to the problem, or at least a plan of attack, and the strategies for carrying out the plan” (ibid: 616). Prognostic framings are thus closely connected to actual policy practices.

I argue that the combination of violent events, their interpretations in diagnostic and prognostic frames, and the subsequent policy practices order and reorder. Together they contribute to the drawing of boundaries between ‘here’ and ‘there’, between ‘us’ and ‘them’. They include and exclude. They produce, intentionally or unintentionally, particular places and subjects that can be governed.

Although, as mentioned above, governmentality approaches often look beyond the state, I will focus here mainly on the dominant political representations and the *how* of governing by the national state. In later chapters, I will study how these representations and techniques of governance affect those that are ‘categorized’ and ‘localized’ and how these are contested and/or replaced by alternative discourses and practices of governance.

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<sup>20</sup> Benford & Snow (2000) in their research about social movements, speak of three core framing tasks: diagnostic, prognostic and motivational framing. However, I will focus only on the first two tasks. Motivational framing “provides a ‘call to arms’” (ibid: 617) and deals with the mobilization of people for collective action, which is less relevant for the case that I discuss here.

Moreover, due to the extensive period that I cover, I will focus on the most important state readings and policy measures, presenting a broad analysis rather than an exhaustive and meticulous empirical one.

### **Phase 1: 1950-70s from newly constructed sunny apartments to segregated stressed inhabitants**

The period after the Second World War in France was marked by a serious and pressing housing shortage, especially in and around the cities. It was caused not only by the damage and destruction of the war but also by demographic changes. The baby boom, combined with flows of repatriation after decolonization and a general move of people from the countryside to the cities, urgently called for a rapid solution to accommodate all the new city-dwellers. The first answer announced itself in the mid-1950s with the construction of so-called *grands ensembles*. These are collections of apartment buildings that either stretch out horizontally in large *barres* or vertically in high-rise *tours*, built rapidly and economically efficiently, using prefabricated standardized materials. Beginning in 1958 and continuing through the mid-1970s, a number of so-called Priority Urbanization Areas (*Zones à Urbaniser par Priorité* or ZUP) were created by the French government, in which entirely new neighbourhoods were built. Whereas France counted 500,000 social housing units in 1946, thirty years later the number had increased to 3 million units; one third of these were part of *grand ensembles* (Fourcaut, 2006: 5).

More than just an acute and practical answer to the housing scarcity, the *grands ensembles* heralded a new era. At least, that was the idea of the architects responsible for their design. Strongly building upon the philosophy of the CIAM-movement<sup>21</sup>, they aimed for a clean break with the often richly decorated 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings in the city centre. In contrast, the new buildings of the *grands ensemble* were simple and straightforward, located in quiet areas far removed from the noisy, dense and hectic city centre (see figure 1.2). A new way of living. The apartments were spacious, neat and affordable for the less affluent. The ambition of the architects is embedded in the term '*ensemble*' (together): living together as a community. The collectivity, rather than the individual, is the focal point (Wassenberg et al., 2006: 9). The massive construction of *barres* and *tours* in France is, as Fourcaut (2006: 9) claims, somewhat different from the approach that Scandinavian countries, the Netherlands and Great Britain, took to solve their housing crises. In those countries, *grands ensembles* are less common and social housing alternated much more with individual houses and low-rise apartment buildings.

In France, the *grands ensembles* were initially received enthusiastically by their socially mixed inhabitants, mainly composed of workers and young families. They were pleased about the unprecedented modern comfort that the apartments

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<sup>21</sup> *Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne*. Movement of Modern Architects, between 1928-1959, with architect Le Corbusier as one of its figureheads.

offered: running water, separate rooms, heating, etc. (e.g., Fourcaut, 2006: 8, Bonelli, 2008: 33). However, soon after the image started to change, with the rosy picture of the *grands ensembles* opened to question. One early example was the short television documentary *40 000 voisins* (1960), which portrays life in Sarcelles, a *banlieue* about fifteen kilometers north of Paris<sup>22</sup> where one of the first large *grands ensembles* arose in 1955 and which is generally considered an archetype for *grands ensembles* in the rest of France. The documentary portrays the project in Sarcelles as an “adventure”, but also notices that the town is a place that is “confined to women and children” during the day, as men go to work elsewhere. The interviewed inhabitants mention the advantages of living in the new *grands ensembles* (spacious apartments) as well as the drawbacks (distance to work, high rents, monotonous architecture that inspires fear). The documentary ends with an image of two children, and a voice-over questioning: “The *grands ensembles*, are they a necessary evil or a new aspect of the joy of life? It is up to these children, if you want, to answer that question in a couple of years”<sup>23</sup>.

More critical voices entered the public, political and academic debate about the *grands ensembles* in the late 1950s and the early 1960s. They predominantly cast doubt on their so-called functional urbanism and questioned the “industrial rationality” behind the newly developed urban areas (Avenel, 2007: 10). Social and psychological problems were beginning to be linked to the highly planned and technocratic architecture of the *grands ensembles*. The housing projects were seen by some as soulless ‘*cité-dortoirs*’ (dormitory neighbourhoods) or ‘*HLM*<sup>24</sup> *couchés*’ (sleeping housing projects), where people live their lives in a standardized *métro-boulot-dodo*<sup>25</sup>-rhythm (Le Goaziou & Rojzman, 2006: 18-19). Emblematic in this sense is the ‘Sarcellite’ illness that owes its name to *banlieue* Sarcelles (see e.g., Vieillard-Baron, 2008; Wassenberg et al, 2006; Fourcaut, 2000); a number of articles in various newspapers described this ‘illness’, reporting about depressed, bored and idle women. Sarcelles was also included in the 1971 PIAURP map (see figure 1.1). The pathologies connected to the neighbourhood were: youth delinquency, loneliness, prostitution, boredom, suicides, tiredness, anxiety and nervous depressions. While some diagnosed these and other symptoms as the ‘illness of the *grands ensembles*’, others denied a causal relation between the psychological problems and the built environment (see for examples Vieillard-Baron, 2008).

<sup>22</sup> See *l’Institut national de l’audiovisuel* (INA): <http://www.ina.fr/video/CAF89007746>

<sup>23</sup> My Translation. Original quote : « *Les grands ensembles sont-ils un mal nécessaire ou un nouvel aspect de plaisir de vivre ? Ce sera, si vous le voulez bien, à ces enfants de répondre dans quelques années* ».

<sup>24</sup> HLM stands for *Habitation à Loyer Modéré*, which are rent-controlled social housing units. The *grands ensembles* are mainly composed of these HLMs.

<sup>25</sup> Translation: Underground/job/beddy-byes



Figure 1.2: A picture of Sarcelles made by *the Ministère de la Construction* in 1959 for the promotion of the new housing projects. The picture shows a serene scene: children, playgrounds, parks, modern apartments and plenty of space. Source: *Textes et images du grand ensemble de Sarcelles 1954-1976* (2007) – 22 *Espaces Verts* © MEDAD/SIC, 1959.



Figure 1.3: The aerial view of Sarcelles around 1960 paints a different picture. It stresses the monotonous architecture, massive size and inhuman character of the *grands ensembles*. Source: *Textes et images du grand ensemble de Sarcelles 1954-1976* – 32 *Vue d'hélicoptère* (2007).

Michèle Huguet's article (1965: 215) also demonstrates how some papers and magazines perceived the modern neighbourhoods at this juncture: weekly magazine *Témoignage Chrétien* spoke in 1961 of: "Grands ensembles, boredom of women"<sup>26</sup>; "Psychiatrists and sociologists denounce the madness of the grands ensembles"<sup>27</sup> wrote popular science magazine *Science & Vie* a couple of years earlier (1959); and the newspaper *Libération* in 1963 referred to Flaubert's famous novel and the empty existence of its main character: "Madame Bovary in the HLM"<sup>28</sup>. Another example is Jean-Luc Godard's movie *Alphaville* (1965), in which the HLM's are renamed 'Hôpitaux de la Longue Maladie' (Hospitals for the long-term disease).

Political measures in the 1970s promised to change both 'stones' and 'people'. In 1973, Olivier Guichard, then Minister of Housing, limited the construction of the *grands ensembles*. In a circular letter<sup>29</sup>, the ministry stated that the homogenous and monotonous architecture and "the loss of a human size" of the *grands ensembles* hampered a good integration in the urban areas (see figure 1.3). The ministry therefore aimed to fight against social segregation and appealed for "renewal and diversity of architecture". In the years that followed, two political developments had a strong impact on the demography of the urban landscape. First, in 1977 the French government facilitated and stimulated home ownership by implementing the so-called Barre Law (*Loi Barre*). Better-off inhabitants of the *grands ensembles* predominantly profited from these newly installed measures, leaving the *cités* that were becoming increasingly impoverished due to their quick and cheap construction process. The departing middle-class was replaced by less advantaged populations (Bonelli, 2008: 36-46; Fourcaut & Vadelorge, 2008: 122; Dikeç, 2007: 38; Avenel, 2007: 25). Secondly, strict immigration regulations under President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing were counterbalanced by family reunion measures for migrants who already lived in France, with many of these reunited families moving to the *cités*.

To summarize, during this first phase the *grands ensembles* were built in many suburban areas across France. The attributed meaning of these projects ranged from a modern and technological tour de force to a boring, monotonous and pathogenic accumulation of concrete. Although there were concerns expressed about the suburban population, and especially about women and children, the *banlieue* and its inhabitants were not yet explicitly and widely defined, or treated as a 'problem'. The dominant linkage between violence and the *banlieue* was not elaborately founded until the early 1980s, after a highly politicized and mediated violent event.

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<sup>26</sup> « Grands ensembles, ennui des femmes »

<sup>27</sup> « Psychiatres et sociologues dénoncent la folie des grandes ensembles »

<sup>28</sup> « Madame Bovary dans les H.L.M »

<sup>29</sup> *Journal Officiel de La République Française*, 5 avril 1973, page 3864. Circulaire du 21 mars 1973. Relative aux formes d'urbanisation dites « grands ensembles » et à la lutte contre la ségrégation social par l'habitat.

## Phase 2: 1981 *rodéos* in Les Minguettes

Summer of 1981. East of Lyon. Charred car wrecks appear on national television. *Cité* La Grappinière in Vaulx-en-Velin, *cité* Olivier-de-Serres in Villeurbanne, and especially *cité* Les Minguettes à Vénissieux are theatres of violence. The burnt cars are the result of so-called *rodéos*, street races with stolen cars, which are subsequently poured over with petrol and set on fire by young inhabitants of the *cités*. There is no direct trigger for these acts of violence. About 250 cars, often large and luxurious vehicles taken from the city centre, are burned in July and August 1981 (Jazouli, 1992: 22). Alongside the burnings, confrontations between young residents and police develop. Although other cities, such as Marseilles and Avignon, also see similar events, Les Minguettes becomes the icon of what is soon labeled ‘the hot summer of 1981’.

The images of these events may have given television viewers the impression that they were witnessing a new phenomenon, but similar violent confrontations had already happened in the 1970s (Fourcaut & Vadelorge, 2008; Dikeç, 2007; Fourcaut, 2006: 11; Bachmann & Le Guennec, 2002 [1996]: 338-339). The events in Les Minguettes and elsewhere, Avenel (2007: 12) argues, therefore did not constitute a break from the past but rather were part of a continuity that had merely become more visible.

This increased visibility should be understood in the context of at least two other events that preceded the ‘hot summer of 1981’. First, many authors point to the Brixton riots in the UK that occurred just a couple of months earlier in April 1981, which stirred up fears in France about similar scenarios or about those from North American ghettos (Fourcaut & Vadelorge, 2008: 120; Dikeç, 2007; Bachmann & Le Guennec, 2002 [1996]: 343-349; Jazouli, 1992: 17). A second contextual factor was the election of François Mitterand as president of the Republic in May 1981, with the new government appearing to break away from the previous one on issues relating to migrants. Whereas under President Giscard d’Estaing immigration was limited and a return to home countries (especially of North Africans) was stimulated, the new leftwing government campaigned for more friendly immigration policies. Seen from that context, the burned cars in Les Minguettes, a *cité* largely inhabited by migrants, provided the perfect ingredients for media-political exploitation.

The state’s diagnostic and prognostic framing of the events in Les Minguettes predominantly portrayed violence as the result of boredom, unemployment and poverty, and the deplorable physical state of the housing projects. In the enactments of these frames, three main governmental approaches to prevent, contain and control violence can be distinguished. First, to prevent a

reoccurrence of the ‘Minguettes *rodéos*’, so-called *opérations anti-été chaud*<sup>30</sup> (anti-hot summer operations) were organized in 1982 in 11 departments (see e.g., Lapeyronnie, 2003). These ‘operations’ consisted basically of leisure activities, such as sport events, short holidays in France or abroad, cultural daytrips etc. All were aimed at maintaining order in the *cités* during the summer months. Young residents of the neighbourhood were recruited as *animateurs* to serve a bridging function between the inhabitants of the *cités* and the local state institutions. The first operation was generally seen as a success and, in the decades that followed, the programme was further developed and extended to other departments.

Secondly, at the end of 1981 Prime Minister Mauroy created the National Commission for the Social Development of Neighbourhoods (CNDSQ). A number of influential reports<sup>31</sup> made an analysis of the main problems in the *banlieues*, and gave directions for future urban policy. The reports emphasized the importance of seeing the *banlieues* as popular neighbourhoods that are part of the larger city, rather than as isolated problem areas inhabited by migrants. Furthermore, they proposed a more preventive and people-oriented approach to the neighbourhoods, to be driven and carried out by local actors. Although physical improvements were deemed necessary, the reports argued that urban policy should primarily deal with structural problems such as unemployment and poverty (see Dikeç, 2007). In contrast to the more common centralized, top-down approach, the new policy initially had a much more decentralized and experimental character. The policies were first implemented in sixteen neighbourhoods in 1982, with another seven added a year later.

Third, a mission called *Banlieues 89* was initiated under the presidency of Mitterrand in 1983. Led by two architects, Roland Castro and Michel Cantal Dupart, the mission was mainly concerned with rehabilitation of the social housing projects. This was an image-oriented focus on buildings and stones, as opposed to a less visible people-oriented approach that was suggested by the research reports years before (Dikeç, 2007: 56).

According to Dikeç (2007), greater attention was paid to urban issues in the late 1980s and early 1990s under Mitterrand’s second term. During that period, urban policy was increasingly removed from the municipal level and became increasingly institutionalized at the state level. Dikeç (ibid: 62) points to the influential 1988 Levy report that proposed to create national objective criteria for ‘urban policy neighbourhoods’ (rather than local and subjective) and to focus social development programmes on the peripheral *banlieues* (rather than on more general urban areas). “What started as an innovative and political spatial approach in the early 1980s became a relatively stable spatial order for intervention – more

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<sup>30</sup> Later renamed as *Opération Prévention Été* (Operation Summer Prevention) and *Opérations Ville Vie Vacances* (Operation City, Life, Holidays) and covers now 94 departments.

<sup>31</sup> The Dubedout Report in 1983 « *Ensemble, refaire la ville* »; the Schwartz Report in 1981 « *L’Insertion professionnelle et sociale des jeunes* »; and the Bonnemaison Report in 1982 « *Face à la délinquance, prévention, répression, solidarité* ». See Dikeç (2007: 48-56) for a more extensive discussion on these founding reports on urban policy in France.

procedural and bureaucratic – in the early 1990s” (Dikeç, 2007: 71). The number of ‘urban policy neighbourhoods’ (meaning those neighbourhoods where the new urban policies were specifically applied) rose from 23 in the early 1980s to 400 in 1993.

### Phase 3: 1990 Vaulx-en-Velin/Mas du Taureau

6 October 1990, almost a decade after the *rodéos* in Les Minguettes, Thomas Claudio, 21 years old, dies in a motorbike accident in neighbourhood Mas du Taureau, part of the *banlieue* Vaulx-en-Velin, northeast of Lyon. Thomas is sitting behind his 20-year-old friend, Laurent Asseville, when he falls off the motorbike and fatally hits his head against the kerbstone. Afterwards, Laurent, who survives the accident, declares on national television that a police car suddenly and deliberately had cut off their path and that he had no time to avoid it<sup>32</sup>. The police, however, deny Laurent’s version of the story and claim that Laurent simply lost control of his motorbike and should be held responsible for the death of his friend. The same night cars are burned, buildings are set on fire, shops are looted and there are confrontations between young people and police. The episode lasts for five days. The estimated damage is 25 million Francs (Bachman & Le Guennec, 1996: 442).

Different from the *rodéos* that flashed up now and then during the summer months of 1981, the events in Vaulx-en-Velin had a clear trigger and were more intense and compressed. And just as in 1981, the events became extremely meaningful and political, partly due to their dramatic timing. Mas du Taureau, an urban policy neighbourhood since 1984, had just gone through major transformations: a new town square with shops had been built, 2500 apartments had been renovated, and 60% of the budget of the municipality had been invested in the social and educational sector (Bachmann & Le Guennec, 1996: 442). On 29 September 1990, exactly a week before Thomas’s death, the renovated neighbourhood was festively inaugurated by local politicians, journalists and inhabitants (Dikeç, 2007: 129; Dubet & Lapeyronnie, 1992: 227-228). Mas du Taureau was presented as an example of successful urban renovation. The ‘success’ lasted only a week.

The 1990 events in Vaulx-en-Velin are seen by many as a turning point. Avenel (2007: 33) speaks of the “*réveil des banlieues*” (the awakening of the *banlieues*). Jobard (2009: 29) states that “from the Mas du Taureau events onwards, the labels ‘*violence urbaine*’ or ‘*crise des banlieues*’ became synonymous with social concern and fears of crime stoked up by intense press coverage”. Indeed, the events received

<sup>32</sup> News report, 20h00-8 October 1990. See *l’Institut national de l’audiovisuel*: <http://www.ina.fr/video/CAB90038648/temoignage-motard-vaulx-en-velin-video.html>

much more political and media attention compared to Les Minguettes (Dikeç, 2007: 73; Bonelli, 2001), and the *banlieues* increasingly became a political and media construct (Hargreaves, 1996). Patrick Champagne (1999: 52) argues that the media attention to the events was “above all the occasion for a resurgence of the stereotypes about the suburbs and the large housing projects from the last thirty years which had been produced around previous news items and were superimposed on Vaulx-en-Velin – even though these models were manifestly inappropriate for what was happening there”. The media reported on the ‘illness’ of the *banlieues*, their dull architecture, and the general inactivity there, even though in the previous years Vaulx-en-Velin had been completely renovated and local business activity was flourishing.

Other violent episodes followed in the early 1990s and reinforced the framing of an ‘awakening of the *banlieues*’. Violence erupted in March 1991 in La *cité* des Indes in Sartrouville after an 18-year-old youngster was killed by a guard at Euromarché, a supermarket. A couple of months later, the neighbourhood of Le Val-Fourée in the Parisian *banlieue* Mantes-la-Jolie was the setting for two dramatic incidents.

On the night of 25-26 May 1991, 18-year-old Aïssa Ilich is arrested by the police, suspected of having been involved in violent unrest earlier that night. Aïssa, who is in a bad health and suffers from severe asthma, is thrown in jail where he is kept the whole weekend. When his parents arrive at the police station to bring him his medicines, they are turned away. On Monday morning, Aïssa lapses in a coma and dies hours later in the hospital of Mantes-la-Jolie. Violence erupts and lasts for a couple of nights.

Two weeks later, the situation in Mantes-la-Jolie becomes even more troubling. On the night of 8-9 June, some young people steal a couple of cars and organize a *rodéo*. At the moment the police arrive, one of the stolen cars drives into a police car. Young police officer Marie-Christine Baillet is flung out of the car and dies from her injuries. A couple of hours later, one of her colleagues spots a car that was involved in the *rodéo*. Upset about the tragic death of his colleague, he shoots at the car and hits 23-year-old Youssef Khaïf in the neck. Youssef also dies that night.

A day later, politician Robert Pandraud (RPR<sup>33</sup>) reveals on national television his diagnostic frame: “It’s incorrect to say that there is no relation between immigration and insecurity. That is because there are too many immigrants. They don’t

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<sup>33</sup> Rally for the Republic, conservative political party founded by Jacques Chirac. Merged in 2002 in the centre right party UMP.

have a job. There's insecurity and there are tragedies in the *banlieues*. It is incorrect to say that there is a disconnection between the misery of the *banlieues* and criminal acts. It is the misery of the *banlieues* that produces petty crime, and petty crime still produces capital offences. That is what happened in Mantes<sup>34</sup>. Pandraud's comments are followed by the diagnosis of rightwing *Front National* politician Jean-Marie Le Pen, who claims that the 'degradation of public peace' is caused by the immigration politics of the previous two decades and that engaging in social or sociological reflections merely hides that reality.

Le Val-Fourée belonged to the first urban policy neighbourhoods (since 1982) and was, like Mas du Taureau, generally seen as a successful example of urban renovation. Mas du Taureau, *cité* des Indes and Le Val-Fourée were not the only affected neighbourhoods. Between 1990 and 1994, ten to fifteen violent events took place every year in various *banlieues* (Lagrange, 2006: 44).

The dominant diagnostic framing of violent events in the *banlieues* changed during the 1990s. In the aftermath of the Islamic headscarf affair in 1989<sup>35</sup>, the political debate centered more around integration issues, and there was a rise in republican nationalism, which was, as illustrated above, especially favoured by the political right. Bonelli (2010 [2008]: 93-96), however, claims that the diagnostic frame of the Socialist Party also shifted in the early 1990s, after a report by Julien Dray<sup>36</sup>, from a focus on macro social causes (such as urbanism, racism and unemployment) towards more attention to individual behavior. The prognostic framings changed accordingly, from a focus on social prevention in the 1980s to more repressive and security-oriented discourses in the 1990s (see e.g., Dikeç, 2007; Body-Gendrot & Duprez, 2001; Linhart, 1992). The media analysis of Hargreaves (1996: 614-615) argues that the words '*banlieue*', 'urban crisis', and '*cité-ghetto*' became increasingly prominent in the media in the early 1990s, whereas before then more general terms such as 'localities' and 'towns' were used. Hence, the boundaries hardened and the link between *banlieues* and problems, such as violence and insecurity, was further established. Moreover, the diagnostic and prognostic

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<sup>34</sup> News Report, Antenne 2, 20h00-10 June 1991. My translation: « *Il est faux de dire qu'il n'y a pas de rapport entre l'immigration et l'insécurité. C'est bien parce qu'il y a trop d'immigrés. Ils n'ont pas d'emplois. Il y a d'insécurité et des drames dans les banlieues. Il est faux de dire qu'il y a une séparation entre le mal des banlieues et les actes criminels. C'est le mal des banlieues qui fabrique la petite criminalité. Et la petite criminalité génère toujours la grande criminalité. C'était là, ce qu' il s'est passé à Mantes* ».

<sup>35</sup> In 1989, three girls were suspended from a high school in Creil for wearing an Islamic headscarf. The head of school saw the headscarf as a religious expression incompatible with the *laïc* (secular) character of a French educational institution. A couple of weeks later, after having reached a compromise, the girls returned to school, but a fierce media and political debate was born.

<sup>36</sup> Report : « *La violence des jeunes dans les banlieues* » (25 June 1992). Julien Dray was Socialist Party Deputee of Essonne at the time

frames were enacted in a number of policy measures that institutionalized the boundaries and meaning of the neighbourhoods. The following examples may clarify this tendency.

In 1991, a Ministry of the City was created that viewed segregation and social exclusion as the main urban problems (Dikeç, 2007: 76). In the same period, the Ministry of Justice started to focus on what it called ‘urban delinquency’, and the intelligence service (*Renseignements Généraux*) introduced a special section on ‘urban violence’, later labeled as ‘*Villes et Banlieues*’ (Dikeç, 2007: 81; see also Bonelli, 2001) and ‘*Dérives urbaines*’ (Roché, 2006: 176). The intelligence service developed the so-called Bui-Trong scale (see figure 1.4), which specifically classifies the intensity of violent episodes in the suburbs. It became a prominent and often-used policy tool. Level 1, the lowest intensity, concerns violence that is not directed towards state institutions, and includes vandalism, *rodéos* and intergroup settlement of disputes. Level 8, the highest, designates violent acts mainly directed at the state, like ‘*guérilla*’, riots and confrontations with the police, lasting for at least 3 to 5 nights, and in which 50 to 200 young people participate (Bui Trong, 2003: 230-234).

Degré 1	<i>Actions contre les particuliers:</i> Vandalisme sans connotation anti-institutionnelle Razzias dans les commerces Rodéos et incendies de voitures Délinquance crapuleuse en bande (racket, dépouille) Rixes, règlements de comptes entre bandes
Degré 2	<i>Premières actions anti-institutionnelles:</i> Provocations collectives contre les vigiles Injures verbales et gestuelles contre les adultes du voisinage, les porteurs d’uniforme, les enseignants Vandalisme furtif contre écoles, postes de police, voitures de professeurs, locaux publics
Degré 3	<i>Agressions physiques contre les agents institutionnels autres que policiers, gendarmes ou magistrats:</i> Agressions sur porteurs d’uniforme (contrôleurs, pompiers, militaires, vigiles), travailleurs sociaux, enseignants, etc.
Degré 4	<i>Premières agressions contre la personne des policiers, gendarmes ou magistrats:</i> Attroupements injurieux Lapidation de voitures de patrouille Menaces téléphoniques Manifestations devant les commissariats
Degré 5	<i>Aggravation des agressions contre policiers, gendarmes ou magistrats:</i> Attroupements vindicatifs freinant les interventions Invasion du commissariat
Degré 6	<i>Actions préméditées et organisées contre policiers ou gendarmes:</i> Attaque ouverte du commissariat Emboscades, guets-apens, pare-chocage, volonté de blesser
Degré 7	<i>Mini-émeute:</i> Vandalisme massif (saccage de vitrines, de voitures, jets de cocktails Molotov), durée brève, 3 à 30 auteurs, absence d’affrontement avec les forces de l’ordre
Degré 8	<i>Émeute:</i> Vandalisme massif (saccages, pillages), affrontements avec les forces de l’ordre ou guérilla, plusieurs nuits d’affilée, plusieurs dizaines d’auteurs

Figure 1.4: Urban Violence Scale of the Renseignements Généraux (Lucienne Bui-Trong, 2003: 234)

Interesting to note is that the Bui-Trong scale, developed in 1993, perceives most violence against the state as highly intensive, whereas it categorizes all forms of interpersonal or intergroup violence among neighbourhood inhabitants at the lowest level. For example, calling a police officer names (level 2) is categorized as a more serious act of violence compared to demolishing private property, burning private cars or fights and settlements of disputes between gangs (level 1). The degree of violence is thus not necessarily based on the intensity of the violent act but also, and predominantly, on the target of violence (the state). A somewhat blunt translation of the scale could argue that the state doesn't care much about troubles and disorder among inhabitants of *banlieues* themselves, but feels the need to discipline and punish them once they turn to violence against state institutions.

Another example of a state enactment against unsecure *banlieues* is the creation of the Brigade Anti-Criminalité (BAC) in 1994, a section of the national police that specializes in interventions in 'sensitive neighbourhoods'.

Moreover, developments in the second half of the 1990s demonstrated that the spatial diagnoses of problems became enacted in spatial solutions: the creation of 'zones'. The *Zones Urbaines Sensibles* (ZUS), *Zones de Redynamisation Urbaine* (ZRU) in 1995, and the *Zones Franches Urbaines* (ZFU) in 1996. These three categories were created and institutionalized under the presidency of Jacques Chirac in order to stimulate social and economic development in particular areas. They are part of the larger *Pacte de Relance pour la Ville*, which became known as a Marshall Plan for the *banlieues*.

The ZUS were the key recipients of urban policy attention (*La politique de la ville*) and were characterized by the ministry as areas that have high numbers of *grands ensembles* and "an imbalance between housing and employment"<sup>37</sup>. The newly created ZUS included the earlier urban policy neighbourhoods that were defined between 1983-1995, but some new 'precarious areas' were added to the list. Until the introduction of a new classification system in 2014 (see further below). France's official count is of 751 ZUS, inhabited by 4.7 million people, which equals 7.5% of the total population<sup>38</sup>. The ZUS differ from other areas in France as their population is in general "younger, poorer, lower educated, more severely affected by unemployment and less healthy than the average French" (Kokoreff & Lapeyronnie, 2013: 14). The other two zones, ZRU and ZFU, are sub-zones of the ZUS and focus mainly on boosting the local economy through tax concessions<sup>39</sup>.

<sup>37</sup> See the website of the ministry (<http://www.ville.gouv.fr>)

<sup>38</sup> See, for statistics, the reports of *Observatoire national des zones urbaines sensibles* (ONZUS). ONZUS was created in 2003 to measure the developments of the urban policy neighbourhoods. It was replaced by *L'Observatoire National de la Politique de la Ville* in 2014.

<sup>39</sup> The ZRUs are those areas of the ZUS that are confronted with particular economic difficulties. The criteria for a ZRU are the number of inhabitants, the unemployment rates, the number of youngsters under 25 years old, the number of people that have left the education system without diploma, and the fiscal potential of the community. The ZFUs are based on the same criteria as the ZRUs, the only difference is that they are larger. ZFUs concern areas with more than 10,000 inhabitants. Initially France counted 416 ZRUs and 44 ZFUs. Later, their numbers increased to 435 ZRUs and 100 ZFUs.

In the same period, starting especially at the end of the 1990s, the themes of discrimination, xenophobia, and racism became more salient in political (and also academic and media) debates. Although NGOs, such as SOS-racisme, had already repeatedly pointed to structural inequality in French society since the 1980s, a 1998 state report named the ‘Battle against discrimination: observe the principle of equality’<sup>40</sup>, is, according to Fassin (2002), the symbolic turning point in the political discussion on migration. It set in motion a growing acknowledgment of the reality and victims of discrimination and racism in French society. It shifted somewhat the attribution of blame from immigrants to structural inequality ingrained in society. The ‘battle’ against racism and discrimination then became institutionalized in various measures, such as the creation of a free telephone service where citizens can report experiences of discrimination; and the establishment of CODAC (*commission départementale d'accès à la citoyenneté*) in 1999, that focused on the problems encountered by migrant youngsters and inhabitants of the ZUS (see e.g., Poli, 2005; 2004). In line with these developments is the later establishment of the French Equal Opportunities and Anti-Discrimination Commission HALDE<sup>41</sup> in 2004, an independent authority that aimed to deal with various forms of direct and indirect discrimination.

As illustrated above, the state’s readings fluctuated: attention was paid to problems such as discrimination, unemployment, segregation and exclusion, but the theme of ‘(in)security’ was equally pressing on the political agenda, both for left- and right-wing governments (Bonelli, 2008; Body-Gendrot & Duprez, 2001; Mucchieli, 2000), and became even more so in the early 2000s, after the 9/11 events on the other side of the Atlantic. During the presidential election campaign of 2002, the tone of the debate hardened and the image that some *banlieues* were *zones de non-droit* (lawless areas) became more common (Mohammed & Mucchieli, 2006: 117). In line with the ‘fear provoking’ atmosphere, Bauer & Raufer (2002) published a small booklet offering a whole range of statistics, including figures from ministerial, municipal and academic reports. Based on these data, they claimed that insecurity and criminality had increased year after year in hundreds of (sub)urban neighbourhoods, a reality that was, according to Bauer & Raufer, long covered by ideological blindness and the wish to avoid stigmatization of certain populations (ibid: 7). Bauer & Raufer criticized previously implemented prevention policies and argued in favour of a security-oriented approach and a firm application of the law.

In 2002/2003, Nicolas Sarkozy, then Minister of Interior Affairs, basically abolished the neighbourhood police (*police de proximité*) that were introduced by the Socialist Party government of Lionel Jospin in 1998. According to Sarkozy, the police should focus on its ‘core business’: order and security; the social dimension can and should be left to others. A zero-tolerance approach was intended to set

<sup>40</sup> The report was published by the *Haut Conseil à l'intégration*. The French title is: « *Lutte contre les discriminations: faire respecter le principe de l'égalité* ».

<sup>41</sup> HALDE stands for *Haute autorité de lutte contre les discriminations et pour l'égalité*. The tasks of HALDE were transferred to the *Défenseurs des droits* in 2011.

things right in the *banlieues* and would lead to clear results and improved statistics (Mohammed & Mucchieli, 2006: 118).

In the same period, the Minister of the City, Jean-Louis Borloo, implemented a radicalized version of the *Plan de Relance* of 1996. Under the banner of a 'National Programme for Urban Renovation' (*Programme national de rénovation urbaine* -PNRU), he sped up the demolition and rebuilding process, coordinated by the national organization for urban renovation (*Agence Nationale pour la Rénovation Urbaine*). Further, he expanded the number of ZFUs and created the "*L'Observatoire National de Zones Urbaines Sensibles*", which studied and measured developments in the ZUS.

Kokoreff & Lapeyronnie (2013: 86-87) are rather critical about these policies that focused predominantly on (in)security and urban renovation and neglected the social dimension of urban policy. They argue that it deteriorated the situation in the suburban neighbourhoods and contributed to the creation of an "interior enemy".

At the end of this third phase, tensions on the local level started to rise, especially due to two events in which Sarkozy played a key role. In June 2005, an 11-year-old boy was hit and killed by a stray bullet while he was washing his father's car in La Courneuve, *cité* 4000 (see Chapter 3). A day later, Sarkozy visited the neighbourhood and promised to solve the issues. The method that he proposed was to clean up the neighbourhood with a Kärcher, a German brand of pressure hose (*nettoyer la cité au Kärcher*). His remark was embraced by some who celebrated his powerful stance while others were offended by his imagery.

A few months later, on 25 October 2005, Sarkozy went on a work visit in Argenteuil, a suburb northwest of Paris. The atmosphere was tense, young residents throwing cans and other objects at him. A local inhabitant yelled out her window at Sarkozy: "When are you going to release us from the scum?" (*« Quand nous débarrassez-vous de cette racaille? »*). Sarkozy promised her that he would deal with the '*racaille*'. Afterwards, he repeated this label during several media appearances. Although the word *racaille* (or *cailleras*<sup>42</sup>) is sometimes used in *banlieue*-raps by the young people themselves, its application by the Minister of Interior Affairs was generally perceived as offensive and a new controversy was born. Two days later the fourth phase started.

#### Phase 4: 2005 Clichy-sous-Bois and beyond

Autumn 2005. 27 October, north Parisian suburb Clichy-sous-Bois. In the afternoon of that late October day, a group of boys walks back home after a game of soccer. When they see a police car driving by they fear an identity check, a state practice that young people are frequently subjected to, especially in these suburban neighbourhoods. The boys decide to run to

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<sup>42</sup> The reversion of words, *verlan*, is part of the evolution of specific *cité* slang.

avoid possible troubles with the police. Three of them, Bouna, Zyed and Muhittin, climb a barbed wired wall and hide in a power substation of *Électricité de France* (EDF). Not much later they take missteps and are electrocuted. Bouna and Zyed die immediately, Muhittin is severely injured. After the death of the two boys, rumours start to spread: Dominique de Villepin, then the French Prime Minister, and his Minister of Interior Affairs, Nicolas Sarkozy, initially accuse the boys of a robbery. Sarkozy suggests that they wouldn't run away if they hadn't done anything (see e.g., Body-Gendrot, 2007; Demiati, 2006; Ossman & Terrio, 2006). Later on, these allegations are withdrawn and the police claim that they were not running after the boys. In Clichy-sous-bois and elsewhere, other stories circulate. On national television, three youngsters say, while their faces are made unrecognizable, that their friends have deliberately been chased by the police<sup>43</sup>.

Violence erupts the very same night that Zyed and Bouna are electrocuted, and rumours about the cause of their deaths spread. The first cars are set on fire by young residents of Chêne-Pointu and La Forestière, two *cités* in Clichy-sous-Bois, and from Les Bosquets, a *cité* located in Clichy-sous-Bois and the neighbouring *banlieue* Montfermeil (Lagrange, 2006: 37). During the three nights that follow, incidents remain confined to those two *banlieues*. Estimates of the number of burned cars vary between 8 to 30 cars per night (see e.g., Demiati, 2006: 64; Lagrange, 2006: 37). Two days after the death of Bouna and Zyed, a silent march is organized in Clichy-sous-Bois. Around 500 people participate, some wear banners and t-shirts stating "Morts pour rien" ("Death for Nothing"). Television and newspapers report on the car burnings and confrontations between youth and police but a full-blown media hype has not yet developed. Violence remains fairly limited and local.

However, on the night of 30-31 October there is a second trigger event: a teargas canister explodes at the entrance of a mosque in Clichy-sous-Bois. It is Ramadan and the mosque is full of people. Not much later it turns out that the teargas canister belongs to the police. Although police officials deny any involvement in the act, others claim that it was a

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<sup>43</sup> News Report France 2 – 28/10/2005 20h00; See *l'Institut national de l'audiovisuel* : <http://www.ina.fr/video/2954558001/20-heures-le-journal-emission-du-28-octobre-2005-video.html>

deliberate attack<sup>44</sup>. No official excuses are made. Sarkozy points out in the newspaper *Le Parisien* on 2 November 2005: “It is a teargas grenade belonging to the police force. The scientific police found out that it did not explode inside the mosque, but at its exterior. We do not know if it was taken by somebody or if it rolled by itself. Nobody did it with the intention to blaspheme a sacred place. It is necessary that everybody remains calm”<sup>45</sup> (see also Demati, 2006: 65). This event and the provocative rumours lead to a further inflammation of an already violent atmosphere in the region and a tense situation in the rest of the country<sup>46</sup>.

During the night of 31 October, other *banlieues* in the north Parisian 93-district are affected, including Sevran, Tremblay, Villepinte, Bondy, Bobigny and Le Blanc-Mesnil (Lagrange, 2006: 38). Incidents include not only car burnings but also confrontations between youth and police and demolition of other property. The following night (1-2 November), violence spreads all over the Parisian province, Île-de-France: *banlieues* in Yvelines, Hauts-de-Seine, Val-de-Marne, Essonne, Seine-et-Marne and Val-d’Oise are affected<sup>47</sup>. After the 4<sup>th</sup> of November these local and later provincial incidents become a national event. The most violent days are between 5 and 7 November 2005. According to the French Press Agency (AFP), a total of 1295 vehicles are burned in 200 neighbourhoods on 5 November, 1408 vehicles in 274 neighbourhoods on 6 November, and 1200 vehicles in almost 300 neighbourhoods on 7 November 2005. On 8 November, just after the peak of the violence, a state of emergency is declared by President Jacques Chirac for a period of twelve days<sup>48</sup>. This measure broadens the array of possible actions and instruments of the Minister of Interior Affairs (Silverstein &

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<sup>44</sup> See e.g., *l’Institut national de l’audiovisuel* News Report ‘19/20 Edition National’, France 3, 31 October 2005: <http://www.ina.fr/video/2954175001007/tensions-entre-les-habitants-de-clichy-sous-bois-et-les-forces-de-l-ordre-video.html>

<sup>45</sup> Original quote: « *C’est une grenade lacrymogène en dotation dans les services de police. La police scientifique a établi qu’elle n’avait pas explosé dans la mosquée, mais à l’extérieur. Nous ne savons pas si elle a été prise par quelqu’un ou si elle a roulé elle-même. Il n’y a rien qui a été fait pour blasphémer un lieu de culte. Il faut que chacun retrouve son calme* ».

<sup>46</sup> Donald Horowitz, in his extensive work on riots, remarks in this regard: “A threshold must be reached for violence to occur, and a small increment of precipitant at a critical moment may prove decisive, particularly if it confirms malevolent intentions” (2001: 92).

<sup>47</sup> For a more detailed description of the affected towns, see Mucchielli (2006: 14) or Lagrange (2006: 38-39).

<sup>48</sup> This measure was especially sensitive as it was based on a 1955 law, implemented during the Algerian war.

Tetreault, 2006). On 15 November the state of emergency is prolonged to three months. From 8 November onwards there is a decrease in both the number of burned cars and affected towns. 17 November 2005 is often considered as the end of the November riots, the end of a heated French autumn<sup>49</sup>.

These events outdid the previous episodes of suburban violence: not only the number of burnt cars but also the duration and geographical expansion of violence were exceptional. In 21 days violence spread across the entire Republic, more than 300 neighbourhoods were affected, with over 10,000 vehicles and about 300 buildings ending up in flames (Rivayrand, 2006: 56). Whereas before these events the notorious reputation of the *banlieues* had remained mainly within France, it now became international through extensive media coverage around the globe. Violence re-erupted several times after 2005, the most mediated and politicized events being the incidents in Villiers-le-Bel in November 2007, in Firminy in July 2009 and in Trappes in July 2013. These later episodes, however, were limited to one or a couple of neighbourhoods and ended within a couple of days, never reaching the extent or intensity of the autumn 2005 events.

The exceptional, violent episode of the autumn of 2005 was followed by an enormous amount and variety of diagnostic and prognostic frames. French sociologist Mauger (2006) states that, apart from the actual ‘riot’, there was a riot on paper (“*émeute de papier*”). Benford & Snow (2000: 626) would probably have called it a ‘frame dispute’, in which frames and counterframes engaged in a dispute over ‘reality’. Counterframes are defined by Benford as attempts “to rebut, undermine, or neutralize a person’s or group’s myths, versions of reality or interpretive framework” (Benford, 1987; cited in Benford & Snow, 2000: 626).

I propose to see the frame disputes in the aftermath of the 2005 events as a continuum with two extreme ends, a continuum that existed since the start of the suburban crisis but that became even more salient in 2005. On the one end, young people are portrayed as ‘criminals’, living in lost territories, who resort to senseless violence (*violence gratuite*); at the other end of the spectrum they are depicted as ‘victims’ who express a violent cry of distress because they live in the forgotten corners of the Republic. The former especially attributes blame to the spatialized (migrant) youth, while the latter blames social conditions, such as poverty, discrimination and unemployment that are rooted in larger society. These frame disputes are, of course, not unique to the French case, but can equally be seen in the aftermath of other recent violent incidents in Europe (e.g., London, August 2011 or Stockholm, May 2013) or the United States (e.g., after the events in Ferguson, August 2014 or Baltimore, April 2015).

The criminalized frame mainly focuses on defining ‘us’ in opposition to ‘them’, the division between good and evil. In line with this type of frame, the

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<sup>49</sup> See for other reconstructions, for example, Roché (2006: 13-30), Lagrange (2006), Body-Gendrot (2007).

violent actors are labeled, for example, as thugs/gangsters (*voyous*), scum (*racaille*), or drug traffickers (*trafiquants des drogues*). Although this portrayal is often critiqued in academic literature, it is widely present in the political and media debate and in popular culture. The violence is perceived as apolitical, criminal acts. The space that these ‘criminals’ inhabit is mainly represented as a bounded, self-contained and isolated territory, islands that strayed from the Republic, a hoodlumocracy (*voyoucratie*), as Nicolas Sarkozy called it after the violent episode in Villiers-le-Bel in 2007 (Moran, 2012: 43-44).

Schrover and Schinkel (2013: 1133) describe this type of categorization as ‘people outside of society’. “Such a figure of speech shapes the realm of ‘society’ vis-à-vis a societal environment, which remains vague and under-defined. This turns ‘society’ into a pure domain devoid of social problems. Problems refer to persons ‘outside society’”. It is a process of ‘othering’, in which the ‘other’ is not only categorized as ‘different’ (identity), but also situated in a deviant place (see for a similar idea also: Graham, 2010). Illustrative of this frame is the campaign poster “Choose your France” (see Figure 1.5) that was made by the youth wing of political party *Front National* for the 2012 presidential elections. Half the poster pictured France as a concrete apartment building, burning cars, criminal youth and poverty; the other half showed a bright France, with picturesque houses, a local market and abundant wealth.

The corresponding prognostic frame is a call for increased repression and the eradication of the ‘evil’ and ‘barbaric’ elements. Or to put it in Sarkozy’s words, to clean up the area with a pressure-wash machine. It very much fits with the larger security-oriented discourse and policy measures that started to gain dominance in the 1990s and further developed in the 2000s, especially after 9/11.

Although the criminalized frame may have been dominant, it is contested by different readings of the events. The diagnostic frame on the other side of the spectrum portrays those who resort to violence mainly as people who are denied equal treatment and who are unjustly dealt with as second-class citizens. In this other frame, the young inhabitants of the *banlieue* are not seen as criminals but more as victims of exclusion, stigmatization and discrimination. They suffer from high levels of unemployment, poverty and humiliating repression by the state police. The space that they inhabit is not seen as an isolated no-go area but merely as a part of the Republic that is severely neglected or maltreated by the state. Violence is mainly understood as a cry of distress, as a statement that may not be well formulated but that is political in nature (see e.g., Kaulingfreks, 2013). Violence is not barbarism but an ‘uprising’ or ‘revolt’ of the poor and excluded. The corresponding prognostic frames include measures aimed at reducing poverty and unemployment, fostering feelings of inclusive citizenship and stimulating empowerment.

This last frame closely corresponds with the analysis of Dikeç (2007), who speaks consistently of ‘revolts’ (rather than ‘riots’) and sees the violent episodes of 2005 as an ‘unarticulated justice movement’. In a similar vein, Kokoreff & Lapeyronnie (2013: 72) argue that ‘riots’ are for the inhabitants of these

neighbourhoods basically the only way to politically express themselves. Riots are “the product of political marginality, a lack of representation, and of the bad functioning of democracy”<sup>50</sup> (ibid: 77; see also Peralva, 1995). The solutions, according to Kokoreff & Lapeyronnie, should be sought in increased political representation and empowerment and bottom up approaches.

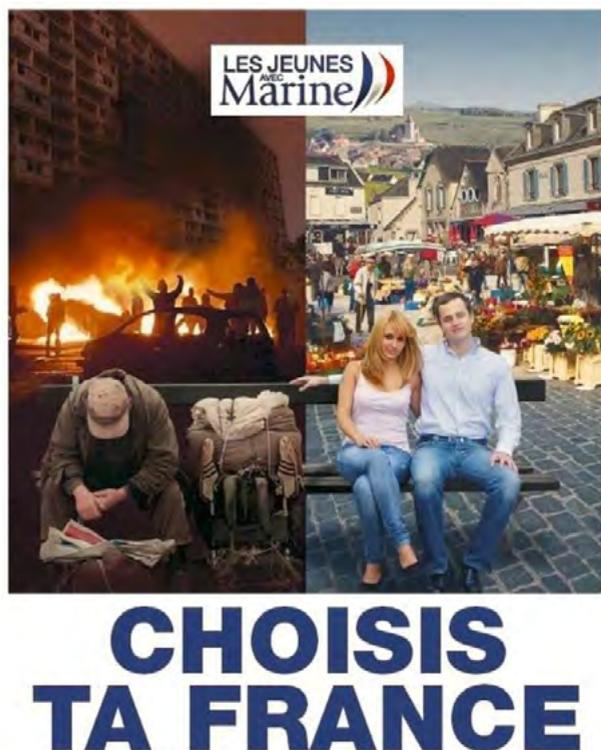


Figure 1.5: “*Choisis ta France*” (Choose your France). Campaign poster made by youth wing of political party *Front National*

The governmental practices in the aftermath of the 2005 events drew on elements from both the ‘criminalized’ and ‘victimized’ frame. Some of the measures that were taken were basically a continuation of existing policy. For example, the urban renovation programme that started in 2003 was extended: 250,000 social housing units in total were announced to be demolished and replaced by newly built ones. Another 400,000 units were planned to be renovated, aiming both at rehabilitating the neighbourhood and increasing the demographic variety of its inhabitants.

In 2007, the so called *Contrats urbains de cohésion sociale* (CUCS) are introduced. Whereas the 751 *Zones Urbaines Sensibles* remained the central reference points for urban policy, the CUCS included an even broader category of neighbourhoods that were to be included in urban policy (*politique de la ville*). These new ‘contracts’

<sup>50</sup> My own translation. « *L'émeute est le produit de la marginalité politique, du déficit de représentation, du mauvais fonctionnement de la démocratie* ».

covered 2492 neighbourhoods that were categorized in three priority levels of which priority 1 neighbourhoods received the most financial assistance. The new policy was not only a further enactment of the spatial frames, but also showed an ever-expanding geography of neighbourhoods nationally that were covered by such urban policy. The 16 neighbourhoods that were included in an urban policy programme in the early 1980s had multiplied over thirty years to 2492 neighbourhoods included in the CUCS.

The most explicit and mediated answer to the 2005 violence was proposed in February 2008 by Nicolas Sarkozy, by then president of the Republic. The programme was called *Espoir Banlieues* (Suburban Hope) and included measures to improve education, public transport, employment and security. Like the 1996 *Pacte de Relance*, *Espoir Banlieues* was called by some a Marshall Plan for the *banlieues*, but many others renamed it ‘Suburban Despair’ (*Désespoir Banlieues*). The programme has been widely critiqued as ineffective. Kokoreff & Lapeyronnie (2013: 38 -39) argue that the presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy in general mainly focused on repression and the further stigmatization of the suburban population. Nor was ‘*Espoir Banlieues*’ the only programme that seems to have failed to change living conditions in the urban policy neighbourhoods. A number of critical reports in 2012 and 2013<sup>51</sup> showed that the measures taken in recent years had been ineffective in reducing poverty, unemployment and segregation. The differences between the *Zones Urbaines Sensibles* (ZUS) and other areas (outside ZUS) have not narrowed and in many cases have even increased in recent years (see Table 1.1).

	Year	ZUS	Outside ZUS
Percentage of unemployed among active population between 15-64 years old	2006	19.3	9.3
	2012	24.2	9.9
Percentage of unemployed youth between 15-24 years old	2006	36.5	21.5
	2012	45.0	23.1
Percentage of population living below the poverty line.	2006	30.5	11.9
	2011	36.5	12.7

Table 1.1: Numbers are based on ONZUS 2013 report

After election as president in May 2012, François Hollande created a Ministry of Equality of Territories and of Housing (*Ministère de l'égalité des territoires et du logement*) and presented a ‘new urban policy’ in November 2013. It introduced new urban contracts and a new approach that seeks to foster active involvement and participation by local inhabitants, something that had been recommended by reports written in the early 1980s (see above). Furthermore, the new ministry seeks to simplify the categorization of neighbourhoods that are subjected to urban policy. The various policy *zones* that were created in the past lack clear criteria and are too complex to understand and therefore ineffective, according to the Minister. The

<sup>51</sup> Report of *Cour de Compte* (July 2012) « *La Politique de la ville. Une décennie de réformes* » ; *Rapport 2013 Observatoire National des Zones Urbaines Sensibles* (December 2013).

new ministry's solution was the creation of 1300 so-called priority neighbourhoods (*quartiers prioritaires*), including the majority of the ZUS and priority 1 CUCS neighbourhoods. The new categorization replaces the other policy *zones* and is based on only one criterion: the income of the inhabitants. The new urban contracts promise to improve social cohesion and quality of life, and include serious investments in education, (youth) employment and urban renovation.

At the same time, *zones* that are in need of additional attention by the security forces were created: *Zones de Sécurité Prioritaires* (ZSP). Fifteen of these ZSPs were established in July 2012, 49 more in November 2012, 16 more in December 2013 and new ones are announced for 2015.

Before ending this chapter, it is necessary to further expound on the four phases (see figure 1.6) I have elaborated above. Why not five or seven phases? Or just one? In other words, why do I see the three (and not other) violent episodes as turning points following the first, building phase of the 1950-70s? It is my assertion that the combination of the performative quality, state involvement, political functionality and growing escalation of the violent events in 1981, 1990 and 2005 turned these into iconic moments.

First, the three events that I have described above were all highly visible, performative or theatric. The spectacular images of a car in flames or a primary school reduced to ashes were well suited for mediatization and political exploitation. Griffin (2010: 8) explains the general fascination for media images of war and violence as they “offer exciting and voyeuristic glimpses into theaters of violence that, for most viewers, are alien to everyday experience”. Moreover, he argues that these images “initially attract attention, not because they introduce novel content or perspectives, but because of their ability to elicit emotional responses tied to an existing public mood and collective public memory” (ibid: 19).

Secondly, in all three events the state was involved as a central actor. In the second and third acts the police were directly involved in the trigger event that inflamed the actual violence; and all episodes included violent confrontations between young people and the police. Although these two features of violent episodes are important, I am not arguing that they are sufficient to turn them into iconic moments. In the past decades, there have been many other incidents of violence that were highly performative and included state actors, but these had less impact on the development of the suburban crisis. Two other factors are needed.

A third factor that contributed to turning the violent acts into iconic moments was their political functionality. Each of the three events in my analysis occurred at a moment that allowed it to become highly politically functional. In the summer of 1981, Mitterand had just come to power and threatening images of the Brixton riots had crossed the Channel a few months earlier. Using these fearful British scenarios, some political opponents seized on images of the *rodéos* of Les

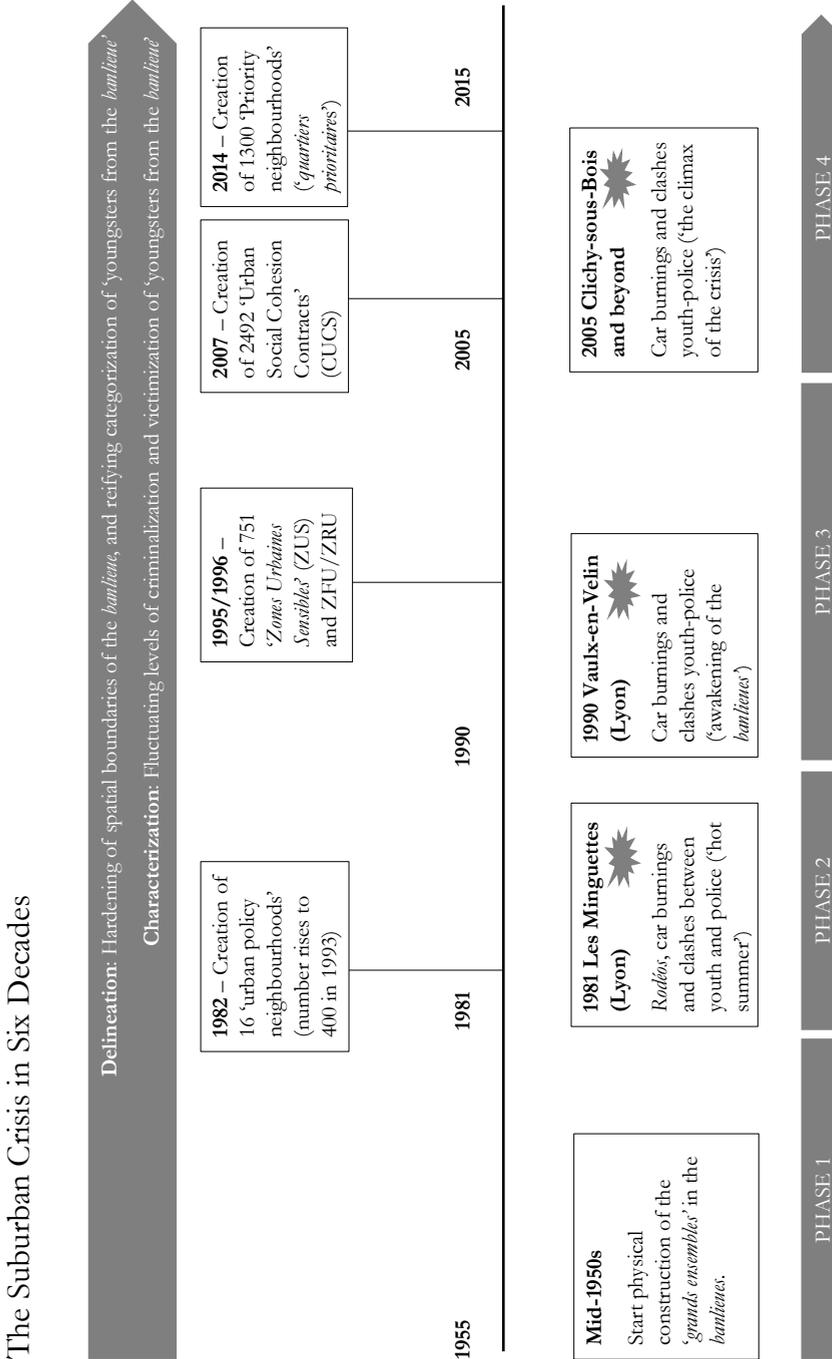


Figure 1.6: The Development of the Suburban Crisis in Six Decades.

Minguettes to critique the newly installed government. In 1990, the timing was equally dramatic. A decade of urban policy intervention seemed to have been futile when violence broke out in Mas du Taureau, a neighbourhood that had just been completely renovated. Similarly, the 2005 events occurred in a context that enabled political exploitation: the aftermath of the 9/11 events and the (both praised and severely criticized) zero-tolerance campaign in the suburban areas instituted by the Minister of Interior Affairs (Nicolas Sarkozy). The car burnings and police-youth confrontations in the autumn of 2005 were used by both sides of the political spectrum in their diagnostic and prognostic frames. Violence was for both a confirmation of their positions. Those in favour of Sarkozy's policy could claim that the repressive measures were urgently needed and should be carried forward, the violent events legitimizing his approach. In contrast, those who were against the hardline measures claimed that the 2005 events were (partly) caused, rather than resolved, by these measures. The repressive zero-tolerance approach had contributed to an increased tense climate in the *cités*, this argument went, with the violent events as a proof of the failing of Sarkozy's zero-tolerance campaign.

The fourth factor that contributed to the formation of these events as iconic was their growing escalation. Each of the above-described violent events outdid the previous one in intensity. The *rodéos* of Les Minguettes set the stage: relatively limited acts of violence that repeated themselves numerous times within the summer months of 1981. In 1990, the violent event presented itself in a different form: a brief but fierce eruption. Violence was more compressed, more intense, and more clearly directed against the state compared to 1981. And finally, the 2005 events surpassed the intensity of the previous two due to their long duration and geographical spread.

As argued earlier, it is violent events as compressed and highly emotional moments that par excellence call for legibility and technologies of governance. Moreover, violent events connect the local with the national, the *banlieue* and the state. Many more violent events have occurred from the 1970s up to the present, with different degrees of political and media attention. However, I argue that these other violent events were mainly seen and interpreted as *déjà-vu* of the three iconic events, which stood out based on the combination of performative quality, state involvement, political functionality, and growing escalation. These other violent events contributed to the consolidation of the suburban crisis rather than adding a new chapter to it.

## CONCLUSION

The 1971 map of L'IAURP (figure 1.1) diagnosed La Courneuve as a place with the following pathologies: alcohol, boredom, youth delinquency, suicides. About ten years later, in 1982, neighbourhood 4000 in La Courneuve was included as one of the first 16 urban policy neighbourhoods. Another 14 years later, in 1996, it was turned into a '*Zone Urbaine Sensible*'. Today it is part of the 'priority

neighbourhoods'. It is classified by the National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE) as one of the areas 'most in trouble'<sup>52</sup>. Being diagnosed and institutionalized as a 'zone' by the state thus seems to involve a chronic 'pathology' rather than an attribution that can be cured and removed.

By drawing on a Foucauldian governmentality approach, I have analyzed in this chapter the development of the 'suburban crisis' in four phases. The transition to each new phase was heralded by an iconic violent event. I have shown how the state's diagnostic and prognostic frames of violence and their enactment in policy measures have contributed to the making of the '*banlieue* crisis'. The *grands ensembles* in suburban France were physically built during the 1950s-60s and classified and attached with meaning during the decades that followed. Going from sunny living rooms in newly built high-rise modern apartment buildings, to an increasingly dominant picture of gloomy ghettos today, from a focus on architecture that makes people (especially women) depressed and ill to dangerous youngsters (especially boys) who threaten mainstream society through the resort to violence.

In the past 40 years, the framing and implemented policy practices in the aftermath of episodes of violence show both enduring and contested features. Most enduring is the divide between the city centre and the peripheral *banlieues*, *cités*, *quartiers sensibles* or ghettos, a divide that is institutionalized in the creation of and interventions in all types of 'zones' (Urban Policy Neighbourhoods, *Zones Urbaines Sensibles*, Priority Neighbourhoods). In a similar vein, the main actors in these frames became reified. Those living in the *banlieues* are predominantly defined as '*jeunes des banlieues*', '*banlieusards*', '*jeunes des cités*', '*jeunes issu des quartiers populaires*', '*jeunes de la rue*'. Hence, a focus on spatialized young people, often more implicitly supplemented with gendered (male) and ethnicized/racialized (migrant, Arab or Noir) characterizations.

Disputes about the central frame focus mainly on how violence, enactors, and the spaces that they inhabit should be understood. Although the criminalized and threatening portrayal of the *banlieues* and their inhabitants may be dominant, it is not fixed. It is rather negotiated and opposed by counter frames that see violence as a cry for help by young victims who live in the forgotten corners of the Republic and experience on a daily basis the structural inequalities in French society.

The analysis made in this chapter has two main limitations. First, the analysis could have been deepened by taking a closer look at the precise connection between the state's frames of violence and the implemented policy measures. This chapter gave a rough overview of the past decades and covered the most important events, state readings and urban policies. But the chapter was not able to empirically *prove* the causality between frames and policy measures. That would require a much more in-depth, empirical research effort. Nevertheless, I argue that this chapter *does* demonstrate that after every episode of violence the state is

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<sup>52</sup> Neighbourhood 4000 is classified in 2011 as « *Catégorie A: Les ZUS les plus en difficulté* ». See website *Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques*: [http://www.insee.fr/fr/insee\\_regions/idf/themes/alapage/alap356/alap356.pdf](http://www.insee.fr/fr/insee_regions/idf/themes/alapage/alap356/alap356.pdf)

confronted with the failure of ‘knowing’ and the failure of governing. After every episode of violence the state attempts to formulate new policies to restore order and to prevent new incidents of violence.

A second limitation is that the analysis could have been broadened. I am aware that the diagnostic and prognostic frames that label the *banlieue* and categorize its young inhabitants are not exclusively formed by state actors, but that these are influenced by many other actors, such as the media. Interesting analyses of journalistic portrayals of the *banlieues* have been made by Peralva & Macé (2002); Lochard (1999); Champagne (1999); Hargreaves (1996), to name just a few. The reason to focus in this chapter predominantly on the state’s readings and technologies of governance is because I view the state as the most dominant actor in the construction of difference. Whereas media may strongly influence the ‘imagination’ of the suburban crisis, it is in the end state actors that are most powerful in the *enactment* of these imaginations through the implementation of policy measures. Moreover, the state is often directly involved (represented by local police) in the violent clashes that are central to the suburban crisis.

Whereas this chapter focused mostly on the state’s project of governing, the following chapters will ‘go’ into the *banlieue* to gain a local understanding of the ‘suburban crisis’. It is time to see how these ‘external’ state representations and techniques of governance play out ‘internally’ at the local level, to study how the making of places and the categorizations of its young inhabitants are negotiated and contested, and/or replaced by alternative representations and techniques of governance.

# Chapter 2

Ethnographic Research: Discovery of the 'Field'

*Walking from the RER Station into the Heart of Cité 4000sud*

*“Zoom uit. Ga erboven hangen. Overzie de tuin, de rondrazende vrolijkheid in duizend kleuren, en hier en daar, goed verborgen, de zwervende zwarte vlekken. Je kunt luisteren naar de gesprekken die de mensen voeren. Je kunt proberen in hun hoofden te kijken en te zien wat ze denken. Je kunt ze vragen stellen, en de antwoorden wantrouwen.*

*Maar wat vertelt meer dan de route die ze lopen, de lijnen die ze trekken over het gras en het terras, als met potlood – en die elkaar kruisen of ontwijken? Van de ene kring naar de andere, naar het buffet, de achtertuin, de weilanden of het toilet. Wie vertelt meer dan de stoel waarop ze niet gaan zitten of het getik van een vork die prikt in een leeg bord?”*

Ivo Victoria, *Gelukkig Zijn We Machteloos* (2011: 81-82)

Two bouquets of flowers. Partly withered, wrapped in decorated cellophane. Not the overwhelming sea of flowers that I expected. The half-dead bouquets lie on the pavement in front of one of the high-rise rectangular social housing blocks that are typically associated with suburban France. They are the only physical sign that reminds me of what happened here three days ago. Nothing else.

It is half-past four on a sunny and warm afternoon in late May 2010. A seven-minute train ride from Paris's Gare du Nord has brought me to RER station<sup>53</sup> La Courneuve-Aubervilliers. I have an appointment with primary school teacher Paul in neighbourhood 4000*sud*. I am too early. La Courneuve is closer to Paris than I expected. The square in front of the school is locked in by two massive apartment buildings. The one in front of me is about fifteen apartments high, and fifteen wide. It is nicknamed *Balzac*, I learn later. Not in honor of the author of *La Comédie Humaine*<sup>54</sup> but simply based on the street on which the building is located: *Rue Honoré de Balzac*. Some of the windows are broken and most of the doorways are blackened. While a number of apartments still seem occupied, the majority look deserted. The building is in terrible condition and looks like a colossal haunted house. The other building is taller, but narrower. It follows the same formula, located on *Rue Claude Debussy* and nicknamed *petit Debussy*. Its bigger brother, building *Grand Debussy*, was taken down decades ago. Compared to *Balzac*, *petit Debussy* is in relative good shape. As I stare at the monotonous architecture, a young woman passes by. She comes round for her kids at the schoolyard and has an animated chat with some other mothers. In a car, parked at the other side of the street, three youngsters listen to rap music from their blaring stereo system. They move their heads to the rhythm. My first steps in 4000*sud* are less exciting than I expected. At the same time, I am seized by feelings of desolation, not sure whether they stem from my current observations or from the pre-established images about the *banlieues* that I have in mind. On the ground I see how the positions of the two apartment buildings produce a mixture of dark shades and bright sunlight.

Twenty minutes later, I walk into Paul's classroom on the upper story of the primary school. Inside it is dark and sultry. Paul opens the curtains; the view is completely taken up by *petit Debussy*: a patchwork of concrete and windows. Paul, who lives at the other side of the highway, just outside La Courneuve, says that 4000 is in a transition phase. "It is dirty now, in decay. It will change, after they have taken down the big building. It will not necessarily get safer. They have already renovated a part of this neighbourhood. It remains unsafe". Paul explains that *Balzac* will be demolished at the end of the year, as part of the urban renovation programme of the French government (see Chapter 1), and at the end of my research, though later than planned, one of the most iconic buildings of 4000*sud* will indeed have vanished. Later, we talk about some of the problems of the neighbourhood. I ask Paul whether the drug trade is visible to the inhabitants of 4000*sud*. "Yes, of course. I'll show you". He guides me to another classroom,

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<sup>53</sup> RER trains are local trains that connect the city centre of Paris with its suburban areas.

<sup>54</sup> A collection of novels, essays, stories depicting French society after the fall of Napoleon.

with a view onto *Balzac*. He searches the doorways and says after a while: "Well... I can't see anybody right now, but it goes on from early in the morning till late at night. The same rhythm. Cars come and go; at the bottom of the building, that's where the drugs are sold. The police arrive. The dealers disappear. After a while, when the police have left, the guys come back and the whole scene starts over again..." From the window I see the two bouquets of flowers. Paul hadn't noticed them before. "I don't know much about the motive for that murder", he says, somewhat reserved. "They say it is due to a fight between two gangs. Some claim that 4000*sud* counts a number of groups that are in conflict with each other. I don't know. I am not very into it..."

In the months that follow I learn more about what happened here three days ago. It becomes one of the recurrent stories of violence that pierces many neighbourhood discussions. I have read a number of articles about the murder in various newspapers. For example, *Le Parisien*, France's largest newspaper, writes on 26 May 2010: "Drama in La Courneuve takes place against a background of drug trafficking"<sup>55</sup>. Sid-Ahmed, a 28-year-old man, received one bullet in his upper leg and one right in his heart. He died shortly afterwards. The newspaper recounts that it happened at the bottom of *Balzac*, where the man grew up before moving to *Le Mail*, a housing block a couple of hundred meters further up the road. Although accused in the past of theft and a series of burglaries, Sid-Ahmed was not known for drug dealing or violence. His relatives claim in the article that he wanted to calm the territorial fights between drug dealers of *Balzac* and *Le Mail*. "He was at the wrong place, at the wrong time". According to the article, the upcoming demolition of *Balzac* had led, in the past weeks, to a tense atmosphere in the neighbourhood. In anticipation of the loss of their territory, drug dealers of *Balzac* needed to seek out new, but often already claimed by rival dealers, venues to sell their wares<sup>56</sup>.

I walk back to the RER train station. I cast a last glance at the flowers for Sid-Ahmed and I realize what I already knew: conducting research at this place will be a challenge. Especially at this very moment, three days after a murder [Diary notes 27 May 2010].

In the first chapter of this book, I stayed comfortably behind my desk, reading and studying, gathering details from books, articles, videos on the internet and archives. However, now I have arrived in La Courneuve and I am confronted with the complexity of daily life. I see it, feel it, smell it. It is a shift from 'armchair analyzing' to face-to-face interactions in an everyday setting that demands a closer explanation of what I am going to do, and, more specifically, *how* I am going to gather my empirical evidence. This chapter is an introduction to La Courneuve and 4000*sud* and some of its inhabitants, but above all it is an outline of my methodological strategy.

<sup>55</sup> *Le Parisien*, 26 May 2010: « *Le drame de La Courneuve intervient sur fond de trafic de drogue* » Aurélie Foulon and Nathalie Perrier.

<sup>56</sup> Later I find out that different versions of this story echoed around in the neighbourhood. See Chapter 5 (paragraph 5.3).

Although I was trained as a quantitative social psychologist (Verkuyten & Slooter, 2008; 2007), I here take a qualitative approach to study the making of the suburban crisis. I am mainly interested in how people ‘read’ and give meaning to the social world and how they act upon those readings. I argue that an ethnographic approach is well-suited to capture both these interpretations and practices. Why is a survey questionnaire among hundreds of young people living in *cités* less apt here? Surveys may advance the understanding or explanation of social phenomena and they may identify ‘laws of behaviour’ derived from correlations in quantitative data sets. Nevertheless, they predominantly unveil, to borrow Malinowski’s words, the ‘skeleton’ and they lack ‘flesh and blood’ (1922: 17). Surveys may give insight into the framework of social phenomena, but they are less suitable to capture the realities of daily life that I am looking for. Ethnography allows for the study of ‘text in context’ through examining both what people *say* and *do*. Similar to how I have analyzed in the previous chapter the dominant ‘external’ portrayal of *La crise des banlieues* and its enactment in state policies and laws, I will study in the coming chapters these readings and practices at the local level, in everyday life. Surveys would not be able to measure both these aspects, as they are focused on what people *say* (or what they say they would do), but cannot see what people actually *do*.

Ethnographies have often been critiqued as being subjective and/or unreliable (see, for a recent example, Perry (2015) on Alice Goffman’s ethnography *On the Run: Fugitive Life in an American City* (2014); or Bovenkerk (1992), for an overview of the critical debate on William Foot Whyte’s methodology in *Street Corner Society* (1943)). Part of that critique is well-justified, as methodology sections in qualitative accounts are sometimes developed rather marginally or are left to the appendix of the book. However, in my view, a methodology section should be an integral and elaborated part of the ethnographic account. The claims and arguments that I make in this book are built on the data that I gathered. A thorough explanation of the methodological strategies is therefore indispensable, because only then is one able to fully judge the academic value of the dialogue between theories/ideas and empirical evidence that I present in this book. This chapter is subdivided into three sections, in which I (1) define ethnography, (2) discuss how I did ethnographic research during my two longer stays in the neighbourhood (from May-August 2010 and from April-August 2011), and (3) reflect on my own role in this research process.

Although the *banlieues* have been researched extensively in recent decades (especially by French academics), in-depth ethnographic studies are less common. Some exceptions are *Coeur de Banlieue* by David Lepoutre (2001), Éric Marlière’s *Jeunes en cité. Diversité des trajectoires ou destin commun ?* (2005), Didier Lapeyronnie’s *Ghetto Urbain* (2008), and *Les Internés du Ghetto* by Manuel Boucher (2010).

## 2.1 EXPLORING ETHNOGRAHPY

Ethnography is rooted in nineteenth century Western anthropology. At first, it was mainly applied as a method to understand the lives of 'exotic others' in faraway countries, such as Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922), often considered a pioneer study in ethnography. In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the method crossed disciplinary boundaries via the sociological Chicago School, and ethnography is currently known as a research method in many other disciplines (O'Reilly, 2012; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Ethnographers started to "study across and within cultures and societies, at home and away" (Madden, 2010: 1). The spreading of ethnography over time and across disciplinary boundaries means that different understandings have developed and multiple meanings have been attached to the term. It is therefore important to first briefly mark the contours of what I mean by ethnography, as well as what I would *not* consider ethnography.

I see ethnography<sup>57</sup> as a broad qualitative method that aims to solve a research puzzle through *contextualization*. The general aim is to disclose or arrive at a deeper understanding of particular processes and mechanisms. Ethnography does not take place in a pre-established setting strictly controlled by the researcher, but is rather concerned with a close and detailed observation of various aspects of everyday life. The ethnographer is led by his/her observations, by the voices of respondents, by being attentive to what he/she discovers but not necessarily searched for. To borrow from Silverman (1985, cited in Herbert, 2000: 552): "order should emerge *from* the field rather than be imposed *on* the field". At the same time, ethnographers do not start their research projects as blank slates; their observations are made with a theoretically trained eye, which influences *what* they see, hear and smell. O'Reilly (2012: 32) refers, in this regard, to 'guiding theoretical problems': "All ethnography needs a guiding theoretical problem or general idea of interest to guide ethnographic practice. These are inspired by (perhaps lay) theoretical ideas about the world, and are not rigid or fixed, but can be adapted or discarded as research progresses". Almost a century ago, Malinowski stated something similar: "Preconceived ideas are pernicious in any scientific work, but foreshadowed problems are the main endowment of a scientific thinker, and these problems are first revealed to the observer by his theoretical studies" (1922: 9).

The ethnographic approach that I take comes close to what Duneier (2002: 1566) calls 'diagnostic ethnography': "...the idea is that the ethnographer comes to a site with the sociological equivalent of the doctor's medicine bag of diagnostic tools derived from already-existing sociological theory and uses these tools to generate a specific explanation of the 'symptoms' in the site" (ibid: 1566). Although the medical metaphor is somewhat unfortunate, as it implies that the object of study is an ill patient, the idea behind it is useful: the ethnographer is equipped and

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<sup>57</sup> Ethnography refers both to the 'doing' (the process, the method to gather data) and the 'writing' (the result of ethnographic research, the final account). I will mainly focus in this chapter on the former and less on the latter.

can aptly apply (and possibly transform and further develop) his/her theory-based analytical tools while doing research.

Data collection may follow from a variety of sources, but I would argue that the main part of the empirical material is gathered through participant observation, including informal conversations (see also Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Conducting interviews is often also part of the ethnographic approach, but cannot be the sole method used. Ethnography focuses both on what people *say* and what they *do*, and the possible discrepancies between the two (Herbert, 2000: 552).

Together with Hammersley and Atkinson (2007: 3), I would further argue that ethnography is best focused on one or a limited number of cases that are studied over longer periods of time. A two-week visit to a French suburban neighbourhood, for example, should therefore not be counted as an ethnographic approach. It is too short to make an in-depth and detailed analysis. On the other hand, the ethnographer does not necessarily have to spend a full year in the ‘field’, like the classic anthropological interpretation of the method prescribed. In my view, the task of the ethnographer is to obtain a good understanding of how people experience and shape their daily lives. The ethnographer is interested in “the interpretation of the meanings, functions and consequences of human actions and institutional practices, and how these are implicated in local, and perhaps also wider contexts” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 3). Like Greenhouse (2010: 2), I argue that ethnography should always involve “experience-based inquiry into the interpretive, institutional and relational makings of the present”. It is not the task of an ethnographer, however, to attempt to fully live through the daily life of his/her respondents and to try to plumb the deepest levels of their minds to arrive at the very intimate, which is, to my mind, instead the task of a psychoanalyst.

A phased approach, in which the ethnographer alternates longer research stays with periods of analyzing and theorizing ‘outside the research area’, is most appropriate in my case, a rhythm in which the ethnographer draws near and then distances him/herself from the daily life of his/her respondents. This creates space for a dialogue between empirical evidence and more abstract ideas and theories. Such a phased approach may also avoid the common critique of ‘going local’ and the frequent accusation that ethnographers may easily become too intimate with their respondents. Moreover, as I have experienced during my research in 4000*sud*, ‘returning’ creates trust and solidifies relationships with informants.

## Discovery of the ‘field’

Hammersley & Atkinson (2007: 3) list a number of characteristics of ethnography that are broadly accepted among academics. The first is that ethnographic research takes place “in the field”. In the introduction to this chapter, I described my first steps into the ‘field’ of *banlieue* La Courneuve and more specifically, *cit  4000sud*. La Courneuve is, as indicated earlier, one of the 40 *banlieues* that constitute the northeast Parisian 93-district, Seine Saint-Denis. The suburbs of ‘*neuf-trois*’ (nine-

three', short for the 93-district) have a notorious reputation and are generally seen as illustrative of the wider suburban crisis.

La Courneuve includes 38,789 inhabitants, who are on average relatively young (47.8 % is under 30 years old) and poor (with a poverty rate of 41.1% and a median yearly income of € 13,122 in 2012). Unemployment rates for people between 15-64 years old are 25.6%, which is far above the national average of around 9.3%<sup>58</sup>. For youngsters it is much higher. The inhabitants of La Courneuve come from all corners of the world, a collection of about 100 different nationalities; 11,055 are formally counted as *étranger*<sup>59</sup> (almost 30% of the population), meaning that they do not have French nationality. Others have French nationality by birth or have acquired it through naturalization procedures.

Two highways cross through La Courneuve and physically divide it into different sections. Rough distinctions can be made among four neighbourhoods: *Quatre routes*, *Centre ville*, 4000*nord* and 4000*sud*. The *Quatre routes* neighbourhood is situated on the southern side of the A86 highway and the other three neighbourhoods are north of the highway. Neighbourhood 4000, named after the number of apartments (4234 housing units were planned), was built during the late 1950s and the early 1960s. As in many other suburban neighbourhoods in France at that time, big and pre-fabricated housing blocks (*tours* and *barres*) were constructed at an enormous speed, due to the great housing shortage (see Chapter 1). In 1962 the first inhabitants moved into their apartments.

Compared to the other neighbourhoods of La Courneuve, neighbourhood 4000, and in particular 4000*sud*, has a notorious reputation, partly due to a highly mediated and politicized chain of events. It started more or less in July 1983, when 9-year-old Toufik Ouannes was playing with a couple of friends at the bottom of a colossal housing block named *Renoir*. At around 21h30, the kids lit some firecrackers. A neighbour was seemingly so disturbed by the noise that he shot from the window of his apartment at the boys. Toufik was hit and died shortly afterwards<sup>60</sup>. The subsequent media reports not only covered the death of Toufik but also focused on the setting in which the murder occurred: 4000*sud*. The neighbourhood's miserable living conditions were stressed in reports shown to television viewers: crowded apartments, degenerated buildings and no activities for the local youth<sup>61</sup>. Although these factors were not directly related to the death of Toufik, they influenced the representation and reputation of 4000*sud*.

<sup>58</sup> Numbers are based on 2011 and 2012 and derived from the *Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques*.

<sup>59</sup> Of those counted as *'étranger'* 50.6 % have an African nationality, 30.7% an Asian nationality and 11.8% a nationality from a country in the European Union. Numbers are based on 2006 and derived from the *Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques*: [www.insee.fr](http://www.insee.fr)

<sup>60</sup> The murder occurred in a context of growing xenophobia in France. In 1982 and 1983, a number of racist murders took place across the Republic and right-wing political party *Front National* celebrated its first victory, in the municipal elections of 1983 (see Jazouli, 1992: 43-52). See also Chapter 1.

<sup>61</sup> See *l'Institut national de l'audiovisuel* (INA): <http://www.ina.fr/economie-et-societe/environnement-et-urbanisme/video/CAB91003547/meurtre-de-la-courneuve.fr.html>

A couple of weeks after the event, François Mitterand, president of the Republic at the time, visited the neighbourhood and promised to take care of the inhabitants of 4000*sud*. He signed a large-scale urban renovation programme<sup>62</sup>, which did not actually begin, however, until almost four years after the death of Toufik. In February 1986, national media reported about the spectacular implosion of the building known as *Grand Debussy*<sup>63</sup>. The television cameras zoomed in on the banners that covered the building just before it collapsed; one could read in bold red letters “May a new neighbourhood be born” (“*Pour que naisse un nouveau quartier*”). However, that wish turned out to be an illusion as several violent events occurred afterwards, of which some will be discussed in later chapters, and 4000*sud* continued to be an area of ill repute. Four more housing blocks were taken down there in the following years: *Renoir* in 2000, *Ravel* and *Presov* in 2004, and *Balzac* in 2011. As primary school teacher Paul said, 4000*sud* is a neighbourhood in transition.

Although the infamous reputation of 4000*sud* has not improved over time, the field that I have tried to describe above is changing somewhat. Not only in terms of its rising and disappearing buildings, but also, as I soon discovered, with regard to its imagined boundaries. The ‘field’ that I have described is composed of people that can be counted; it exists by the grace of measured unemployment rates, poverty levels and the number of immigrants who live within boundaries that are created by the state. However, these institutionalized boundaries are just one way of imagining and demarcating the neighbourhood. They do not necessarily correspond with other imaginations of the neighbourhood and with the boundaries that inhabitants draw themselves. The first time that I stopped at RER train station La Courneuve/Aubervilliers, I experienced ‘leaving the train’ as synonymous for ‘entering the field’. Later, I found out that the neighbourhood that I planned to study is shaped in various ways, depending on the person that I talked to. Some see the starting point at the train station, but others a couple of streets further up the road. Still others see only the apartment building where they live as their neighbourhood. I soon realized that the boundaries of my field are contested, blurry and dynamic. I struggled with several questions: What is the field? Where does it start? Where does it end? And who decides where the boundaries are?

The early ethnographic idea of having a field that you can enter and leave is problematic. Over the past decades, the field concept has led to considerable debate among ethnographic scholars, especially in anthropology (see e.g., Kokot, 2007; Nadai & Maeder, 2005; Hastrup & Olwig, 1997; Gupta & Ferguson, 1997; Ferguson, 1997). Culture and place are no longer understood as bounded or fixed, but are regarded as interconnected entities in a globalizing world. Ferguson (1997:

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and <http://www.ina.fr/economie-et-societe/environnement-et-urbanisme/video/CAB8302385501/drame-la-courneuve.fr.html>

<sup>62</sup> See INA: <http://www.ina.fr/video/CAB8301384301/les-4000-video.html>

<sup>63</sup> See INA: <http://www.ina.fr/economie-et-societe/environnement-et-urbanisme/video/PAC00027506/la-courneuve-implosion-de-la-barre-debussy-a-la-cite-des-4000.fr.html>

138) states that: “the ethnographer’s still-familiar tropes of entry to and exit from ‘the field’, the images of ‘heading out to’ or ‘coming back from’ the field, powerfully suggest two separate worlds, bridged only at the initiative of the intrepid anthropologist. Such images, of course, push to the margins of the anthropological picture precisely those connections that link the two places, and situate them within a common, shared world”. Although classic ideas of the field have been refuted, they are still deeply embedded in the practices of fieldwork (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997: 12). The danger of applying a given or static field concept is that it tends to legitimize and contributes to the hardening of particular (often dominant) boundaries. Problematizing the field and its boundaries is therefore crucial in ethnography. However, as Nadai & Maeder (2005: 1) indicate, “problems of defining, finding and delineating a field for an ethnographic study are often absent from both, research reports and textbooks” (see for an exception, e.g., Madden, 2010: 37-39).

Although the field may be contested, blurry and dynamic, the ethnographer has to start somewhere. How then should I demarcate the field in my study? One possibility is to understand the field as a concept without any direct spatial references. The field does not necessarily have to refer to a location but can instead, or also, be conceptualized and operationalized from a cultural, social, historical and/or psychological dimension (see e.g., ‘t Hart et al., 1998: 266). The main problem is that a solely social, cultural and historical field dismisses the importance of spatial references which, even in a globalized and interconnected world, are very real and important to people.

Another possibility is to leave the ‘local’ and go ‘global’, or to combine the two. Olwig (1997), for example, speaks of ‘cultural sites’ instead of a field. She argues that people find themselves in a “... more or less permanent experience of not being in situ, as they negotiate a diversity of experiences in a deterritorialized world. Their insights lead to the cultural construction of places, such as homelands, which are viewed from a local as well as a global perspective” (ibid: 34). Recent discussions about the field have given rise to new methodological directions: mobile, multi-sited, or global ethnographies (see e.g., O’Reilly, 2012: 169-172; Madden, 2010: 53; Falzon, 2009; Hannerz, 2003; Marcus, 1995; and for a critique: Candea, 2009). The ethnographer should no longer stay in one location, but follow people, things, conflicts etc. (Marcus, 1995). The ethnographer should not zoom in on the local, this argument asserts, but use a broader lens instead, taking into account the interconnectedness of people and places. Indeed, I could follow some of my respondents to Mali or Algeria and observe how they visit their families. I could go to Abidjan, to see how money, earned in 4000*sud*, is spent in the capital of Ivory Coast. Or I could follow the global roots of rap music that many youngsters listen to in 4000*sud*. Although a multi-sited ethnography (following things or people) does pay explicit attention to the global interconnections, it is in the end confronted with the same problem: Where does each of the multiple sites start? Where does each one end? Who draws the boundaries?

In order to deal with the central field critiques and the struggle to determine an appropriate scale (local, national, global, multi-sited etc.), I propose the following: first, the ethnographer should explore and decompose the field. As stated above, the field is not a fixed or natural given, but a dynamic social/political/cultural construct. Dominant and institutionalized boundaries and the outside representations may be used as a starting point, but the ethnographer should be aware that it is only one way, among many others, to imagine the field, one way of categorizing and distributing spaces and people. I will not simply step into the dominantly imagined field and only study the content, processes and interactions within that field. Instead, I will problematize the constitution of the field, the very construction of its boundaries, the juxtaposing of ‘nature’, ‘space’ and ‘culture’ (Kokot, 2007: 13; see also Hastrup & Olwig, 1997). In the first chapter, I started this task by drawing on a governmentality approach and analyzed how the state contributed to the imagination and institutionalization of the suburban neighbourhoods. In the next chapter, I will elaborate further on this point by studying how people on the ground imagine and harden the boundaries of ‘their neighbourhood’.

Second, the ethnographer should, based on his/her research puzzle and his/her initial observations, select and zoom in on a number of relevant sites to study the processes that he/she is interested in. Those sites may be geographically close (as in a local ethnography) or far away from each other (a global ethnography). Whether the ethnographer crosses the world or stays in a geographically limited area depends on what he/she wants to know. I am interested in how youngsters living in the *cités* perceive their neighbourhood, deal with the stigmatizing identity images that are imposed on them and the meaning that they attribute to incidents of violence. Hence, for my research puzzle it isn’t necessary to travel to North- or Sub-Saharan Africa; instead, I can stay within a geographically limited area to study the processes that are central to my guiding theoretical problems.

The above is a more abstract discussion of what ethnography entails and how I approach the field concept. Let me now more concretely elaborate on how I carried out ethnographic research.

## 2.2 DOING ETHNOGRAPHY

Jean. His name is basically the only thing I know about him. In my hand a paper with his address. I found the advertisement an hour ago on a website. Jean offers a room: 14m<sup>2</sup>, in La Courneuve, at the border of neighbourhood 4000*sud*. On the telephone he only told me that he already rented out the room, but that we might find a solution when I come by, so I decide to go. During my three-week search for a room in the area, it once again becomes clear that 4000 has an infamous reputation. I read on a website, where rooms for rent are offered: “*I am looking for a*

roommate in *La Courneuve*, it has nothing to do with 4000!!!<sup>64</sup>. Also, when I visited earlier an apartment in the *4Routes*-neighbourhood, the owner of the house hastened to say that the part of *La Courneuve* where he lived was very different from 4000. "You see, it is very calm here, unlike at 4000. It is almost *residential* here. We have a nice shopping street, a supermarket, we have everything here, during the weekends a big market and it is very close to Paris. We are really at the border of Paris here" [Diary notes 8 June 2010].

Jean's apartment is on the fourth floor of a small building just across from a big budget supermarket 'Leader Price'. It is located on a quiet street with mainly small detached and fairly well-maintained houses. At the end of the street, the apartment buildings *Le Mail* and *Balzac* loom. The door is already open when I arrive; Jean is at the toilet but yells that I can enter. I have a look around: the living room has a light-colored laminate floor; a brown leather couch and a coffee table covered with a colorful tablecloth; a dinner table and two blue chairs; a cupboard with a few books, a couple of DVD's, some souvenirs and an enormous flat screen television. My attention, however, is mainly attracted to the many photos in and on the cupboard. The majority of the pictures seem to have been taken in some place in sub-Saharan Africa, showing people in what appear to be 'traditional' clothes. Jean enters the room, we shake hands and he invites me to sit down while he moves to the kitchen. I feel somewhat uneasy to suddenly sit in the living room of a man that I don't know. Jean comes back with a serving tray, two glasses and a bottle of orange juice. He serves me like a waiter in a chic restaurant: with one hand pouring me the juice, the other hand elegantly on his back. Jean is in his fifties, comes originally from Ivory Coast, and moved to France approximately ten years ago. He is divorced and left his four children in Africa. He has worked in France in the security business and as a porter in apartment buildings in Paris, but he is currently unemployed. One day he will return to Ivory Coast, because he doesn't want to spend his old days in a suburb of the French capital. He has a different dream, back home. His stay in *La Courneuve* is temporary.

Since we spoke on the phone, Jean has thought about a solution to my housing problem: "As you will stay only for a couple of months... come with me. I'll show you the room". I follow Jean to the hallway. He points at one of the doors: "This one is already taken by somebody else. And this..." he points to the second door with a big picture of himself on it "...is my bedroom. Well, there are two options. Either we both sleep here in this bed... You know, as friends... As friends... Or you sleep here and I sleep on the couch in the living room, but I can't move all my clothes". Jean opens the wardrobe and shows his bulging clothing collection. "So then I will have to disturb you sometimes in the mornings...if you don't mind". We go back to the living room; I say that I will think about the second option [Diary notes 9 June 2010].

The next day I call Jean again and ask him if I can briefly stop by. An hour later I find myself for the second time in his apartment. I want to explain him the

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<sup>64</sup> My Translation. Original quote: « *Cherche coloc à la Courneuve, rien à voir avec 4000!!!* »

reason for my visit, but Jean interrupts me: “First we have to eat!” Together with a friend of Jean, we share a huge fish in a spicy sauce, African rice and a bowl of baked bananas. Only after completely stuffing ourselves on the tasty Ivorian meal does he say: “Ok, why are you here?” I explain myself: “I have thought about your offer, but it makes me feel uncomfortable, you know, you sleeping in the living room of your own house... I would like to stay here, but then you stay in your own bedroom and I will take the couch, if that is all right with you” Jean seems relieved. “Okay, that’s fine. I will then lower the monthly rent for you”. Three days later I move to Jean’s couch.

After a couple of nights, little sleep and backaches, I decide to buy a self-inflating mat.

Soon after I settle into Jean’s apartment, I meet my other housemates. Ishmael, 26 years old, is originally from Guinea and moved to France three years ago. For the past couple of months he has rented the 14m<sup>2</sup> room in Jean’s apartment. Ishmael says he is working for the Public Gardens Department in a neighbouring suburb, but I soon doubt whether that is really the case (see end Chapter 5). He doesn’t spend much time in 4000*sud* and often comes home late, sometimes with female company, to Jean’s great dissatisfaction. “He can have visitors only once every two weeks, that’s what I told him, not more! Girls spend too much water. We, men, only take one short shower a day, not more. These girls are gonna cost me a fortune!”, grumbles Jean [Diary notes 1 July 2010]. Ishmael, in turn, is fed up with Jean’s interference and complains later “He always wants to know where I was, with whom I was. I am not a child, you know. It is not a prison here” [Diary notes 8 July 2010]. Then there is Patrick, in his thirties, and Jean Jacques, in his forties, both originally from Ivory Coast. They spend some time in the apartment (often staying in Jean’s room or occasionally sharing the living room with me) then suddenly disappear for days or weeks. Why remains unclear to me.

My first period of ethnographic research in 4000*sud* ends in August 2010. In 2011, I return to Jean’s house, where I stay for 4 ½ months (from April to August 2011). Ishmael, Patrick and Jean Jacques have left the house by then. This year Jean has reserved the 14m<sup>2</sup> room for me (now sleeping in there, I actually think it is somewhat smaller). From my window, I have a view on the *Balzac* building. A man named Hervé is now sleeping in the living room. He is 35 years old and works at airport Charles de Gaulle. His wife and young kids, to whom he sends almost all the money he earns, are still in Ivory Coast, his home country. He cannot afford his own apartment in France. During the first months of my 2011 stay, there is also Alain, a 22-year-old student from Cameroon. He shares the living room with Hervé.

Jean’s apartment is thus the starting point for my exploration. Living close to the research sites has many advantages. Many young residents seem to appreciate that I live in their neighbourhood. Sometimes it diminishes the levels of distrust related to my presence on the street corner. For example, on 13 July 2011 late at night, I come across a group of six boys, around 18-20 years old, hanging out in front of their apartment building. I haven’t seen them before. One of them shouts:

“Hey! ... Are you a cop, or what?” I tell him that I live in the neighbourhood. “Where?” I point in the direction of my apartment and say: “Just around the corner”. His attitude changes, and the other guys look at me more relaxed and friendly: “So you are *Courneuvien*! That's great man!” He gives me a thumbs up. “Hey, have a nice evening!” [Diary notes 13 July 2011]. Living close to the research sites not only contributes to building trust, but also shapes the right conditions for accurate and meaningful observations. It enables me to see what happens in the early mornings, around midday, when the sun has just set and in the middle of the night. To use Boucher's (2010: 46, my translation) words, it enables me “to experience both physically and psychologically what daily life in the ghettoized working-class neighbourhoods entails”.

Although the data that I gathered during these two research stays in 4000*sud* constitute the core evidence in this book, I also draw on insights that I gained during earlier research in other suburban areas in France. In 2007, I conducted research in *cité* Les Bosquets, in the north Parisian suburb Montfermeil. Moreover, from 2007-2011, I visited a number of other *cités*, for example, in *banlieues* Clichy-sous-bois, Drancy, Bondy and Aubervilliers in the 93-district; Mantes-la-Jolie, to the west of Paris; Villiers-le-Bel to the far north of Paris; and in other parts of France: Les Minquettes, a suburb of Lyon (see Chapter 1) and three 'sensible' neighbourhoods in Flers, in the Normandy region (see Slooter, 2011; 2007).

### **Data collection: participant observation, interviews, neighbourhood mapping**

As stated above, ethnography is not only concerned with what people *say*, but also what they *do*. I have used three techniques of data collection to capture both these aspects (and their interrelation): (1) participant observation, (2) interviews, and (3) neighbourhood mapping. I will discuss them one by one, in the order of relative weight, starting with the one that contributed most to my empirical material.

Participant observation is rooted in classic anthropology and inextricably bound up with ethnography. I understand participant observation as a study of daily life in a broad sense, including observations of people, their acts and interactions with others, as well as the physical, social, cultural and political setting in which daily life unfolds. It includes observations and participation in informal conversations, local festivities, the daily and ordinary visits to the supermarket or the bakery. It comprises observations of the architecture, the presence or absence of graffiti on the walls, the location of charred cars, the spaces that people occupy, quickly pass or avoid, and so forth. During my stays in La Courneuve I participated in numerous events that were either organized by the municipality or by local associations. I attended several debates, I joined the annual picnic to the countryside, I went to the celebration of 14 July, to concerts, a talent show, the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the local newspaper, a soccer tournament/fashion show, and many other activities.

The broadness of the method has advantages to the extent that it approaches the research puzzle with a relatively open mind rather than with a set of focal points and narrow hypotheses. On the other hand, it is problematic in that it's impossible to capture all the details of daily life. Hence, the ethnographer is forced to select only a limited number of subjects, acts, buildings, situations, and interactions for closer scrutinizing. My experiences taught me that three guidelines were especially useful in structuring my observations: broadening, deepening and reflecting. These guidelines also reveal the interconnectedness of data gathering and data analysis. They proceed in dialogue with each other throughout the research periods. Becker (1970: 27, cited in O'Reilly, 2012: 182) calls it sequential analysis: "important parts of the analysis being made while the researcher is still gathering his data".

During the first period (from May-August 2010) my aim was to get a general picture of daily life. I spent most of my time walking around, following routes that I had not systematically mapped out and that went beyond the institutional boundaries of the neighbourhood. The people and the experiences that I came across primarily directed my walks. I talked to as many people as I could, young and old; I contacted various local associations and I observed what happened during the full day (and night). In this first period I was mostly led by a broad array of respondents, observations and experiences. My starting point was youth centre 'La Tour'<sup>65</sup>, located in the northern part of 4000*sud*, where I spent many afternoons. The youth center offers a place to hang out, to just sit and talk with friends, play a game of monopoly or to watch a video on YouTube in the computer room. It is mainly the younger kids (up to the age of 17) that frequent the center. The older ones sometimes stop in but often do not stay long.

Franck, Karim and Moussa, the youth workers (*animateurs*) who were present when I arrived for the first time at *La Tour*, were more than willing to help me. Later I met other members of the centre's team and became especially close to Idriss, Moussa and Fadilah. They were not only helpful in arranging meetings with youngsters, but I also discussed with them my observations and let them, now and then, reflect on my findings. The youth centre had a separate room that I used when I wanted to interview or talk to youngsters without the interference of others. The youth workers of *La Tour*, most of them in their twenties, are hired by the municipality and run the daily activities of the centre. Apart from having a mediating function between the state municipality and youngsters in the neighbourhood, they are also very much involved in the internal dynamics of 4000*sud* (see later chapters) as they often grew up and still live in the neighbourhood. The youth workers are therefore seen by many youngsters who visit *La Tour* not as representatives of the state but merely as older peers in the neighbourhood.

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<sup>65</sup> The youth center is part of the municipality. It is open from Monday to Friday in the afternoons and on Saturdays the full day. All types of activities, both indoor and outdoor, are organized year round. These activities range from a karaoke-pizza night to a soccer tournament, from making your own bracelets to an 8-day trip to London.

During the second period of ethnographic research (April-August 2011), the aim was not so much to broaden my empirical data but to deepen my understanding of certain aspects that I came to see as crucial. My walks became more organized. Based on my observations, informal talks and interviews, I was able to select a number of sites that seemed meaningful to a number of young residents. For example, the square in front of the supermarket, the soccer cages behind *Le Mail* building, the porches of the *Balzac* building and the area where drugs deals flourish. My walks also became more restricted to certain parts of the day. I walked more often in the afternoons and in the evening. In the mornings and late at night the sites are often very quiet, except for the 'drug-sites', where trade goes on from 9 or 10 in the morning till half past 12 at night. During the second period I was still led by the 'field', but I imposed more on it, much more than I had in the first period.

Reflecting, the third guideline that structured my participant observation, occurred during both research periods. By reflecting I mean the constant questioning of what I heard, saw and felt. An example may illustrate this. On 22 June 2011, I am at 'home', brushing my teeth and making myself ready for the night. It is about half past eleven. Jean's bathroom looks terrible: The paint is peeling off the walls and some spots have been stained with mildew. The small and somewhat rickety side table next to the washbasin holds some five perfume bottles. And a bottle of self-tanning cream. I smile and wonder why Ivory Coaster Jean, very dark-skinned, has bought it. A summer breeze slightly vibrates the open bathroom window. The smell. I recognize it. Unmistakable. It is getting stronger. I have smelled it before. Something is burning. Two short but loud explosions follow. I call Jean and Hervé, they come to the bathroom, have a quick look outside and then go back to the television in the living room. The scene doesn't seem to impress them. The flaming cars, some 200 meters from our apartment, produce a spectacular image. They turn the white facades of the buildings next to them yellow and orange. Shortly afterwards, these colors are joined by a flickering blue: the flashing light of the fire brigade [Diary notes 22 June 2011].

The journalist usually writes about the exceptional, the spectacle for the wider public. The difference between the journalist and the ethnographer (see also Ragin & Amoroso, 2011: 21-32) is that the latter stays for a more extended period, and is therefore able to observe and study in more detail the fluctuation of calmness and violent outbursts and the variety of reactions to it. It is in the first place the rhythm that attracts my attention, not the spectacular event in and of itself. The alternation between spectacles and silence, between the excitement of some and the boredom of others, between the approval and disapproval of violence. Constantly asking myself whether I could also find evidence for the opposite of what I observed, heard or smelled, and how these opposites and everything in between interact and lead to a pattern that can be described. To arrive, in the end, at what Greenhouse (2010: 2) calls a "layered fabric of meaning and experience". It is this kind of reflection, fed by theoretical debates and

analytical concepts derived from various bodies of academic literature that guided my observations.

My observations and informal conversations form an imperative part of the collected empirical data. A careful and systematic recording of these observations is therefore important. “A research project can be as well organized and as theoretically sophisticated as you like, but with inadequate note-taking the exercise could be like using an expensive camera with poor quality film” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007:142; see also for example: O’Reilly, 2012:101-105; Curtis & Curtis, 2011:95). I kept a diary in which I noted what I had observed. I wrote out the dialogues that I had heard or in which I had participated as precisely as possible. I noted not only what was said but also how, where and who else was present. I also soon discovered the importance of reporting what I had observed quickly afterwards. If I waited longer than a day I found that I had already lost a lot of important details. Sometimes I went home during the day to jot down some notes or I used my mobile phone during the informal talks to make short notes or to save important catchwords. As many youngsters frequently use their mobile, it didn’t interrupt the conversation (see also O’Reilly, 2012: 102; De Jong, 2007:90). My diary equally included preliminary analyses, summarizing and categorizing the data that I had collected, as well as notes about my own feelings and reflections on my role in this research (see Curtis & Curtis, 2011: 88). I will come back to the degree of personal involvement in the last part of this chapter (paragraph 2.3).

The second method that contributed to my empirical data were semi-structured interviews. I only started interviewing in a later stage of the research process, after I had established a certain degree of trust. The interviews (47 in total<sup>66</sup>) had a loose structure, following a topic list and mostly held with one respondent at a time. Occasionally, however, I conducted interviews in small groups of two, three or four people. Most of the interviews were held at the youth centre, others at a local café, fast food restaurant or Jean’s apartment. Some people that I approached did not want to be interviewed. They seemed to distrust my intentions (thinking that I worked as an undercover police or for the secret service – see next paragraph), others seemed to be afraid of the questions, worrying that they couldn’t give me the ‘right answers’. I recorded some of these interviews, with the permission of my respondents. I did not just interview 4000*sud*s young residents but also older inhabitants, social workers, and people working at the local *associations* (see Appendix 1 for an overview of the interviewees).

During the interviews with young residents, I asked some to draw a map of their neighbourhood on a white paper, the third data collection technique (7 maps in total, see next chapter for examples). Many interviewees were hesitant to do so, fearing that they would not be able to give a ‘correct’ representation of their neighbourhood, while several claimed they were very bad at drawing. This partly explains the rather limited number of collected neighbourhood maps. The aim of the neighbourhood mapping data collection technique was to get a better idea of

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<sup>66</sup> This number does not include all the informal conversations that I had.

the area that the interviewees perceive as their neighbourhood, where they draw the boundaries, what sites and objects they include in their map and what they leave out. Furthermore, I asked them to indicate the places that they like and dislike in their maps (see, for recent applications of similar methods, e.g., Reinders' 'narrative cartography' (2013); and 'mental mapping' applied by Schut et al. (2012)). These maps show how young residents "decide what is faraway and close by, what is perceived as inside and outside, and who belong to us and who are counted as them" (Reinders, 2011: 61, my translation).

As I indicated in the Introduction, the gathered data was distributed unequally based on age (I focused deliberately on the most central characters in the suburban crisis: young residents between 12-30 years old). The gender distribution of my data is equally skewed. As my observations mainly took place at the street corner, a place dominated by young males (see Chapter 3), their stories and practices are more prominent in the coming Chapters. I was less able to get full access to the inner world of girls.

## 2.3 TRUST AND TENSIONS

Philippe Bourgois (1995: 13) states in the introduction to his classic ethnography *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*: "only by establishing long-term relationships based on trust can one begin to ask provocative personal questions, and expect thoughtful, serious answers. [...] In other words, in order to collect 'accurate data', ethnographers violate the canons of positivist research, we become intimately involved with the people we study". In the remainder of this chapter, I will elaborate on the relations between the researcher and the researched, deemed central in ethnographic research. I will sketch some scenes from my research that show that the relationship is partly controlled by fluctuating levels of trust. Moreover, the scenes unveil that I am also observed by the people that I am observing. It results in a reflection on my own role, as a white upper-middle class Dutch young man, and a justification for the presence of my voice throughout this book.

### The 'zoo': observing and the observee

On 13 July 2011 I meet Pierre for the first time. He is in his fifties and works at a cultural institution in La Courneuve. After I have introduced myself, he says: "Ahh, so you are here to study *us*. There have been so many sociologists that came to La Courneuve to study us. They have never shown any result. I have talked to many, but they have never ever come back to show me their results. They just come here to gather their data to never come back again". He holds for a while and then continues: "We have become an object of study for sociologists. It's not a good thing. That's not good. They have all tried to find something here, but in the end

they did never find anything. People are normal here. If you really want to study something you have to go to the 16<sup>th</sup> *arrondissement* of Paris<sup>67</sup>. There, you can find really something. Walk around in the streets of the 16<sup>th</sup>... Where is human kindness over there?" [Diary notes 13 July 2011]<sup>68</sup>.

Pierre confronted me with the objectives of my research, with my reason for being in the same room as he was. It made me feel uncomfortable. His words reminded me of the fact that researchers not only create their own 'field', but also their own 'study objects'. Earlier, I had heard similar remarks. Several youngsters displayed their aversion to journalists and politicians who visit 'their neighbourhood' for a couple of hours and then draw conclusions about who they are, what they do and why they resort to violence. "We don't live in a zoo!" they complained<sup>69</sup>.

Pierre was neither the first nor the only one who critiqued my presence in the neighbourhood. Soon after the start of my research I realized that I am not only the observer but also the observee. I am an exotic attraction in the 'zoo'.

On 23 June 2010 I am walking my walk and pass by a group of four youngsters. One of them follows me on his small bicycle, slackens his pace, rides next to me and says:

- "Sir, where do you live?"
- "Over there" I point in the directions of Jean's apartment.
- "Where is over there?"
- "Just next to the Leader Price."

My answer seemingly suffices, as the boy nods and drives back to his friends. He whispers something in their ears. They giggle.

The same day, I am stopped for a second time, at another place by a group of five boys who must be around 16 or 17 years old. The conversation is now less convivial. Two of them sit on a wooden bench and the other three stand around them. They talk to each other and some of them eat a kebab sandwich (*'un grec'*, one of the favorite snacks among the youngsters that I interviewed) and French fries, bought at the shop a bit further up the road. They fall silent when I pass by. Somewhat uneasy with the situation, I nod a greeting. I move along. After ten seconds one of them shouts: "Eh!" And then louder "EH!!!" I turn around. One of

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<sup>67</sup> The 16<sup>th</sup> *arrondissement* is one of the most affluent areas of Paris city centre.

<sup>68</sup> See Dangschat (2009: 837) for a corresponding academic critique: "... what Wacquant and the other sociologists are interested in is the 'hot spots' where discriminated-against foreigners and poor and marginalized people are concentrated (the concentration of the better-off, rich and whites are never of interest either to scholars or urban stakeholders)".

<sup>69</sup> A similar narrative can be seen in the classic movie *La Haine* (1995), about life in a suburban neighbourhood. In one of the scenes, journalists enter the neighbourhood and ask youngsters on the street corner some leading questions about a violent event. As the journalists do not dare to step out of their car, the youngsters say in return that their neighbourhood isn't '*Tboiry*' (a drive-through safari park not far from Paris).

the guys is coming to me, still holding the plastic tray with French fries in his hands. He has a downy mustache, sleep in his eyes, and asks aggressively:

- “Are you a *keuf* [a nickname for a cop]?”
- “No, I am not”.
- “So, you are not a *keuf*?”
- “No”
- “What are you doing here then?”
- “I live here”
- “Where?”
- “There”, I point to the Leader Price.
- “Where is there?”
- “Next to the Leader Price”.

In an attempt to calm him down, I say that I come from the Netherlands. To no avail.

- “Are you fucking with me?”
- “What do you mean?”
- “Shut the fuck up!! Fuck off!!”

The guy spits on the ground, his saliva lands just before my feet. He walks back to his friends [Diary notes 23 June 2010].

I don't wear the right clothes, I have the wrong haircut, I gaze too long, I have blue eyes, I am upper-middle class, and I am too white. My physical presence does not correspond with the stereotypical image of a *'banlieusard'*. While some young residents seem to appreciate my presence in 'their neighbourhood' right from the start, others seem more suspicious and hostile. I am stopped numerous times by boys and young men, mostly to check whether I was a *keuf*. The last example given above is among the most aggressive encounters that I experienced. I decided, however, not to try and imitate a *banlieusard*, to talk like 'them' or to look like 'them'. Every attempt to become one would surely fail. I estimated that a sincere interest in their neighbourhood and their lives and a respectful attitude was going to be the best way forward.

Young people on the street corner were not the only ones to notice my presence in the 'zoo'. On 1 June 2010, I walk through rue *Honoré de Balzac*. A number of young people hang out on the porches of the building; I guess they are running their *'bizness'*, as those who deal commonly call the drug trade. On the other side of the street two girls and two boys sit together, in front of the rundown Catholic *Chapelle de l'Emmanuel*. As the walls of the buildings that surround them echo their laughter, I see four policemen enter the street and calmly walk past the *Balzac* building. One of them has a *flashball*, an impressive hand weapon with rubber balls, holding it tightly in front of his chest. The sudden appearance of the policemen doesn't seem to lead to much excitement among those who are outside. “Sst sst”, I suddenly hear, then hear it again, more decisively: “Sst sst”. I look

around and try to see where the noise is coming from. And then again: “Sssss sst”. I realize that it is the policeman behind me who is making the provocative noise. I cross the street, leave *Balsac* behind me, and pass the lower and smaller apartment buildings and head towards the train station. “*Monsieur*” I turn around and look into the eyes of a male and female police officer. “Against that wall, please”. They point at the building right next to me. Then they guide me a little further up the road, where I have to stand in the corner, closed off by a wall and a concrete fence. They stand in front of me. Escaping is impossible.

- “What are you doing here?”, asks the female police officer
- “I had an appointment with David Degni,” I say, still somewhat confused by the situation in which I find myself.
- “Who is David Degni?”
- “He works at the sport centre across the road”
- “What sport centre?”
- “eh... Beatrice Hess”

The male officer gives me a suspicious look. His glasses slip a little down his nose; he pushes them back. The female officer continues:

- “Do you know what happens in this street?”
- “Eh..,” I stammer, searching for an answer.
- “Do you know what happens in this street!?” she repeats before I can adequately respond. She says it louder than the first time. I try to formulate an answer, but she interrupts me:
- “This is the number one place in France where cannabis is sold! Did you buy anything?”
- “..” Apparently my answer comes too late again.
- “Just tell me, did you buy drugs or do you use it?” she says firmly.
- “No, I didn't buy anything and I don't use it”.
- “Identity card, please”. While I explain that I do research, the male officer carefully looks at my French student card. After a while, they let me go.
- “Have a pleasant day, sir”.

Somewhat confused, I take the train to Paris [Diary notes 1 June 2010].

The encounters reveal that both state representatives and some local inhabitants noticed my presence and attributed particular roles to me. Paradoxically, I am at the same time seen as a *keuf* and a drug client. I am a stranger in an immigrant neighbourhood.

I was stopped three more times by the police, each time on my way to the train station and always suspected of buying drugs (which I didn't do). Some interrogations and searches were more hostile than others. When I tell Abdel, a 13-year-old kid, about an unpleasant encounter with a policeman who searched me, touching my crotch just a bit too blatantly and firmly, he says: “Yeah, that's what they do with people like you! They are just used to *Arabs* and *Noirs*” [Interview

Abdel, 29 July 2010]. Another day, I was chased by a police van and searched in the middle of the street. I saw the looks of those who passed by, and the old men who sat a little further up the road on the wooden benches under the trees and closely followed how the scene between me and the police evolved. I felt embarrassed every time it happened to me. Conversely, these personal emotions also provided insights into the feelings that some young residents may experience when confronted with similar police practices and were helpful in discussing these issues (see Diphooorn, 2013, for 'the emotionality of participation'). In the next two paragraphs, I will explain more specifically why it is important to take into account both my role as observer and observee, and how that leads to a particular type of ethnography.

### **Obstacles and golden rules?**

The attributed roles and the distrust that I experienced are not exceptional in ethnographic research and they are sometimes referred to as 'access problems' or 'obstacles' in ethnographic textbooks or monographs. Criminologist Jan Dirk De Jong (2007), for example, identified in his ethnographic study in an Amsterdam neighbourhood three central obstacles which he believed hampered his research: the police, the media and social researchers. As these outside actors had generally negative reputations in the neighbourhood, De Jong (also an outsider) had to invest intensively in building a relation of trust. Although I had similar experiences as De Jong, I argue that labeling these experiences as 'access obstacles' underestimates their value. These 'obstacles' actually provide crucial insights into the tense relations between the *cité* and larger society, and should not be seen as a prologue to the ethnographic research but rather as part of the core data. As O'Reilly (2012: 90) argues: "Access is not separate from the research itself; from it you learn about how people view things, what they want you to see and what they do not, and how they understand your own role".

Similar to De Jong (2007: 68-70), I also experienced the negative reactions that journalists receive in the neighbourhood. On a sunny day in June 2011, late in the afternoon, I walk together with photographer Aurélie to the apartment building *Le Mail*. I have just given an interview about my research to the local newspaper *Regards*. Aurélie wants to take a picture of me in front of the building that will accompany the article. Three guys hang out at the street corner. They look at the camera that hangs round Aurélie's neck. One of them asks: "What are you looking for?" I explain to them that we are going to take a photo for the local newspaper. "Oh okay, can you then also write in the paper that youngsters have no job, no work, no apartment?" His friend interrupts him: "Well, you haven't got a job because you get out of bed only around three in the afternoon!" The third one laughs loudly, and then to us: "... he has just woken up!" While two of the three guys are still laughing, Aurélie searches for a good angle to take the photo. Then another guy suddenly enters the stage, looks at Aurélie and says: "Miss, I would

stash away that camera right now!” Aurélie protests: “I have to do my work. I am sorry. This is my work. It’s for *Regards*”. “I am just telling you: I would stash it away. I warn you!” Aurélie continues to take pictures of me. While I try to smile, I hear the loud noise of an approaching motorbike. A younger boy, unrecognizable as his head is laced up by his hoody, stops his motorbike in front of us and agitatedly asks: “What are you doing here?” He seems to calm down a bit when I tell him that it is only for the local newspaper. He drives away. As the racket of the motorcycle dies out, the three boys still stand at the corner. “It is summertime...these kids also want to have a holiday. Give them 50 Euros instead of your camera that will also do”. They laugh. “If I were you I wouldn’t pass that building now (*pointing to Le Mail*), you’d better take the other way” [Diary notes 9 June 2011].

Rather than seeing the above type of reaction as an ‘obstacle’, I see it as relevant information. It is an illustration of the widely shared idea that ‘the media’ is (partly) responsible for the notorious image of 4000*sud*, and more generally of La Courneuve. Many inhabitants state that their neighbourhood is only in the news when something ‘has happened’: fights, car burnings, drugs, a murder. The positive aspects are not shown on television. During a debate about the representation of La Courneuve in the media, someone emphasizes the distorted picture that is often diffused. “When a trash can burns in Paris nobody sees it, when it happens in La Courneuve there are three camera crews around it. Clichy-sous-Bois and Montfermeil have the same problem. It sticks to our skin.” [Diary notes 19 May 2011].

Moreover, the fact that a number of youngsters think that I am a *keuf* and approach me in a rather unwelcoming way is telling. It corresponds with the larger problematic relation between young people and the police. Stories about policemen being racist or abusing their power buzz around the neighbourhood. The revulsion is also clearly visible. Numerous tags on the walls state: « *Nique la police* » (Fuck the police), spelled differently as « *Nike la police* », or as a variation on the same theme: « *Baise les keufs* ». Sometimes more personalized insults are tagged, for example on the buildings at the other side of sport centre Beatrice Hess, I read: “*Nique tony le keuf*” (Fuck cop Tony). It sits next to two other lines: “*nique la police*” and “*mamadu est le pede du 93*” (Mamadu is the faggot of 93) [Diary notes 27 July 2011].

Delamont (2004: 225) identifies three ‘golden rules’ with regard to access negotiations: “First, every aspect of the processes needs to be meticulously recorded, because vital features of the setting are made visible during the access stages. Second, failed access attempts are ‘data’, just as successful ones are. Third, the harder it is to gain access, the more likely the work will be rewarding once ‘inside’ and vice versa: very often deceptively easy access leads to barrier-strewn fieldwork”. Although I generally agree with these rules, they give the impression that once access has been gained, ‘the real research’ can start, which is in contrast with what I have explained above. Once again, access is not a prologue to ethnographic research but belongs to its core. Moreover, Delamont’s rules also assume a univocal relation to the field in which the researcher has successful or

unsuccessful access attempts, that is, in which he/she is accepted or refused. The picture, however, is usually more scattered than that and changes over time. I recognize that during the research process there may be a development in which the overall levels of trust increase. Nonetheless, the ethnographer does not build relations with the field, but with individuals. Some of my respondents seemed to distrust me until the end of my stay while others welcomed me and were willing to talk with me right from the start. Some of my relations always remained superficial, while others developed over time and became more intimate.

Although I did not have a true 'Doc', the famous local research assistant in Whyte's *Street Corner Society* (1943), a number of young people (most of all youth workers Idriss, Fadilah and Moussa) helped me find my way. The common suspicion of me being a *keuf* was often dispelled by those I already knew or had encountered before. Illustrative of this is the following example. On 19 July 2010, Lamine, Olivier and Ibi hang out in front of the supermarket. At that time, I know Lamine vaguely; we have only watched a soccer game on television with some other guys on a recent night. Lamine is a friend of Idriss (a respected youth worker) and works as a security agent at the local supermarket. I have also seen Olivier before, but haven't really spoken to him. When I enter the supermarket I shake hands with them. Ibi, who is new to me, says: "Bonjour Philippe". I greet him and walk into the supermarket. Every time I cross him afterwards he calls me 'Philippe', a typical French bourgeoisie name. I decide not to protest. I just greet him normally every time I see him. Two weeks later, Ibi stands at the same supermarket with two friends of Idriss, with whom I have a good relation. "Bonjour Philippe", Ibi shouts as soon as he sees me. One of Idriss' friends intervenes and says with a calm but firm and decisive voice to Ibi: "Hey, that is not Philippe". As I have already entered the supermarket, I cannot capture the discussion that follows, but ever since, Ibi has been friendly to me, and was happy to see me back in 2011 when I returned for my second research period. He never called me 'Philippe' again.

The fact that I am not French and have an accent also facilitates access. I cannot easily be positioned at either side of the imagined boundaries between the *banlieues* and wider French society. I am an outsider. The stereotypical image of Dutch soccer and the Netherlands' tolerant views on the use of soft drugs also contributes to comfort about my presence at the research sites. Besides Philippe, I also became known as 'L'hollandais', 'Hollande', 'Le sociologue', 'Monsieur l'inspecteur'. In text messages youngsters consequently misspelled my name: Lukk, Luk, Luc, Look. When I tried to correct it, they objected: "No, no, no, I write it like this 'L. u. k. k.'. Then I will better remember you" [Diary notes 11 May 2011]. My name is transformed and appropriated, which seems to be a sign of integration.

After a while, I realize that sensitive information has become more easily shared. Some no longer seem to remark my presence. As for example, when I sit on an afternoon, around four o'clock, outside in front of the youth centre. I am with youth worker Idriss and Modi (14) and Tarik (14) sit next to us. The boys frequently visit the youth centre, often together with a group of other friends. Karim, an older *animateur*, joins us and starts to talk about Dominique Strauss Kahn

(DSK)<sup>70</sup>, who has just been arrested in New York after allegations of having sexually assaulted a hotel employee. “She lied, you heard that? The maid, she lied! She is a drug dealer and suspected of money laundering”. Karim is laughing. A lively discussion follows. They gossip about DSK and women from Ghana, known for their involvement in illegal business, according to Karim. Just like those from Cameroon. “Hey, and is DSK now going to sue her?” asks Tarik. The discussion is disturbed by the noise of a passing motorbike. Instead of answering Tarik's question Idriss points to the guy on the motorbike and says: “Is he a *porteur*<sup>71</sup>? He doesn't live here, does he?”

- Tarik: “No, not from here, he delivers stuff” (*And then dryly with a smile on his face*) “Delivery service for the whole area.”
- Karim: “What stuff?”
- Tarik: “Kebab.”, Tarik smiles.
- Karim: “No shit?”
- Tarik: “Yes also.”
- Idriss: “Shit and *cam* [cocaine]?”
- Tarik: “Yes, everything.”
- Idriss: “How much does he get?”
- Tarik: “Two hundred a day.”
- Idriss: “Only two hundred? No, they earn more, no? The *porteurs*.”
- Tarik: “No, two hundred a day. The *guetteur*<sup>72</sup> fifty a day.”
- Idriss: (*laughs*) “ah it's the crisis, right? They also earn less now. Crisis (*the others laugh as well*). But the kid, he's young, no? He's very young”
- Tarik: “Yeah, 18 or so.”

Two girls in front of us play badminton. The wind blows the shuttle in uncoordinated directions, towards the roof of the youth centre. The girls giggle at every stroke, afraid that the shuttle will be blown away.

- Idriss: “So that means that a *porteur* takes 6000 a month?”
- Tarik: “Wait!” (*Tarik grabs his phone and calculates it*)....Yes. 6000 a month [Diary notes 1 July 2011].

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<sup>70</sup> Dominique Strauss Kahn is a prominent member of the French Socialist Party and former president of the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

<sup>71</sup> A *porteur* literally means a deliveryman. The word is often associated with the drug trade.

<sup>72</sup> A *guetteur* refers to the person who posts at the street corner and looks out for the police.

Tarik, who used to be rather suspicious about the reason for my stay in the neighbourhood, who didn't want to talk with me alone in the beginning because he "had nothing to say", now freely talks about the drug trade, one of the most delicate issues in the neighbourhood. It seems that Tarik is no longer disturbed by my presence.

However, this does not mean that I have fully gained access to the research sites in general or that these individual relations are stable. Suspicion and distrust may suddenly and unexpectedly erupt anew. For example, on 11 July 2011, in the evening, after we have eaten our self-made pizzas in the youth centre, I sit outside with a number of youngsters. We talk about the small fight that took place earlier that evening. One of the boys that participated in it bravely sums up the highlights of the fight: "And then I kicked him here, bashed him there". He shows his moves to us and then scratches his swollen eye. One of the bystanders says: "Hey, you have been seriously beaten up yourself!" and he points to the swollen eye. The boy quickly answers: "No no no, I just have a pimple close to my eye". Then one of the kids asks me: "Do you live here in the neighbourhood?" I nod in assent. "Are you an *animateur*?" I want to tell him that I do research, but then Modi interrupts me. I have seen Modi very often this year and last year, I have talked to him and I have played several games of Monopoly with him and his friends. Modi is quiet, somewhat shy, but had always been friendly to me. He says determinedly: "No, he's a *mouchard*". I had never heard the word before and ask him what a *mouchard* is. "You don't know what it is? You interview people and then snitch... you tell the police what we have said to you" [Diary notes 11 July 2011]. Modi's change in his way of acting towards me shows that access to informants is a constant negotiation process that continues through the entire research process.

### A fly on the wall?

The experiences above contrast with what some textbooks on ethnography state about the choices for different degrees of involvement and visibility in participant observation. Gold (1958) distinguishes, for example, four different roles: complete participant, participant-as-observer, observer-as-participant and complete observer. Hammersley & Atkinson (2007: 17) come up with a similar kind of continuum: the researcher can be a 'fly on the wall', almost invisibly observing the 'natural setting' or a 'full participant', actively taking part as much as possible in the daily life that is under study.

To my mind, the best approach is for the ethnographer aptly to change roles depending on the situation at hand: being rather invisible at some moments and clearly present at others to evoke a reaction or to ask respondents for clarification of their actions. The above vignette shows, however, that effectively navigating roles is not solely dependent on the strategy of the ethnographer. I probably could have easily played the role of a 'fly on the wall' if I were conducting ethnographic research in a university class, or maybe even in the 16<sup>th</sup> *arrondissement* of Paris. In

4000*sud* it was impossible: A 'fly on the wall' attracts the attention when he is, due to his differences, regarded as something more of an elephant. Hence, both the synergy between the researcher and the researched, and the dynamics of interaction between them determine, at least in part, the freedom and ability that the ethnographer has to take a particular role. While doing ethnographic research I realized more and more that my own role is inextricably bound up with my research. My presence triggers certain reactions as people actively attribute roles to me, for example as a drug client, as a *keuf* or as a journalist.

The role that the ethnographer takes or that he is forced into should, in my view, be reflected on during the entire research process and needs to be scrutinized in the final product (this book). Van Maanen (1988) distinguishes between realist and confessional tales, which refers to the various ways ethnographers position themselves in their writings. In the former, the researcher is almost invisible, leaving 'autobiographic confessions' for the appendix, if at all; in the latter, the experiences of the researcher play the leading role, his/her experiences forming the core of the book, which corresponds very much with some later forms of 'autoethnography' (Ellis et al., 2011) and the postmodern turn in anthropology. Neither of these types of tales would properly reflect the research that I have conducted. This is not a confessionalist book, but on the other hand minimizing my role and covering up my personal engagement would obscure very relevant data.

Somebody else going to the same research sites would have made different observations and had different experiences. Since research and data collection are not fully replicable, self-reflection and open and clear reporting about it is indispensable. On the other hand, overstating my own role, which may happen in confessional tales, diverts from the aim of the research: getting a better understanding of the making of the suburban crisis. This research is not about me. I therefore associate the style of this book with Van Maanen's third category, impressionist tales, which fall in between realist and confessional tales. Like the impressionist painters, they deviate from the static, formal and idealized and turn to everyday scenes and a learning process, to 'evoke an open, participatory sense in the viewer' (ibid: 101). "Impressionist tales present the doing of fieldwork rather than simply the doer or the done". (ibid: 102).

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the book arrived in La Courneuve, and in particular in neighbourhood 4000*sud*. I have pointed to some of its (in)famous apartment buildings: *Balzac* and *Le Mail*. I have introduced Jean, a number of young people on the street corner, and some youth workers. And I have briefly touched upon some local incidents of violence: the supposedly drug-related murder of 28-year-old Sid-Ahmed at *Balzac*, the death of Toufik Ouannes in the early 1980s, and the smell of a burning car. The book has moved from a state perspective on the making of the

*banlieue* and the categorizations of its inhabitants to the beginning of a local exploration and understanding of these places and people. At the same time, the book has moved from 'armchair theorizing' in the first chapter to a focus on social research that is nourished by ethnography in this chapter. Key to this chapter was an elaborate discussion of my methodology. Whereas the empirical material of my reconstruction of the development of the French suburban crisis (Chapter 1) was mainly based on evidence from written text and audio-visual material, the images presented in this chapter (and the coming ones) predominantly draw on data that I gathered through interviews, neighbourhood mapping and observations of everyday life during two longer research stays in 4000*sud*.

After my first steps in the neighbourhood, I soon discovered two 'ethnographic tensions' that I have discussed in this chapter. The first tension concerns the relation between the researcher and the researched. My presence in 4000*sud* provoked reactions both by young people on the street and state representatives. I was not only observing but also being observed. I was simultaneously suspected of being an undercover policeman and a drug client. Rather than seeing these role ascriptions by others as 'access problems' or 'obstacles', I have argued that these encounters belong to the core of the data-gathering process and should be seen as valuable empirical material. Following that line of argumentation, I proposed to describe my role in this research process not as an invisible and minor figure (fly on the wall/realist ethnography) nor as the main character (confessional tales) but as a research instrument, reflecting on my presence in the neighbourhood and the reactions that it provoked.

The second tension is related to the 'field', one of the core concepts in ethnographic research. I soon discovered that the field that I wanted to study is contested, blurry and dynamic. I had difficulties determining where the neighbourhood started and ended. What was included and excluded seemed to differ from one person to another. Corresponding with the theoretical discussion of the first chapter, where I argued that the suburban neighbourhoods should not be taken for granted as static units of analysis, I proposed in this chapter that the ethnographer should problematize the field. Whereas in the first chapter I discussed how the state's governing has contributed to the imagining and the institutionalization of the *banlieues*, I will examine in the next chapter the local processes of place-making: how the inhabitants themselves draw boundaries and give meaning to their neighbourhood.

While implicitly discussed throughout this chapter, it is important to stress here again that four measures have contributed to the reliability and validity of this research. First, I systematically applied the three data collection techniques described above and I carefully transcribed the interview data and meticulously reported my observations in an ethnographic diary. Secondly, my two long-term research stays in 4000*sud* enabled me to conduct both a detailed study of everyday life and to solidify my data through multiple and recurrent observations, informal conversations and interviews over time. Third, I have applied not one but multiple techniques of data-collection (triangulation). The combination of in-depth

interviews, observations, neighbourhood mapping and the consultation of documents (such as newspaper articles and television news items) enabled me to make more valid claims on the central processes that are key to this book. Finally, I developed a systematic dialogue between theory and empirical data, going back and forth between ideas and evidence. This systematic dialogue was started during my two research stays in 4000*sud* (guided by the earlier mentioned ‘broadening’, ‘deepening’ and ‘reflecting’) and was carried on afterwards. The coming chapters are an account of that dialogue. By drawing on various bodies of theoretical literature, I identified and coded the main patterns in my data. While reading the coming chapters, it is crucial to keep in mind that I will present my evidence often in the form of small sets of individual voices or descriptions of particular situations. These voices and situations have been selected and described because they are emblematic for recurrent and broader shared interpretations or acts in the data that I gathered. They thus represent larger patterns rather than just singular anecdotal reflections or coincidental occurrences.

After a long day on the street I arrive at Jean’s apartment. The television is on, like always when Jean is at home. Always, *bouquet Africain*, the African channels. I plop down on the couch in the living room. Jean enters the room, has a quick look at the clock above the television cabinet and says: “Ah! It is already eight o’clock!” I see that the hands of the clock point not at eight, but at ten o’clock. I look at him in surprise. Jean doesn’t notice it and changes the channel. Only then I realize that his mind is in another part of the world. Together we watch the eight o’clock news of Ivory Coast. Electricity is laid on a small village composed of mud huts. Jean enthusiastically screams through the room: “That’s very close to my village, very close! That’s were I was born!” One of the inhabitants of the village is interviewed and expresses his gratitude with the new development: “*Maintenant la nuit est comme la journée!*” (“Now the night is like the day”). A couple of hours later Jean turns off the television and goes to his bedroom. I prepare for another night in the living room. Through the open window I hear the Arab music from the cars waiting for the traffic light in front of our apartment building. Just before I fall a sleep I think of the village in Ivory Coast. Boundaries become blurred and less exotic once you shed some light on them, view them from different angles and perspectives. The boundaries between day and night. Between the *banlieues* and the city centre of Paris [Diary notes 18 June 2010].

# Chapter 3

## The Internal Place-Making Process

### *At the Bottom of the Balzac Building*

Poot and Bodie walk through the streets with a friend

*Poot: I don't know, man. I mean, I'm kind of sad. Them Towers be home to me.*

*Bodie: You gonna cry over a housing project now? They should have blew the motherfuckers up a long time ago.*

*Poot: Man, it ain't all be bad. I mean, I done seen some shit happen up in them Towers that still make me smile.*

Scene switches to a public meeting with the Mayor of Baltimore who speeches in front of high-rise apartment buildings

*Mayor: A few moments from now, the Franklin Terrace Towers behind me, which, sadly, came to represent some of this city's most entrenched problems, will be gone.*

The crowd whoops with joy and applauds, then the scene switches back to Poot and Bodie in the street

*Bodie: Y'all talking about steel and concrete, steel and fucking concrete.*

*Poot: Man, I am talking about people, memories and shit.*

*Bodie: That ain't the same. They gonna tear this building down. They gonna build new shit. But people? They don't give a fuck about people.*

*The Wire*, third season, start of the first episode  
HBO (2006)

From Marie's living room I have a view of the degraded high-rise apartment building *Balzac*. "They try to lure them in an ambush", says Marie to me a week and a half after the murder of 28-year-old Sid-Ahmed at the bottom of *Balzac*<sup>73</sup>. Marie is one of the first inhabitants of 4000*sud* that I interview after my arrival. She is in her sixties, grew up in a traditional working class family and has lived in La Courneuve since the early 1970s. Her apartment in building *La Tour*, is located just in between *Balzac* and *Le Mail*. The view from her colourful livingroom is spectacular. The Eiffel Tower looms up in the distance. Marie starts to talk, there is no need to ask questions. "They blame the police.... They were too late. If they would have arrived earlier, he would probably still live now. But it's not only the police. They also want to take revenge on the other team who killed the guy. I saw it written on the wall next to the elevator... that they are going to fight each other there and there... I don't know whether it's true.... Anyway, you should stay away from *Balzac*! It's dangerous. Don't go there... No, but really, don't go there [Interview Marie, 3 June 2010].

Marie was not the first and would not be the last neighbourhood inhabitant who urged me to avoid *Balzac*. Marie's warning reminded me of the very first time that I came to La Courneuve for a short visit in 2007. Meme, 21 years old, picked me up at the RER train station. I had met him two weeks earlier during a session of '*dialogues citoyens*' (citizens dialogue), a training programme for youngsters who have come into conflict with the law. Meme committed a minor crime, according to the police, something that he denied himself. He told me that he was arrested by mistake. While we walked towards *La Tour* and *Le Mail*, he looked around and said with a certain pride in his voice: "We live in the ghetto. It is just like Chicago here, ain't it?" he laughed. When my eye passed over *Balzac*, he said: "We can't go there. It's too dangerous... I can go there, but if we go together, we will probably get in trouble...".

In this chapter I will move further into the neighbourhood. Into a place, that is often simply treated as a sad setting in which dramatic storylines unfold. The *banlieue*, ghetto, or *cit * is, however, not a given stage on which people act and interact with each other. In the first two chapters, I have argued that the *banlieues* should not be seen as something natural and static, but as a social and political construct. I have pointed to the need to study the *making of the banlieue*. By drawing on a governmentality approach, I have started to analyze how the state has contributed to the imagination and institutionalization of the *banlieue* through various 'languages of description' (frames) and 'technologies of governance' (practices). This chapter will deepen and broaden that discussion by (1) a theoretical exploration of place-making processes; and (2) by analyzing how the state's making of the *banlieue* is negotiated and contested internally by various alternative 'languages of description' and 'technologies of governance' that are enacted by young people on the street corner.

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<sup>73</sup> See also start of Chapter 2

The above stories of Marie and Meme illustrate two tensions that are key to this chapter. The first tension has to do with the ways in which one can understand and study the *banlieue*, or places in general. Although I will later in this chapter elaborate on how I define the concept of place, a preliminary differentiation may be helpful here. One may describe a place by referring to its geometric position, the distance from other places. I could, for example, measure how far Marie's apartment building is from *Le Mail* (200 meters) or the Eiffel Tower (about 12 kilometers). One may also emphasize the material aspects of places, the built-environment: the streets, the parks, the buildings, the architecture -- the degraded state of *Balzac*, for example. Or one could focus on demographic characteristics, such as poverty rates, the degree of violence and the number of immigrant inhabitants. All these descriptions or identifications of place (separately or in combination) can be measured: in distance, in buildings, in people that inhabit the place. Travel writer and novelist Raban would probably classify these views on place as 'hard'. It is opposed to what he calls the 'soft' city. "The city as we imagine it, the soft city of illusion, myth, aspiration, nightmare, is as real, maybe more real than the hard city one can locate on maps in statistics, in monographs on urban sociology and demography and architecture" (Raban, [1974] 2008: 2; see also Reinders, 2013; 2011). The 'soft city' thus focuses on meanings and ideas. On how cities, neighbourhoods, ghettos or apartment buildings are subjectively imagined, rather than objectively counted in statistics and stones. It is about the possible dangers that Marie and Meme attach to *Balzac*, not about the degraded concrete material of the building<sup>74</sup>.

Secondly, I have shown in the first chapter how the *banlieues* have been planned and constructed, and how they are often externally perceived and policed as rather monolithic or homogenous territories, increasingly associated with danger and threat. If you come past 4000*sud* by train or car you will probably see a rough sketch that offers the stereotypical characteristics: high-rise apartment buildings, decayed *barres* and *tours*, immigrants. Maybe, at certain moments, clouds of smoke of a burning car. Many people may recognize it from images on television and in newspapers, but far fewer intimately know that landscape (see Augé, 1995). The longer I stayed in *cité* 4000*sud*, the more I realized that there are numerous and changing neighbourhood boundaries. Boundaries that may not be directly physically visible, but that are present in people's minds and enacted in everyday life. Places to avoid, such as *Balzac* as Marie and Meme say, and places that are embraced. Buildings and inhabitants that are by some perceived as part of the neighbourhood, whereas others would see them as alien to their *cité*. These two tensions, the soft and hard aspects of place, as well as the external and internal making of place, will be further discussed throughout this chapter.

The chapter can roughly be divided into three parts. I will start with a discussion on a particular 'language of description': the ghetto. Whereas the naming

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<sup>74</sup> See, for another example of the difference between the 'hard' and the 'soft' city, the extract from HBO series 'The Wire' at the start of this chapter.

is used by both state representatives and inhabitants of 4000*sud* (as Meme's words reveal), the term is also at the core of a fierce academic debate among sociologists. In the second part of this chapter, I propose to shift the academic discussion on the ghetto towards the underlying process of place-making. By recounting a brief 'biography' of the *Balzac* building, I will demonstrate how space is constantly claimed, appropriated and transformed by various actors, both externally through state governance and internally by inhabitants of the neighbourhood. In the last part, I will zoom in on this often understudied, internal place-making process. I will elaborate on how youngsters (especially boys and young males) create, negotiate, change and contest the boundaries, physical ordering, meaning and social organization of their neighbourhood through mundane discursive and practical routines that mimic the state's technologies of governance. The theoretical exploration in this chapter draws mainly on ideas rooted in cultural and human geography, sociology and anthropology.

### 3.1 FRENCH GHETTOS ?

*Cité, banlieue, quartier sensible, quartier populaire, ghetto.* There are numerous ways to name the place that I will explore in this chapter. All these names imply a certain approach to the concept of 'place'. Using the term 'suburban neighbourhood', for example, implies that the place is located at the periphery and does not belong to the city centre. The geometric characteristics are embedded in the term 'suburb', finding its roots in Ancient Rome and referring to a place that is situated under (sub) the city (urbs). In a similar way, the label '*banlieue*' is a combination of the words '*ban*' (a feudal lord) and '*lieue*' (a linear measure). In the Middle Ages, a *banlieue* was the area located up to a '*lieue*' (4440 meters) from the heart of the city that was still under control of the suzerain (Stébé & Marchal, 2009: 18; Le Goaziou & Rojzman, 2006:5). However, these terms do not only have a geometric connotation but also reveal power relations: the ruler lives in the city centre, the ruled in the suburb or the *banlieue*. Although our understanding of the terms today differs from the older ones, the power inequality between the city centre and suburban areas is still ingrained in the contemporary French geography and in the use of these terms.

Of all categorizations, most controversial in the French public, political and academic debate is 'ghetto'. Just like 'suburb' and '*banlieue*', its etymology is rooted in the past. In early sixteenth century Venice (Italy), Jews were ordered by the Venetian Senate to live in separated areas of the city (Haynes & Hutchison, 2008). Sennett (1994) beautifully recounts how the first ghetto was constructed during the decline of Venetian power and the rise of a perceived threat by Jews, who would contaminate the 'purity' of society. "The segregated space of the ghetto represented a compromise between the economic need of Jews and these aversions to them, between practical necessity and physical fear" (ibid: 216). The Jewish neighbourhood (the Ghetto Nuovo) was located in the old Venice foundry

districts; some argue, therefore, that the word ‘ghetto’ is derived from the Italian verb *gettare* (to pour) (ibid: 231). Others claim, however, that the ghetto finds its origins in the Italian word ‘borghetto’ (small part of a city) or the Hebrew ‘get’ (deed of separation) (see Wacquant, 2005: 8). Social scientific attention to the ghetto rises after the classic work of Chicago School sociologist Louis Wirth (1928) and even more so in the 1960s at the peak of the civil rights movement in North America and the publication of Kenneth Clark’s *Dark Ghetto* (1965). Since the late 1980s and early 1990s, the French version of the ‘ghetto’ and its supposed features are hotly debated in France (see e.g., Stébé & Marchal, 2009; Dikeç, 2007; Maurin, 2004; Lepoutre, 2001: 84-85).

### “A sociological absurdity”

Loïc Wacquant argues in his book *Urban Outcasts* that the ghetto and the supposed process of ghettoization in France is a ‘sociological absurdity’ (2008a: 160). He claims that the image of the French ghetto has been propagated in the past decades by exaggerated media coverage, by academics such as demographer Hervé LeBras and sociologist Alain Touraine, and by French policymakers, who implemented for example an ‘Anti-ghetto Act’ and the ‘ghetto’-oriented initiative ‘*Mission Banlieue 89*’ (see also Chapter 1). The increasing prominence of ghetto(ization) in the French debate should, according to Wacquant, be seen as a discursive construction, merely based on a moral panic (Cohen, 1972) rather than on *empirical* evidence.

Wacquant does not deny that one can observe an increasingly spatialized inequality in France and he acknowledges resemblances between the American ghettos and French *banlieues* (2008a: 145-150). Both are, for example, populated mostly by minorities or ‘ethnically marked’ people, both deal with high unemployment rates, and in both cases inhabitants are confronted with a ‘bleak and oppressive atmosphere’ (ibid: 147) and a negative stigmatized image. However, according to Wacquant, these are just ‘surface similarities’, while a closer and more profound look would provide evidence for his claim that French *banlieues* and North American ghettos should be distinguished conceptually. His argument is built on a number of differences (2008a: 150-162): (1) *banlieues* are smaller in size and less isolated compared to North American ghettos; (2) *banlieues* have multi-ethnic populations, whereas the North American ghetto is inhabited by a more homogenous population, mainly African Americans (see also Le Goaziou & Rojzman, 2006: 31); (3) degrees of poverty and criminality are much higher and more disquieting in North American ghettos compared to the French *banlieues*; and (4) the decay is less apparent in France as state authorities are more involved and intervene more directly and positively in the *cités* (with the buildings in the *banlieues* being renovated or removed and rebuilt, which contrasts with the neglect of US authorities). Wacquant concludes that the French *banlieues* are more akin to ‘anti-ghettos’ (2008a: 274, 284; 2008b: 115; 2005) due to their porous boundaries, ethnic

heterogeneity, absence of parallel institutions, a poor organizational capacity and the lack of a unified and shared cultural identity.

Wacquant's empirical evidence, however, mainly collected in the late 1980s and early 1990s, is severely critiqued by Kokoreff (2009) for two reasons. First, crucial developments in the past two decades would have made Wacquant's data obsolete and may unsettle his conclusions. In this regard, Kokoreff refers, on the one hand, to the investment of US authorities in the ghettos since the 1990s, whereas, at the same time, the French state withdrew from the *banlieues/cités*. On the other hand, he points to the changing composition of the population of the French neighbourhoods in the last decades, with the suburban *cités* increasingly populated by immigrants or non-whites (Kokoreff, 2009:566). A second critique concerns the little detailed information about the French *banlieues*, both descriptive and statistical, that Wacquant presented in *Urban Outcasts*. Kokoreff argues that Wacquant's field observations in, and his "several visits" to, La Courneuve were not sufficient to qualify as ethnographic research (ibid: 566)<sup>75</sup>.

### **"A sociological reality"**

Didier Lapeyronnie's influential work *Ghetto Urbain* also opposes, as the title of the book already indicates, Wacquant's reading of the French context. Lapeyronnie (2008: 9) argues that the term ghetto does not exclusively 'belong' to North American blacks, as it earlier did to Jews. What may have been labeled as an "anti-ghetto" in France in the 1980s has transformed, due to rising urban segregation, racial discrimination, unemployment, as well as the formation of a social organization marked by a street culture of young people, distorted gender relations and widespread use of violence (Lapeyronnie, 2008:13), into what we can today call a French ghetto. The ghetto that Lapeyronnie describes is isolated, suffers from decay, stigmatization and racialization, but above all his ghetto is characterized by a form of social organization to deal with difficulties that people encounter in their daily lives (ibid:11). The ghetto is, according to Lapeyronnie, not simply a place or a neighbourhood, nor is it a collection of poor or immigrant people. The ghetto is constructed both *externally* and *internally*. The population is more or less externally forced, based on social and racial characteristics, to live in the ghetto. At the same time they internally construct protection mechanisms to deal with the outside society (ibid: 11). The ghetto is, as Lapeyronnie metaphorically states, simultaneously a 'cage' and a 'cocoon' (ibid: 21; see also Clark, 1965). Hannerz (1969: 11) has a similar understanding of the 'ghetto', which he distinguishes from commonly used synonyms as 'inner city' (only a term of location) and 'slum' (a poor and rundown place). In contrast, the 'ghetto' according to Hannerz "tells us more about the nature of the community and its relationship to the outside world".

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<sup>75</sup> See for other critiques on Wacquant's book, for example, Pattillo (2009), who argues that Chicago's ghettos would not be representative for all North American ghettos; and Caldeira (2009), who questions the one-dimensionality of Wacquant's 'advanced marginality'.

Hence, Lapeyronnie (2008: 24-25) is predominantly interested in how people subjectively *experience* and *live* the ghetto. He searches for and emphasizes the social and moral logic and organization of the ghetto, as well as the various, ambivalent and contradicting interpretations and meanings that people give to the ghetto.

According to Lapeyronnie, people can live in the ghetto without living the ghetto (2008: 23; see Hannerz, 1969: 15-16). Likewise, people that live in the ghetto do not necessarily live in the neighbourhood. The ghetto may thus remain within, cross and go beyond the institutionalized boundaries of the neighbourhood. The fact that Lapeyronnie focuses on meaning and organization and moves away from the physical, becomes however somewhat problematic when he describes ‘his’ ghetto in terms of the population, the unemployment rates, degree of poverty and violence. All these numbers and statistics are based on an institutionalized and physically bounded neighbourhood<sup>76</sup>. Hence, he uses two different definitions of the area: one that is purely imposed from above with institutionalized boundaries of the neighbourhood, and the other founded on an internal and external social interaction<sup>77</sup>, with less clearly defined physical boundaries. Drawing a parallel with the nation-state concept may clarify my point. Metaphorically, you could say that Lapeyronnie’s description of the ghetto switches between the two constituent components of the nation-state: the idea of an imagined community (‘nation’/ghetto) and a physically bounded entity (the ‘state’/neighbourhood).

### **From a fixed definition of the ghetto to a liquid process of place-making**

The above discussion provides two important insights. First, the differences between Wacquant’s and Lapeyronnie’s definitions may be partly explained by Wacquant’s somewhat out-of-date data not including recent developments in suburban France. However, in my view, their disagreement can above all be explained by their different conceptualizations of the ‘ghetto’. Although Wacquant claims that the historic pathways of the French *banlieues* and the American ghettos are dissimilar, the decisive factors to determine whether the French *banlieues* may be labeled as ‘ghettos’ are numbers: homogenous composition of the population, degree of isolation, intensity of violence, size, investment of government institutions. Numbers tell the story. Instead, Lapeyronnie draws in his book heavily on the classic North American literature on the ghetto and sees many similarities in how people, on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, *experience* and deal with the ghetto. Whereas, Wacquant’s line of reasoning inclines towards an emphasis on Raban’s ‘hard city’, Lapeyronnie focuses mainly on the ‘soft city’, on ideas and interpretations. Lapeyronnie underscores the imaginary part of the ghetto (2008:

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<sup>76</sup> This insight is to my mind also crucial for policymakers who deal with problems of violence. Do they focus on the physical neighbourhood or on the socially organized ghetto?

<sup>77</sup> However, Kokoreff (2009: 560) remarks that throughout Lapeyronnie’s work one slides easily from ‘ghetto’, to ‘*cité*’ to ‘neighbourhood’ Bois-Joli.

29-35), the dissociation between ‘objective facts’ and ‘subjective truths’ (ibid: 25) and states that in the ghetto nothing is false, but nothing is true either (ibid: 22).

I propose to move away from the above dualisms on the ghetto by moving to a different level of abstraction. I will take the underlying term ‘place’ as a starting point. As illustrated above, the ghetto is a provocative (academic) concept. Social scientific debate on the ghetto may therefore easily get bogged down in a political, moral and highly emotional debate, thereby shifting the centrality of the discussion towards an issue of definition and insult, and distracting from the task of obtaining a better understanding of a social phenomenon. The underlying concept ‘place’ is therefore, to my mind, a more fruitful analytical tool to start the inquiry with.

In the past decades, ‘space’ and ‘place’ have received renewed attention across the humanities and social sciences. The germination of urban ecology of the Chicago School can be seen as a forerunner, followed by the founding works of LeFebvre and Foucault in the 1970s, but it is only in the mid-1990s that “the Spatial Turn burst onto the academic scene” (Soja, 2009: 23). Ever since, a purported overemphasis on time/history has been critiqued, and space and place are increasingly seen as important and crucial in the understanding and explanation of social phenomena (Warf & Arias, 2009; Foucault, 1986). As sociologist Gieryn (2000: 466) argues: “place is not just a setting, backdrop, stage or context for something else that becomes the focus of sociological attention”. Instead, places are an inextricable part of our daily social interactions (see Reinders, 2011). Everything we do happens somewhere. It occurs in a particular place. Or said differently, it is ‘emplaced’ (Gieryn, 2000: 466).

I understand ‘place’, as I argued in the beginning of this chapter, as a combination of ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ characteristics. The physical aspects, the social organization and the idea or meaning are intertwined and should be studied together rather than separately. As human geographer Cresswell (1996: 13) argues: “Places are neither totally material nor completely mental; they are combinations of the material and mental and cannot be reduced to either”. Both aspects are encapsulated in Cresswell’s definition of place, which he sees as a combination of *location* (“an absolute point in space with a specific set of coordinates and measurable distances from other locations”), *locale* (“the material setting for social relations – the ways a place looks”) and *sense of place*<sup>78</sup> (“the feelings and emotions a place evokes”) (Cresswell, 2009: 169; see also, for example, Starr, 2003: 4; Agnew & Duncan, 1989: 2). Cresswell’s subdivision corresponds more or less with the conceptualization of sociologist Thomas Gieryn (2000: 464-466). Gieryn states that places are composed of a (1) geographic location, (2) a material form; and (3) meaning and value. “Without naming, identification, or representation by ordinary people, a place is not a place. Places are doubly constructed: most are built or in some way physically carved out. They are also interpreted, narrated, perceived, felt, understood, and imagined” (Soja, 1996, cited in Gieryn, 2000: 465).

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<sup>78</sup> Tuan (1979: 409) also refers to the ‘spirit’ or ‘personality’ of places.

Like many others, both Gieryn and Creswell emphasize the conceptual difference between ‘space’ and ‘place’ (see also e.g., Löw, 2008: 42; Tuan, 1977). “[P]lace is space filled up by people, practices, objects, and representation” (Gieryn, 2000: 465). Space is constantly claimed and framed by actors and can be transformed into place(s) (see Glass, 2012; Schinkel, 2009: 197; Gans, 2002<sup>79</sup>; De Certeau 1984). In the same space various actors may make various places. The boundaries of these places may coincide, partly overlap or cross each other, the ordering and meaning may be contested or shared and agreed upon. As Schinkel (2009: 197) argues, space should therefore not be seen as simplex but as complex. Nonetheless, particular actors will try to represent ‘*their* space’ as simplex and natural. For example, the rulers of a nation state may promote and try to preserve the idea of authentic physical frontiers and the unity of a people that inhabit that space. In a similar way, advocates of a strong European Union, or youngsters that strongly identify with ‘their neighbourhood’, will emphasize natural boundaries and coherence among its inhabitants.

To summarize, the contradicting views of Wacquant and Lapeyronnie can (partly) be explained by the emphasis on either hard or soft aspects of their respective definitions of the ghetto. Moreover, I proposed that a focus on the underlying concept of place may deepen and advance our discussion.

The debate about the ghetto provides a second insight, which involves several attempts to pin down what the ghetto *is*. I suggest, however, that it may be more fruitful to pay attention to the constantly making and unmaking of places (or *banlieues*/ghettos) and avoid any uniform and reified categorization of these places (Gans, 2002). As anthropologist Baumann (1996; cited in Blokland, 2008: 376) argues, the question is not to determine which areas should be considered ghettos, but rather to investigate how “mechanisms of border creation and maintaining create areas where residents consider themselves involuntarily segregated and what processes and mechanisms contribute to this understanding of social reality?”

Based on my empirical data and inspired by Gieryn’s (2000) and Creswell’s (2009; 1996) definitions of place, I propose to understand the transition from space to place through four interrelated and contested mechanisms<sup>80</sup>: (1) drawing boundaries to delineate what is and what is not part of a particular place; (2) ordering a place by arranging objects (the position of some objects may be constantly changing or short-lived, whereas others have a more enduring position, such as buildings, roads, parks; the ordering or positioning not only involves ‘objects’ but also people); (3) giving meaning and value to a particular place (places are named and identified, and evaluative and emotional notions are attached to

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<sup>79</sup> Note that Gans (2002: 329) discusses the transformation from what he calls ‘natural space’ to ‘social space’, where I respectively use the terms ‘space’ and ‘place’.

<sup>80</sup> I loosely borrow here from Tilly & Tarrow (2007: 29), who propose to disaggregate processes into a number of mechanisms. They define ‘mechanisms’ as “a delimited class of events that alter relations among specified sets of elements in identical or closely similar ways over a variety of situations.” By ‘processes’ they mean: “regular combinations and sequences of mechanisms that produce similar (generally more complex and contingent) transformations of those elements”.

them); and, (4) the creation of appropriate norms and a social organization (determining what are and are not considered appropriate acts in a particular place) (see Cresswell, 2009: 5-6)<sup>81</sup>.

Moreover, I understand place-making as a multi-actor process. Places are not solely invented and made by urban planners and architects or through state frames and practices; rather, they come into being through social interaction. As Gieryn (2000: 471) argues: “[p]laces are endlessly made, not just when the powerful pursue their ambition through brick and mortar, not just when design professionals give form to function, but also when ordinary people extract from continuous and abstract space a bounded, identified, meaningful, named and significant place (De Certeau, 1984, Etlin 1997). A place is remarkable, and what makes it so is an unwindable spiral of material form and interpretative understandings or experiences”.

Places can be established, maintained, destroyed and re-made. They change over time; the four component mechanisms can thus be short-lived or more enduring. Places can become at certain moments more static and cemented, and then again more flexible and ‘plastic’ depending on the power that place-makers have. Those with more power are, obviously, able “to leave a larger mark” (Nas et al., 2006: 10). Places may, thus, have different degrees of fixation or closure (see Gieryn, 2002: 43).

I will illustrate the above, rather abstract discussion by taking a closer look at the *Balzac* building. The ‘biography of *Balzac*’ (see the following section) is, to my mind, emblematic of the process of place-making. The murder of 28-year-old Sid-Ahmed that Marie talked about above, and that had occurred three days before my arrival in the neighbourhood (see start Chapter 2), was not the first violent event that occurred there. In the past fifty years, *Balzac* has become a symbol of disorder, danger and threat. Gieryn argues that “[m]eanings that individuals and groups assign to places are more or less embedded in historically contingent and shared cultural understandings of the terrain – sustained by diverse imageries through which we see and remember cities [...] These culturally reproduced places are thus arbitrary but real in their consequences – for what people do to the land, as they make (or destroy) places” (Gieryn, 2000: 473). “The biography of *Balzac*’ illustrates not only *shared* understandings of the terrain but also the contestation in which multiple actors claim space and imagine and make place: a struggle between architects, the government, the police, groups of drug dealers, and inhabitants of the building.

Whereas the first chapter discussed a broader view on the making of the *banlieues*, thereby focusing on state governing frames and practices, the ‘biography of *Balzac*’ is a more locally informed illustration that pays attention to the *interaction* between various actors in the place making process.

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<sup>81</sup> The first two mechanisms correspond more or less with what Löw calls ‘spacing’. “Spacing means erection, building, or positioning” (2008: 35). The last two mechanisms come close to what Löw calls ‘synthesis’, “that is to say, goods and people are connected to form spaces through processes of perception, ideation or recall” (ibid: 35).

### 3.2 THE *BALZAC* DRAMA: A MULTI-ACTOR STRUGGLE ABOUT SPACE

Like many other buildings in La Courneuve, *Balzac* was built in the early 1960s and initially seen as a symbol of modern progress. About fifty years later its meaning has changed: a symbol of decay, danger, threat, violence, poverty and immigrants. The notorious reputation of the area became especially salient in the early 1980s, when the place was marked by the mediated and politicized murder of Toufik Ouanes, a couple of buildings away from *Balzac*, and the subsequent presidential visit of François Mitterrand (see Chapter 2). During my interview with Claire, a social worker in La Courneuve for over thirty years, she said: “Since Mitterrand’s visit in 1983 there are television cameras here. At that very moment, people saw that the neighbourhood was in decay. A building that was nicknamed ‘couscous’, became later known here as ‘couscous royale’. So much money was invested in the rehabilitation project. Later, they started to take down complete buildings” [Interview Claire, 27 July 2011]. Indeed, after Mitterrand’s visit the first urban renovation plans were announced by the French government. In 1986, building *Debussy*, next to *Balzac*, was demolished. It was seen by urban planners as an ‘obstacle’ that separated the *cité* from the rest of La Courneuve. For *Balzac* it would take another 25 years to crumble down. Nonetheless, the appearance of the building changed. In the late 1980s, *Balzac* was not only renovated but also had its form adjusted, with about 40 apartments in the middle of the building removed to create three big ‘windows’ (see figure 3.1). Architect Laurent Israel explained on national television<sup>82</sup> that these ‘windows’ would provide sunlight on the other side of the building. It would open up the physically isolated neighbourhood. However, in the same news item an inhabitant of the neighbourhood already expressed his doubts. Would this really help to change the atmosphere in the area? The architect had brightened the ‘hard’ *Balzac*, but was less capable of changing the ‘soft’ aspect of the building, as its dominant meaning remained dark and unreputable in the decades that followed.

Other events further marked the infamous reputation of *Balzac*. One of the most notable ones occurred on 19 June 2005, a sunny summer day, around three o’clock in the afternoon. Sid-Ahmed, 11 years old, died at the bottom of the building hit by a stray bullet while washing his dad’s car. (Coincidentally, he carried the same name as the 28-year-old man who was killed at *Balzac* in May 2010). The mayor of La Courneuve declared in the newspaper *Le Monde* that Sid-Ahmed had accidentally fallen victim to a mounting fight between two rival drug gangs. A local inhabitant, however, claimed that the tragedy was rooted in forbidden love and more general tensions between ‘Arabs’ and ‘noirs’ in the neighbourhood<sup>83</sup>. Later,

<sup>82</sup> See *l’Institut national de l’audiovisuel*: « *Observatoire banlieues: rehabilitation de la Courneuve (1989)* » <http://www.ina.fr/video/PAC9002151483/observatoire-banlieues-rehabilitation-de-la-courneuve-video.html>

<sup>83</sup> *Le Monde* (21 June 2005) « *La Courneuve en colère après la mort de Sidi-Ahmed* »

Nadia, an inhabitant of *Balzac*, explained it all, in tears, to *Le Monde*<sup>84</sup>. She was dating Mhamoudou, a ‘black guy’ with a Comorian background, and her family, with Tunisian roots, didn’t accept it: “A girl dating a guy is not well-thought of”, Nadia said in the newspaper. “With a black guy it is even worse”<sup>85</sup>. A day before the tragic death of Sid-Ahmed, Mhamoudou had sent Nadia a message to tell her that he still loved her, even though their relationship had already ended long before. The next day, Mhamoudou allegedly ran into Nadia’s brothers Salah and Mohamed. The encounter degenerated into a fight. According to a later newspaper article, Mhamoudou fired a first warning shot in the air. Salah also fired, to show that he was armed. It was supposedly the bullet coming from Mhamoudou’s gun that hit Sid-Ahmed, by accident<sup>86</sup>.

Both journalists and Nicolas Sarkozy, Minister of Interior Affairs at the time, hurried to La Courneuve. Sarkozy, surrounded by a crowd of inhabitants and with *Balzac* as a bleak background, entered through television screens into the livingrooms of the French public. “The inhabitants of *cité* 4000, like the other inhabitants in France, have the right to security...”, stated Sarkozy decisively, “... so we are going to clean up *cité* 4000 in the literal and figurative sense”<sup>87</sup> (see figure 3.1). Sarkozy had once before started a ‘zero-tolerance’ campaign against suburban violence. Sarkozy’s wording “*nettoyer*” (clean up) and “*nettoyer au Kärcher*”<sup>88</sup>, was heavily criticized, especially by the political left. A day later, Sarkozy responded on television that he didn’t understand why people were shocked by his language: “When I see gangs that deal drugs in the hallways of the apartment buildings, you need to clean it up. And when I see thugs (*voyous*) with air guns, you need to clean it up”<sup>89</sup>. The violent event and the subsequent political and media coverage contributed to the *meaning* of *Balzac* (and also of 4000, La Courneuve and suburban France in general) as a dangerous place in need of security. The short-term state ‘technologies of governance’ included increased police surveillance. The long-term policy practice was the complete destruction of *Balzac*.

At the start of my research in 2010 *Balzac* looks like a haunted house, waiting for its demolition<sup>90</sup>. Most of the inhabitants have already left. The housing corporation has assigned them a new place to stay, either in La Courneuve or somewhere out of town. A dozen families remain and wait for a new home. The

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<sup>84</sup> *Le Monde* (30 June 2005) « *Nadia B.: "C'est déjà très mal vu quand une fille sort avec un mec. Avec un Noir, c'est pire que tout"* »

<sup>85</sup> My translation. « *C'est déjà très mal vu quand une fille sort avec un mec. Avec un Noir, c'est pire que tout* » Nadia cited in *Le Monde* (30 June 2005).

<sup>86</sup> *Le Monde* (22 October 2008) « *Mort de Sidi-Ahmed: en toile de fond, une banale histoire d'amour* »

<sup>87</sup> See *l'Institut national de l'audiovisuel* (INA) - Soir 3 (20/06/2005). Interview Nicolas Sarkozy - Original quote: « *Les habitants de la cité des 4000 ont, comme les autres habitants de France, le droit à la sécurité, on va donc nettoyer, au propre comme au figuré, la cité des 4000..* »

<sup>88</sup> Kärcher is a German brand that is known for its high-pressure cleaners.

<sup>89</sup> See INA – France 2 (21/06/2005) *Opération de police à la Courneuve* – Interview Nicolas Sarkozy – original quote: « *Quand je vois des bandes qui trafiquent de la drogue dans les halls d'immenses, il faut nettoyer; Et quand, je vois des voyous avec des fusils à pompes, il faut nettoyer* »

<sup>90</sup> See also Chapter 2

place is now increasingly appropriated by a group of young people; I see how boys stand on the lookout at every street corner. “In La Courneuve there are two *équipes*, one from *Balzac* and one from *Le Mai*”, explains Marie [Interview Marie, 3 June 2010]. Then she suddenly stops and looks me in the eye. “You shouldn’t mention my name... Otherwise I am dead. I have done interviews before, but then I don’t tell the full story, you know. I am more open to you. So don’t tell anybody... otherwise I am dead. Really.” Marie continues: “Well, there is a drug trade going on for a long time already. However, it used to be much more hidden. We didn’t really notice it in the past, but now they stand on the corner of *Balzac* and when they see the police coming at the beginning of the street they shout: “They pass! They pass!” (“*Ça passe! Ça passe!*”), to warn the others. In the summer, when my windows are open, I can hear them. And indeed...” Marie laughs, “...every time I hear them, a couple of seconds later I see a police car coming by”.

Youngsters involved in the drug trade thus change and institutionalize the *boundaries* and *order* of place (by positioning people at strategic locations) and its *social organization*. They thereby contest the state’s practices of governing place. Moreover, these young people attribute *meaning* to the place by naming it: on the walls it says in graffiti letters ‘Booldog’, after the famous drug coffeeshop in Amsterdam (the Netherlands). Black arrows drawn on the wall accompanied with the text ‘*pare ici*’ (‘this way’ - misspelled in French) lead you to one of the hallways of *Balzac*, where the actual drug trade takes place. On the wall it says ‘*La maison ne fait pas crédit*’ (‘No credit given’) and on the other side ‘*Veuller patienté!!! Mercé*’ (‘Please wait!!! Thank you’ - misspelled in French).



Figure 3.1: pictures of *Balzac*, from left to right: the *Balzac*-‘windows’, Sarkozy in front of *Balzac* after the murder on Sid-Ahmed in 2005; Demolition of *Balzac* in 2011<sup>91</sup>.

The appropriation of place is not only limited to the hallways and direct surroundings of *Balzac*; the drug dealers have equally claimed a number of apartments. “They sell the apartments of *Balzac* for 1000 or 1200 euros”, explains Marie. “After a family has moved, the front door is barricaded by the housing corporation. But the dealers at the bottom of the building just force it open and sell it to homeless people. Illegal immigrants... there is many people like that who live

<sup>91</sup> Sources Pictures – *Balzac* windows: <http://desencyclopedie.wikia.com/wiki/Fichier:Cite.jpg> - Sarkozy in front of *Balzac*: AFP - Demolition of *Balzac*: Les Chantiers Parisiens (Facebook page).

in *Balzac* now”. Marie’s account is not the only one that I hear; similar stories circulate in the neighbourhood. *Balzac* has been ‘taken over’, at least in part.

The reaction of the French government is not long in coming. Just as Mitterand did in 1983, Nicolas Sarkozy, now President of the Republic, appears in the neighbourhood, surrounded by security forces, late in the evening of 24 June 2010. A surprise visit. It is a month after my arrival in the neighbourhood; a month after the murder of 28-year-old Sid-Ahmed at the bottom of *Balzac*. A state intervention follows two weeks later: in the early morning, riot control forces (CRS) massively enter *Balzac* and remove the illegal inhabitants. Later that day, I am unable to get near the building as I am stopped by the riot police that besiege it. In the distance, I see the removed inhabitants and I hear the muffled beat of drums combined with cries of protest. The government allegedly offered them three nights in a nearby hotel. Many do not accept it; enraged at having lost their home, they stay in front of the building. They have no chance to return as the building is permanently guarded by security forces. Watchdogs are leashed to the doorknobs of the central entrances. The state has regained power over the social organization of place.

However, the removed inhabitants stay. They cook in the open-air and sleep outside with their kids. Not just on the day of their removal, but they occupy the street for the coming months. A new CRS evacuation two weeks later makes little difference. As the removed inhabitants have no place to go, they just end up at the square 50 meters further up the road. An association that promotes the interests of the removed inhabitants provides tents. Marie tells me that she has brought some food to them. Youth worker Moussa and some others plan to organize a neighbourhood barbecue out of solidarity with those who lost their home. However, the event is cancelled by the local authorities at the last moment. When I later talk to Moussa, he is worried about the situation. “Did you see that video? Of the second evacuation?” He shows it to me on his mobile phone. “It’s really dreadful. It was also on the news, but they left out part of it as the images were considered too shocking” [Diary notes 2 August 2010]. I see how mainly women and children hold on to each other. They scream and cry, while CRS forces try to remove them from the square in front of *Balzac*. Their physical presence, their bodies refusing to move, are the only means they have left to continue their struggle for shelter<sup>92</sup>.

A friend of Jean is among those who have been removed from *Balzac*. He enters Jean’s living room with a blue cloth that carries an enormous music centre. He shakes his head. “France... France”, he sighs, “it’s wild, it’s wild... They didn’t warn us, you know? I don’t understand why they have removed us. The building is empty now!”, he says, embittered. “It’s because Sarkozy was here. He saw some youngsters smoking shit and dealing drugs. Someone would have cursed at him. He wanted to finish us off. This is the only thing that I could take”. He points to the

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<sup>92</sup> The video that Moussa showed me can be found here:  
[http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xe63l2\\_evacuation-de-familles-sans-logemen\\_news](http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xe63l2_evacuation-de-familles-sans-logemen_news)

music centre. “All my belongings are still inside the building, even my television. I can’t get it. And I don’t know if I will ever get it back. They sealed it off, the whole building” [Diary notes 2 August 2010].

On a summer afternoon, I count about 50 tents at the central square of the neighbourhood. Laundry dries in the sun on improvised clotheslines that are tied to the trees on the square. A refugee camp, only a few RER train stops away from the impeccable lawns of *Jardin du Luxembourg* in the heart of Paris.

When I leave 4000*sud* after my second stay in 2011, *Balzac* is slowly being taken apart (see figure 3.1). For the French government, *Balzac* is an icon of insecurity that needs to be removed and where order should be restored. For the illegal immigrants, it was a temporary haven in an uprooted life. For the drug dealers, *Balzac* was business, a place to make good money. For other young residents, it was part of their daily life; they have ambivalent feelings about the destruction of the building. Some feel strongly attached to it. “Take some pictures of *Balzac*, Luuk. Next time you come here it has disappeared”, says Moussa. “It’s better. They have already taken down four, five *barres*. Those big buildings cause violence. People pee in the elevator and in the hallways. Because they don’t feel at home. You see, in the small buildings, three, four families, they feel more responsible” [Diary notes 4 August 2011]. Oumar (20 years old), who lives not very far from *Balzac*, is less convinced. “We can never show others where we grew up. *Balzac* is a sick patient. Well, you don’t simply kill a sick patient. You cure him, so he recovers” [Diary notes 23 June 2011]. Also 16-year-old Salif, who lives in *Le Mail*, regrets the demolition of *Balzac*. “The big *barres* that’s what make it a *cit *. If they all take them down, then it will become a rich neighbourhood here” [Diary notes 19 July 2011]. Salif imagines *cit s* as ‘big buildings’; taking them away hurts, it destroys ‘his place’.

Wacquant (2008a: 148, footnote 17) has made a similar observation: “Such attachment is vividly revealed during the demolition of large towers carried out with a view toward ‘rehabilitating’ degraded *cit s*. The residents then express an acute nostalgia, even regret tinged with bitterness, at losing buildings that were also nodes of sociability and the physical supports of their individual and collective history” (see also Marli re, 2008: 719-footnote 5; Lepoutre 2001).

The rise of a modern building, murders, presidential visits, downfall and collapse. The above short ‘biography of *Balzac*’ has described some events that have marked the meaning of the building in the past decades. An historian would probably strive towards a detailed reconstruction of these events. However, the drama of *Balzac* includes not only traces of *temporal* but also of *spatial* developments. It contains elements that give insight into the contested process in which different actors claim space and try to make, transform, and destroy places. Not only government officials through state policies, architects through designs and journalists through the portrayal of violence; also people ‘on the ground’ in everyday life adjust and attach their own meaning to *Balzac* and the streets in front of it. Marie who forbids me to go there, the drug dealers who turn the hallways of *Balzac* into coffeeshop

Booldog, Salif and Oumar who feel themselves inextricably bound up with the slowly crumbling building. Space is claimed both by external and internal actors and the place-making process contains both ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ aspects. It is to the often understudied internal place-making process that I will turn to now.

### 3.3 THE INTERNAL PLACE-MAKING PROCESS: ROUTINES IN EVERYDAY LIFE

“Where are you going?” asks Jean, with a worried face. When I tell him that I am going to post a letter around the corner, he leaps out of his chair: “This late? It is half past ten at night! No no no, you can’t go outside now! Do it tomorrow morning.” I try to change his mind and explain that I have been out there numerous times at night. To no avail. “It is dangerous in this neighbourhood! Youngsters are bad here. If you walk alone in the streets, they will come to you and ask for a cigarette or a euro. When that happens to you, you’d better run. We are here in ninety-three<sup>93</sup>! In Paris you can walk in the streets at night, not here. Youngsters in this neighbourhood are bad. They attack the police. At our place [in Ivory Coast] that’s impossible. Youngsters know that if you attack a police that they will hit you in return. Till you’re dead. They will beat you, beat you, beat you to death. Here, if you beat someone they take you to the hospital to see and check if you have mental problems. [...] I am so happy, so happy that we don’t live in the *cité*. Sarkozy also wants to take down the other large *barre* [apartment building *Le Mail*]. The people who live there don’t want to work. The young Arabs have arms... youngsters, are really bad in this neighbourhood. My neighbour filed a request to move. He doesn’t want his daughter to grow up here. Now he lives in La Courneuve *centre ville*, he didn’t have much choice. I also want to move. I will stay in ninety-three, but no longer in La Courneuve. In other places people *talk* about violence, but here it actually *happens*. If people come to you to ask for a cigarette, you’d better run” [Diary notes 9 May 2011].

Jean does not only make me stay inside, he also (re)produces the meaning of particular places: the 93-district, the neighbourhood and apartment building *Le Mail* are seen as dangerous, inhabited by bad youngsters, young Arabs who possess arms or people that don’t want to work. In contrast, Paris is imagined as a safe place. Whereas Jean is clear about the meaning of these places, the boundaries remain vague and change while he is talking. At the start he refers to *this* neighbourhood and sees us as part of the ‘dangerous’ 93. However, later he explicitly states that we do *not* live in the *cité* and clearly distances himself from the area that he is describing. His words are emblematic for a contested and constantly negotiated process of place-making. How to make sense of these negotiations and contestation?

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<sup>93</sup> District 93, Seine Saint-Denis.

A concrete starting point may be the maps of the neighbourhood drawn by Sofyan (16) and his friends Abdel (13) and Duna (14). Sofyan, Abdel and Duna live in apartment building *Le Mail* and go to the same school, which is walking distance from their apartment. All three were born in France. Their parents come originally from Morocco, Algeria and the Comoros. During the interview that I had with them, the boys were initially somewhat hesitant to draw their neighbourhood. Several times they asked for a new paper as they felt that they had gone wrong. Sofyan was happy with his third version (see figure 3.2; and compare with figure 3.3, the ‘hard’ version of the neighbourhood) [Interview Abdel, Duna, Sofyan, 29 July 2010].

The central mechanisms of the ‘place-making process’, which I identified earlier, are visible in his map. The boundaries of neighbourhood 4000<sup>sud</sup> are, according to Sofyan, designated by three landmarks: *Balzac* (at the right), *Villon* (the four buildings in a square at the left); and a playground with a soccer field (‘foot’ at the top). He has ordered different objects. The main reference points are the apartment buildings, the shopping centre and parking places, the school and the playgrounds. The apartment buildings are named after the street on which they are located (*Rue Honoré de Balzac*, *Mail Maurice de Fontenay*, *Place François Villon*). Sofyan did not include the small streets with middle class houses that are next to the school. Unlike the *barres* and the *tours*, these houses are not ‘named’ (see for a similar observation, Lepoutre, 2001: 77) and are often referred to with the more general word ‘*pavillons*’. Sofyan has also drawn *Renoir* (in the middle), a building that was taken down in 2000, by then ten years ago. Sofyan was five years old at the time. “I have drawn *Renoir*, it’s gone now, but I drew it anyway because it used to be there,” explains Sofyan. The building seems to have symbolic importance; others also included buildings in their maps that are long gone. Just like the reactions on the destruction of *Balzac*, this demonstrates the intimate relation people have with the physical terrain. Some youngsters meet or say that they hang out at buildings that physically no longer exist. What once was (also) ‘hard’ is still there, but now exclusively in a ‘soft’ form.

Sofyan has attached meaning to places in his neighbourhood. With little hearts, he has indicated on the map the places that he likes: *Le Mail*, the playground in front of *Le Mail*, the buildings behind *Le Mail*, the parking place in front of the shopping centre, and the soccer field. The places he has marked with a crossed heart he does not like: the *Balzac* area, the *Villon* buildings, the school. He especially doesn’t like the guys from *Balzac*.

Finally, his drawing reveals a social organization. He included the objects that he finds important and left other objects out. He explains where he likes to hang out with his friends (for example at the shopping centre, which he has drawn in closer detail, naming the separate shops); and which spots and people he avoids (for example, *Balzac*).

Sofyan’s map is just one way to delineate, order, give meaning to and socially organize the neighbourhood. The maps of his friends Abdel and Duna look pretty much the same, but those, for example, of the girls Alima, Fadilah and Mariam (see

figure 3.4 for the example of Mariam) reveal different boundaries, orderings, meanings and organizations. They come up with different drawings and different stories<sup>94</sup>.

Obviously, the above four mechanisms (boundary-making, ordering, giving meaning and organizing) that can be identified in Sofyan's drawing are not literally carried out one by one. Rather, they are embedded in everyday discursive and practical routines that make, maintain and transform places (Löv, 2008; Ferguson & Gupta, 2002: 984). Based on my observations and interviews, I will distinguish between three routines: naming and narratives; *trainer* (hanging out at the street corner); and surveillance. These routines should not solely be seen as a form of resistance against external readings and practical constructions of place (e.g., by the state). Instead, these mundane routines have a dual function. On the one hand they produce and reproduce a demarcation with the outside world. On the other hand, they strive towards an internal social organization. Some are merely 'soft' and symbolic, whereas others are 'hard' and directly affect the physical environment.

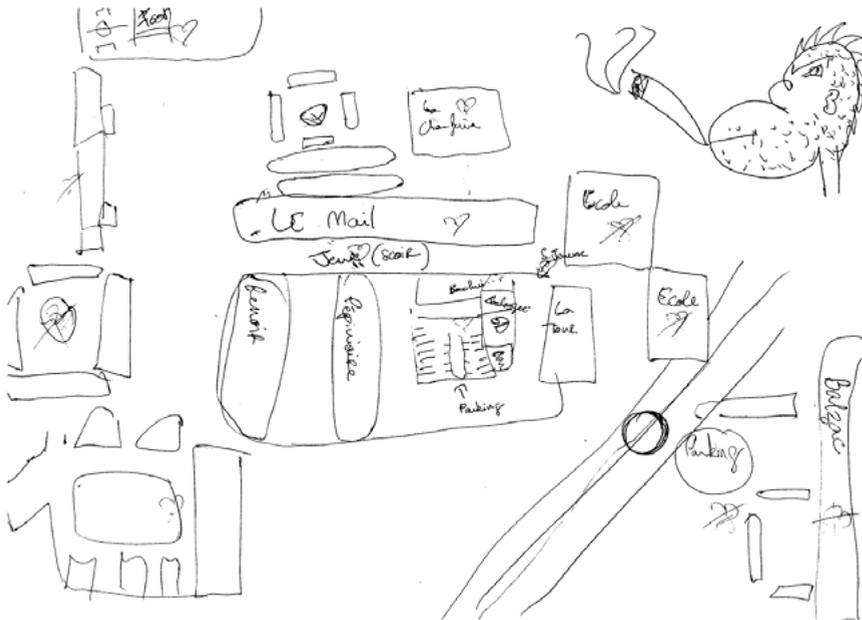


Figure 3.2: Sofyan's map of his neighbourhood.

<sup>94</sup> In comparison with those made by the boys, the neighbourhood maps drawn by girls covered a much smaller terrain and were mainly limited to the direct surroundings of their apartment building. While the very limited number of collected neighbourhood maps (only seven in total) does not allow me to make hard claims, it could mean that girls imagine and experience their neighbourhood in a much more restricted way. It would be interesting for future research to explore these possible gender differences.



Figure 3.3: The ‘harder’ version of Sofyan’s map of the neighbourhood (source: google maps)

### Routines of naming and narratives

Geographer Tuan (1991: 684) claims that “... words, alone, can have the power to render objects, formerly invisible because unintended, visible, and impart to them a certain character”. Tuan goes on “[i]n modern society in which empiricism, hard science, and control over matter are highly valued, people find it difficult to accept the seemingly magical idea that mere words can call places into being” (ibid: 691). In a similar vein, Julie Petet (2005: 157) states: “Naming a place functions as a public claim. Repeating a name, standardizing it, and displacing former names normalizes it... naming is an assertion of power” (see also Bhatia, 2005).

The stories of, for example, Jean and Sofyan reveal that narratives and naming may contribute to the delineation and meaning of places. As I already noted, the names for and the narratives about the neighbourhood are not univocal. Boundaries sometimes overlap and cross each other again; and in a similar way the orderings, meanings and social organization vary. What and where the neighbourhood is, where it starts and ends, is contested and negotiated. It may therefore be better to speak of a myriad of places with different degrees of closure. A similar observation can be found in Herbert Gans’ (1962) classic book *The Urban Villagers*, about the Boston slum West End. Gans states that from the outside West End was seen as a single neighbourhood that pretty much resembled North End

and South End. However, “the residents themselves divided it up into many subareas, depending in part on the ethnic group which predominated, and in part on the extent to which the tenants in one set of streets had reason or opportunity to use another” (ibid: 11).

The narratives and names that I heard during my research were at some moments broad and general and at other moments narrow and specific. They ranged from the global to the very local. “It’s like Chicago here, ain’t it?”, said Meme to me. Names such as ‘The Bronx’, ‘East side’, ‘West side’ are also used to describe the neighbourhood, and North American rap stars are admired by some (see also Lepoutre, 2001: 61-64). Indeed, young people may imagine themselves as part of what Jaffe calls a ‘cosmopolitan ghetto’. Jaffe argues that these youngsters have more ‘social ties’ with their peers who live in ‘ghettos’ in other parts of the world than with their physical neighbours. A similar observation was made by Gupta & Ferguson (1992: 20): “... the ‘distance’ between the rich in Bombay and the rich in London may be much shorter than that between different classes in the ‘same’ city”. It is debatable, however, to what extent such ties with direct physical neighbours are absent. Place-making is relational; it requires not only a self-definition of where you are, but also a definition of where you are *not*. Without the 16<sup>th</sup> *arrondissement* of Paris, the rich neighbourhoods in the western part of the inner city, 4000*sud* would probably be imagined differently. Direct physical neighbours are often referred to in narratives. They are needed to make a place, even though there may be little direct contact between them. In my view, images of the ‘cosmopolitan ghetto’ merely inspire young people and contribute to the meaning-making process of their ‘own place’ but do not truly give youngsters the feeling of living in a transnational community. Language is already a first and major barrier to create such a true transnational community, as most young people that I interviewed do not speak English.

Whereas the ghettos around the globe may inspire, the boundaries that are drawn in narratives are often more specific and based on their direct physical environment. Michel (23 years old), for example, who was born in neighbouring *banlieue* Saint-Denis and moved to La Courneuve at the age of 10, says, when I ask him whether there are differences between neighbourhoods in La Courneuve: “No, I don’t see much difference... maybe the landscape. When you are in 4000, that’s a stereotypical *cité*, with the big *tours* and *barres*. But for the rest it’s all the same. La Courneuve is not big enough to be different. It’s not New York with its enormous neighbourhoods, where you have a true difference between the northern and the southern part. Here you are at the other side of town within five minutes” [Interview Michel, 2 August 2011]. Jamel (19 years old), who has lived in 4000 since he was born and who is currently studying at one of the most prestigious university in Paris city centre, has a similar view: “Everybody gets along” [Interview Jamel, 16 June 2011].

In contrast, others do see essential differences within La Courneuve. Analysis of their accounts reveals that the boundaries are marked by economic

characteristics, ethnicity, morals or mindsets, and degrees of violence/dangerousness.

“There are various neighbourhoods in La Courneuve”, says youth worker Idriss, who grew up in 4000*sud* but now lives in Paris city centre. “You have 4*Routes*. It’s different there. People do not have the same economic problems. It’s more or less the rich who live there. Then you have 4000 *Balzac/Le Mail*. We are isolated. Here, people have been put together based on their weaknesses. The social integration in this neighbourhood is the worst of all areas in La Courneuve. Most of the drug trafficking takes place here. Then you have *Cosmonautes*<sup>95</sup>. That neighbourhood has a very closed architecture. People who live there, they almost all have a job. La Courneuve has a reputation of being dirty. Well, have a look at *Cosmonautes* or 4*Routes*, it looks different there. And then finally you have Verlainie<sup>96</sup>, it is kind of calm there. In Verlainie people are really different. They don’t have the will to be Courneuvien. They miss the psychological connection, you know. They have a different mindset. They have the feeling that the municipality doesn’t do anything to help them... La Courneuve is not made for social exchange. We all live on small different pieces of land. Here is a small piece, there a small piece, there another small piece. That’s the way it is constructed. It is not made for openness. If youngsters didn’t go to school, they wouldn’t know each other. In other towns there is more oxygen, more air. They have been built differently, not as a prison. There is more life and less delinquency [Interview Idriss, 7 July 2010].

Youth worker Fouad (30 years old), who was born in 4000, draws similar boundaries: “Yes, there are four neighbourhoods in La Courneuve: *Verlainie*, *La Tour*<sup>97</sup>, 4*Routes* and *Centre Ville*. The last one is also known as “Inter”. 4*Routes* is more quiet compared to the other neighbourhoods. Parents work and there is little delinquency. They take better care of their children. They go on holiday. And *Centre Ville* is a bit in between, you know, pretty calm. There are young people who study and others who are in the *business*. And there are also big differences between *Verlainie* and *La Tour*. In the first place, because *Verlainie* has mainly a population that comes originally from the *Maghreb*. *La Tour* is much more mixed, *Arab* and *Noir*. And at *Verlainie* the older guys stay more with the younger kids. So, if they see the big ones smoking and drinking, the younger kids often join them. At *La Tour* it is mainly delinquency. A lot of delinquency. Theft. A lot of young people in this neighbourhood have been in prison or are still in prison” [Interview Fouad, 13 May 2011].

For Sofyan, Abdel and Duna, however, the boundary with *Verlainie* is less salient.

<sup>95</sup> According to the institutionalized boundaries, *cité Cosmonautes* is not part of La Courneuve, but of neighbouring suburb Saint-Denis.

<sup>96</sup> After Rue Paul Verlainie. Others also call this ‘neighbourhood’ 4000*nord*.

<sup>97</sup> Fouad refers here only to one building, whereas others would say that *Balzac*, *Le Mail* and *La Tour* together form 4000*sud*.

- Duna: In La Courneuve, 4000*sud* is the ‘wildest’ [*le plus chaud*]!  
 Sofyan: Yes, it is the ‘wildest’!  
 Duna: It’s more dangerous than *Verlaine*.  
 Luuk: Do you have friends at *Verlaine*?  
 Abdel: We know them from school, but they are not our best friends, you know... our true friends live here.  
 Sofyan: Yeah, the guys who live here are our brothers... at *Verlaine*, those guys are our cousins, you see what I mean?  
 Duna: Yes, there is a better atmosphere here. Everybody knows each other here...  
 Abdel: And there’s more shops here.

Sofyan, Duna, and Abdel emphasize instead a harsh divide between *Balzac* and *Le Mail*. The boys don’t like to cross the road, *L’avenue du Général-Leclerc*, that separates the two buildings (see also figure 3.2 and 3.3). [Interview Abdel, Duna, Sofyan, 29 July 2010].

Mariam (20 years old) also sees *Balzac* as a separate neighbourhood. She doesn’t like the place: “There’s a bad atmosphere at *Balzac*”. Unlike Sofyan, she didn’t even include *Balzac* in her map of the neighbourhood (see figure 3.4). She just drew *le Mail*, the apartment building where she lives, the playground next to it (indicated with ‘*jeux*’), and part of the shopping mall (including youth centre *La Tour*) and the primary school. After Mariam finishes her map, she signs her drawing. Behind her signature<sup>98</sup> she jots down ‘(93)’. I ask her what the numbers are for. “It stands for La Courneuve!”, she says full of pride [Interview Mariam, 20 July 2010].

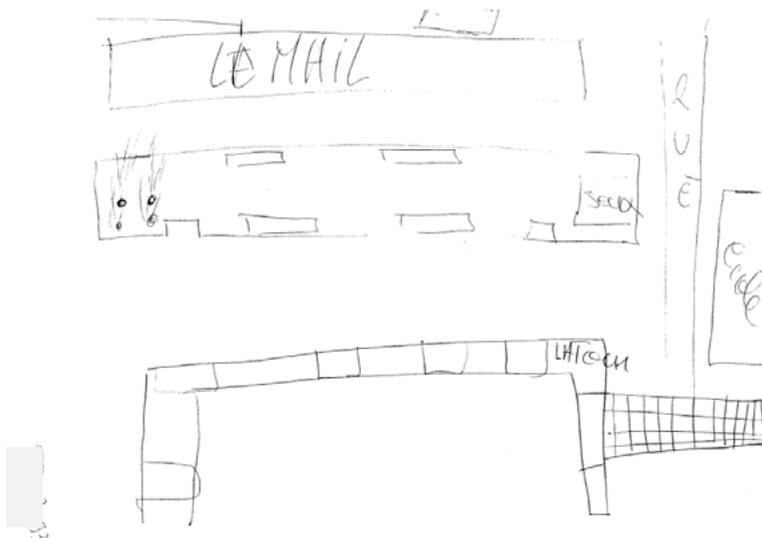


Figure 3.4: Mariam’s map of her neighbourhood.

<sup>98</sup> For privacy reasons her real name has been blurred in Figure 4.4.

Saeed (27 years old), who like Sofyan, Abdel, Duna and Mariam lives in *Le Mail*, sees different boundaries: “No, there is no rivalry between *Balzac* and *Le Mail*. That’s what people say that don’t know this place. I sometimes go to *Balzac*, nothing happens to me. These kids that just passed by and with whom we shook hands. They all live at *Balzac*. Well, there’s the proof that there is no rivalry. Even, when there are problems in Aubervilliers or Saint-Denis<sup>99</sup> with one of our guys, we go there together you know what I mean? We are here in 4000*sud*.” When I ask him about *Verlaine* he says: “Oh no, no... no we don’t like the guys from *Verlaine*. *Verlaine* is 4000*nord*. No, we don’t like the guys from *Verlaine*. Why? It has always been like that. I don’t know why. It’s just like that. Like you have East Coast – West Coast. It’s kind of the same here. You have 4000*nord* and 4000*sud*. They don’t come here. A guy from *Verlaine*. No, they don’t come here [Interview Saeed, 26 July 2010]. A bit later, 27-year-old Hassan passes by. Hassan works at the youth centre *La Tour*, but lives in *Verlaine*. Saeed shakes hands with Hassan. Apparently, this is not the right moment to act upon the difference.

Places are not only produced and reproduced through the everyday talk and names, but also through practices. For example, in rap songs and in graffiti inscriptions on the walls.

At the beginning of the summer of 2011, youth worker Moussa and his association have organized a soccer tournament. It is held at a sports centre at the other side of La Courneuve, about a 20 minute walk from *Balzac*. All soccer teams in La Courneuve with players over 18 years old take part in the tournament. Sofyan, Abdel and Duna are present, even though they are too young to participate. Mariam is selling drinks and food. Big barbeques with merguez sausages and hamburgers produce dense clouds of smoke that move in the direction of the soccer fields. “Hey put these barbecues in the direction of Paris!”, jokes someone. The bystanders roar with laughter. Youth worker Idriss stands on a stage next to the soccer fields and announces the various acts that will be staged this afternoon. About twenty plastic bucket seats in front of it are occupied by both boys and girls, though they sit mostly separated from each other. A group of young girls dances to Beyonce’s latest record. “Hey DJ, Hey DJ, Hey DJ”, screams Idriss through the microphone, to stir up the public. The girls are followed by a local rap star, apparently loved by the public. He raps: “I live in La Courneuve/4*keus*/ *Banlieue Nord*/ I live in La Courneuve/4*keus*/ *Banlieue Nord*” [Diary notes 19 June 2011]. The name 4*keus* refers to 4000*sud*, which is *verlan*<sup>100</sup> for 4 *sacs* (four bags). Nobody really knows where the name comes from. “That name exists already for a long time. It has always been 4*keus* or 4*sac* for 4000*sud*. I don’t know why”, says youth worker Marc, who has lived for 30 years in 4000 [Interview Marc and Claire, 27 July 2011].

I see open affirmations of the neighbourhood on the walls of the shopping centre, in and outside the apartment buildings, at the train station, and many other

<sup>99</sup> Aubervilliers and Saint-Denis are neighbouring suburbs.

<sup>100</sup> Suburban slang in which the syllables of words are inverted.

locations: ‘93120’, ‘4*keus*’, ‘4000 *en force*’. The same numbers and names appear on t-shirts and shoes that some youngsters wear. I see t-shirts with ‘93’, ‘4*KEUS*’, or ‘*Produit 2 Banlieue*’ (product of the *banlieue*) printed on it. Abdel wears one with ‘93 DON’T PANIC’ on it.

By naming the neighbourhood and its buildings, young people claim space (see Anderson, 2010: 141-152; Cresswell, 1996; Peteet, 1996; Tuan, 1991; Ley & Cybriwsky, 1974). Names and narratives (re)produce a variety of places that oppose the outside and structure the inside. Whereas some see *banlieue* La Courneuve as a rather homogeneous whole, many differentiate among particular neighbourhoods with their own ethnic, socio-economic and moral characteristics. Boundaries are, however, contested and range from the global (‘ghetto’), national (all *banlieues* in France), and department level (93), but are most explicit on the very local level. Neighbourhood 4000*sud*, and *Balzac* in particular, is by many seen as the most problematic place (the ‘wildest’ and most dangerous).

### Routines of ‘trainer’

Sofyan likes to hang around in the afternoons and evenings with his friends Abdel and Duna. Often four to five other boys join them. For many young residents, *trainer* (the French word for hanging out) is an enjoyable way to pass the time. *Trainer* is not a random activity, but changes the order of place as youngsters physically occupy space. Furthermore, it follows explicit and implicit rules that produce and reproduce both physical boundaries and a form of social organization. Unlike the first routine that is enacted by both boys and girls, the routine of *trainer* is mostly a boys’ affair.

Sofyan’s, Abdel’s and Duna’s daily round is relatively stable and bounded: *Le Mail*, the soccer fields, and the parking place in front of the shopping centre (see also Sofyan’s map, figure 3.2). The boys often hang out at a certain spot for a while and then move on to the next one. However, they preferably stay, like many others, in the direct surroundings of the apartment building where they live. On special occasions they may leave their neighbourhood, for example to go to soccer tournaments, concerts or the yearly ‘La Courneuve Beach’ in the summer and the firework shows on the night before *quatorze juillet*.

Sofyan, Abdel and Duna mainly hang out with guys their own age: “The young ones stay with the young ones, the older guys with the older”<sup>101</sup>, explains Sofyan. He points to the map that he has just drawn and indicates that there are three different groups of older guys that often meet behind *Le Mail*. Sofyan and his friends can go there and sometimes talk to these older guys, but they are not supposed to stay for long [Interview Abdel, Duna, Sofyan, 29 July 2010].

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<sup>101</sup> The ‘young ones’ are here youngsters roughly between 12-17, the ‘older ones’ are between 17-30 years old.

Routines of *trainer* are not only influenced by age but also by gender<sup>102</sup>. “Girls hang among each other, but not on the streets,” says Abdel. Duna adds: “We do sometimes talk with girls, but we don’t go in the streets with them”. Aicha (21 years old) says that girls don’t hang out at the bottom of a building but rather at home or at a friend’s place. Youth worker Dany (27 years old) says: “Girls cannot hang out with guys. They stay alone, or they go somewhere else. To Le Bourget or Aubervilliers [neighbouring towns]. Because of the rumours, gossiping. If she stays in the neighbourhood and hangs out on the streets, then you will soon hear the stories. That she earns her money like that... you know... That she is a whore” [Interview Dany, 30 May 2011].

My observations reveal that girls are present in the streets but that they are indeed often on their way to other places, outside the neighbourhood. They cross the neighbourhood, but do not often hang out on the street corner or in front of the shopping centre. Fadilah (see next chapter), Mariam (19 years old) and some of their female friends are an exception. Mariam says: “My father doesn’t like it when I am outside with the guys. But I often stay only for 10-20 minutes. Just a small chat and then I move on. Well, actually the backside of the building [*Le Mail*] is only for guys. The playground in front of it is for the girls. I sometimes play there with my little cousin” [Interview Mariam, 20 July 2010].

The streets are not completely taken over by young people who hang out on the street corner. The adult inhabitants also gather on a regular basis, mainly on the square in front of *La Tour*. Marie often sits there with two or three friends. Although Marie now and then let slip rather racist remarks, she also speaks warmly about the diversity in La Courneuve. “All those African women with their beautiful dresses and these colourful cloths wrapped around their heads. I don’t need to go on holiday!” Marie laughs out loud: “We have it all here. Here I am on the Comoros, there I am in Algeria, over there in Portugal!” Marie points to the spots on the square where these people often meet late in the afternoon or in the evening. “Yes, I really appreciate the mixture” [Interview Marie, 3 June 2010].

To a certain extent, one could argue that the older people also display routines of *trainer*. The function, however, is different, as they meet, unlike most young residents that I interviewed and observed, predominantly with people from the same cultural/ethnic background. Their gathering is not directly rooted in the space where they physically find themselves at that moment, but in their faraway home countries. Young people, in contrast, hang out primarily in the *here* and *now*. They are more focused on the claiming of space, the designation of boundaries, and the social organization of ‘their neighbourhood’. They create a new place of the space they inhabit. *Trainer* contributes to this process; producing and reproducing physical boundaries with the outside, and the ordering and social organization of inside along age and gender lines (and less along ethnic ones).

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<sup>102</sup> See for an excellent discussion on gender roles Lapeyronnie (2008: 507-593). The next chapter will also touch upon the different identification strategies that boys and girls engage in.

## Routines of surveillance

“What are you doing here?” Numerous times I was asked this question during my walks through the neighbourhood (see also Chapter 2). Important to note is that it was only boys and young men who asked me this question. Sometimes they did not ask me anything and directly started to call me names. I had to ‘fuck off’. I had to go back to where I belonged. By contrast, nobody stopped me while I was walking in the streets of the city centre of Paris. The encounters illustrate that at these places different people have the power to define who is *in* and *out* of place (Cresswell, 1996; see also Slooter, 2014). In Paris, my presence is seen as normal, in 4000*sud* it is perceived as abnormal, or as Cresswell (1996) would say, it is a ‘transgressive’ act.

Just as state institutions are involved in various practices of surveillance to ‘sort’ and control their population, such as identity checks by local police and evacuation of illegal *Balzac* inhabitants by CRS forces, youngsters at the street corner engage in practices that allow and prohibit the presence of particular people in particular places. They internally make divisions between places for boys and girls. They police and discipline ‘their neighbourhood’. Saeed claimed earlier that guys from *Verlaine* never enter ‘his neighbourhood’. Aicha, a 21-year-old student in commercial studies<sup>103</sup>, condemns guys like Saeed that hang out all day in the street. She says: “... there are youngsters in this neighbourhood that want to move forward, but others prefer to stay at the bottom of their building. They don’t look for a job. They have no diploma. They stopped at the 6<sup>th</sup> grade [at the age of 11]. They don’t want, you know. We’ve grown up together, but they like the ‘easy life’: staying in bed as long as you want and then hanging out in the *cité* till three, four o’clock in the morning. They are always there, at the same spot. Always. In the winter they are inside in the hallways. In the summer they hang out in front of the building”. She explains that the place is claimed and policed by these guys. “You can’t just hang out at their spot. They don’t like foreigners. Guys from [district] 95 or 91, for example, are not welcome here. They don’t know you. They immediately know that you don’t live here. If you only pass by, they may pursue you. I mean, when you are in the *cité*, for the rest of La Courneuve you’ll be fine” [Interview Aicha, 26 July 2010].

Routines of surveillance determine who’s ‘in’ and ‘out’ of place (see also Le Goaziou & Rojzman, 2006: 53). The longer I stayed in the neighbourhood, the more I realized that I myself was often stopped and interrogated by young males in certain areas, and less or never in other locations. After a while, I could indicate for each and every street whether or not there was a substantial risk of being confronted with routines of surveillance. There was a logic in the ‘routines of surveillance’. There’s an interplay with the other two routines. The areas under high surveillance (around *Le Mail*, *Balzac*, the shopping centre, etc.) are also included in the maps that Sofyan and Mariam have drawn, they are named, play a role in the

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<sup>103</sup> *BTS Commerce*.

narratives and are among the favourite spots to hang out. In contrast, I experienced little routines of surveillance in the streets that are absent from Sofyan's map, that are not or little named in narratives (e.g., 'the *pavillons*'), and where youngsters do not frequently hang out. Just like the routines of 'trainer', surveillance was predominantly carried out in the late afternoon, evenings and at night; and, as indicated earlier, predominantly by boys and young men.

Furthermore, the routines of surveillance are most prominent and common at the spots where drug trade flourishes. Supervision of the terrain is carried out by 15-16 year old boys, known as *guetteurs*, standing on the look-out at every corner. The fact that these boys have a named role in these routines reveals a certain level of institutionalization of their acts. The *guetteurs* are supposed to warn those who actually sell the drugs in the hallways of the apartment buildings. As Marie earlier recounted, every time a police car enters the street they scream "They pass! They pass!" Their voices echo in the area. The *guetteurs* are on the corner from the early morning till late at night. Every day. Always at the same spots. Sometimes they listen to music that blasts through their earphones, sometimes they look bored, play games on their iPhones, sometimes they lie sleepy in the sun at the gates of 'their territory', but they are always attentive to those people that could be considered out of place.

I will further elaborate on these practices, the drug trade and its relation to violence, in Chapter 5. For now, it is important to note that the high level of surveillance at these spots does not mean that these places are hermetically sealed off for people who are not involved in the drug trade. Children play next to the *guetteurs*. A couple of young mothers have a lively chat just a few meters away from them. Some inhabitants, such as Jean and Marie, complain about the *guetteurs* and the trafficking. Others seem to be less affected. Sophie (45, inhabitant of *Le Mail*), for example, says: "Well, nothing has ever happened to me in this neighbourhood. Never ever. These youngsters that hang out in the hallways are always friendly to me. They say '*Bonjour, madame*'. And sometimes when I come back from the supermarket, packed with plastic bags, they ask me: 'Do you need a hand, madam?'" [Diary notes 8 July 2010].

The routines of surveillance thus produce and reproduce the ordering of people within a certain place. The presence of some is appreciated or tolerated, whereas others ('outsiders') are undesired. This ordering is further enforced by inscriptions in the physical terrain. The walls are not just covered with graffiti that praises the neighbourhood, the postal code of La Courneuve or the department numbers (see above), but also indicates who is *out* of place. I read at numerous spots: "fuck police", "*nique la police*", "*nike la police*" and "*Baise les keufs*". I also read on the walls who is *in* place: "*vive l'algerie*", "I love Algeria", "*Vive Mali*", "Senegal", "*Le Mail en Force*" (*Le Mail* in Charge) and names of local rap stars and other inhabitants. Graffiti makes a personal message "visible, material, solid and shared" (Cresswell, 1996: 48). Once in a while the tags are removed by the municipal authorities but they soon reappear.

The above mundane routines are part of a struggle about place. To an increasing extent, these routines lead to the closure of place: from names and narratives, via physically occupying the street (*trainer*), to practices of surveillance that determine who is 'in' and who is 'out' of place. To an increasing extent these routines give power to youngsters (predominantly boys and young men) to define place, especially at certain moments of the day (late afternoons, evenings and at night).

Important to note is that other inhabitants, who engage in different, sometimes opposing enactments, also contribute to the closure of places. People that avoid, at certain moments, the street corner out of fear for young males. For example, Marie, who has four different locks on her front door, says to stay inside when night falls. Also Jean, who forbade me to go outside at night, says to avoid as much as possible the area around the shopping centre. Only if he really needs ingredients for his Ivorian meals does he go there, to the only close by shop that sells African products.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have moved from an academic debate on the contested existence of French ghettos to the underlying process of place-making. I have explained that places should not be taken as static or naturally bounded entities but rather that they are constantly made and unmade by multiple actors leading to a layered, contested and dynamic patchwork of places. Moreover, I have argued that in studying place-making processes both 'hard' and 'soft' dimensions of place should be taken into account, meaning both practices that change the physical aspects of places (e.g., demolition of buildings, or graffiti inscriptions on the wall) and negotiations about meanings and representations (e.g., the danger or safeness of places).

At a more abstract level, I have analyzed place-making processes by looking at them from a governmentality perspective. In the first chapter, I discussed how governmentality approaches study an assembled variety of projects of knowing and reading the social world on various scales, and the techniques to maintain that social world through forms of policing and (self)disciplining. In reference to the place-making process discussed in this chapter, multiple actors read various places in space and intervene in space in an attempt to constitute places. While the first chapter showed in general terms how the state contributed to the making of the *banlieue*, this chapter looked more in detail at a particular building and neighbourhood, and predominantly dealt with the internal dimensions of the place-making process. How do young people, categorized as '*banlieusards*' negotiate, contest and make 'their neighbourhood'?

I have identified, in this chapter, three routines in everyday life, enacted by the interviewed and observed respondents, that contribute to the internal making of place. I have illustrated how youngsters are involved in the place-making process by narratives and naming 'their neighbourhood', by hanging out on the street

corner (*trainer*) and through practices of surveillance that determine who is 'in' and who is 'out of place'. These everyday routines bring about demarcations with the outside world, and at the same time they organize (or discipline) the place internally, especially along age and gender lines.

What can be concluded from this chapter is that young people mimic and also contest state practices of governance. Youngsters equally read space and attempt to claim it through governing practices. They imagine and represent their neighbourhood and they resort to similar forms of policing and (self)disciplining. Just as the state, they name the place, show presence in the streets, and embark on practices of surveillance/identity checks. However, these imaginings and practices propagate forms of conduct that oppose the state's readings and interventions. This leads to overlapping places that are claimed and governed simultaneously by the state and by young people at the street.

Important to note is that not each and every youngster engages to the same degree and in the same way in these internal place making routines. Whereas both boys and girls are involved in the routine of naming and narratives, it is predominantly male youngsters who engage in the other two routines (*trainer* and surveillance). Moreover, as Aicha stated, there are youngsters who want to move forward, and youngsters who hang out on the streets and go for 'the easy life'. That such a divide should not be reduced to a simple dichotomy will be discussed in the next chapter.



# Chapter 4

Us and Them: Social Identification Strategies and Dynamics

*In Front of the Budget DLA-supermarket*

*Je viens de là où, dès douze ans, la tentation t' fait des appels  
Du business illicite et des magouilles à la pelle  
Je viens de là où il est trop facile de prendre la mauvaise route  
Et pour choisir son chemin, faut écarter pas mal de doutes*

*Je viens de là où la violence est une voisine bien familière  
Un mec qui saigne dans la cour d'école, c'est une image hebdomadaire  
Je viens de là où trop souvent un paquet de sales gamins  
Trouvent leur argent de poche en arrachant des sacs à main*

*Je viens de là où on devient sportif, artiste, chanteur  
Mais aussi avocat, fonctionnaire ou cadre supérieur  
Surtout te trompe pas, j'ai encore plein de métiers sur ma liste  
Évite les idées toutes faites et les clichés de journalistes  
[...]*

*Je viens de là où on est un peu méfiant et trop souvent parano  
On croit souvent qu'on nous aime pas mais c'est p't-être pas complètement faux  
Il faut voir à la télé comment on parle de là où je viens  
Si jamais j' connaissais pas, j'y emmènerais même pas mon chien !  
[...]*

*Je viens de là où comme partout, quand on dort, on fait des rêves  
Je viens de là où des gens naissent, des gens s'aiment, des gens crèvent  
Tu vois bien, de là où je viens, c'est comme tout endroit sur Terre  
C'est juste une p'tite région qu'a un sacré caractère*

*Je viens de là où on est fier de raconter d'où l'on vient  
J' sais pas pourquoi mais c'est comme ça, on est tous un peu chauvin  
J'aurais pu vivre autre chose ailleurs, c'est tant pis ou c'est tant mieux  
C'est ici que j'ai grandi et que je me suis construit...  
Je viens de la banlieue*

Grand Corps Malade, *Je viens de là* (2008)

Jean sits in the brown leather lounge chair in his living room. The television is on. His eyes are closed; now and then he nods off. He has just received a letter stating that he officially lost his job. “I didn’t sleep well last night...”, he sighs “... neither the night before. Too many worries”. On television there is a debate about a new French bill about cutting social benefits when kids are truant from school. One of the discussant says: “It is mainly the Arabs and Blacks who do it”. Jean leaps up from his chair: “He’s completely right!! It’s really bad to make mistakes, especially when you are not at home!”

I leave the apartment to get some fresh air. In front of the budget supermarket a group of young men hang out. It is their favourite spot. They wear big black Dolce&Gabbana sunglasses and black shirts with gold glittering ADIDAS logos. They look like the typical *banlieusards* that you see on television. Gangsters. Cool and potentially dangerous. As I enter the supermarket, I see how the security guard yells at a young veiled woman, apparently accusing her of stealing a box of mushrooms. “I don’t want to see you here again! Leave! Leave!” The woman quickly walks out with her baby buggy, seemingly ashamed. “If you do it again, I will pin up a photo of your face right next to the entrance so that everybody can see what you did!” cries the security guard. The boys outside see how the young mother slinks off. Their lives meet in front of the supermarket: Dolce&Gabbana gangster-life and desperate poverty [Diary notes 1 July 2010].

In the first chapter I discussed how, over the past decades, the state has through various ‘languages of description’ (frames) and ‘technologies of governance’ (practices) contributed to the making of the *banlieue* and the categorization of its young inhabitants. The previous chapter elaborated on the making of the *banlieue* by studying how various actors are involved in a contested place-making process. The topic of the present chapter is the ‘making’ and ‘unmaking’ of its young inhabitants. *Banlieusards*, *jeunes des banlieues*, *jeunes de cité*, *jeunes issus des quartiers populaires/défavorisés/difficiles*, *jeunes de zone urbaine sensible*, *zonards* etc. As discussed in the first chapter, these spatial identity categorizations have become commonplace and refer to ‘the other’, dominantly portrayed as young, male and (more implicitly) people of colour, ‘black’ or ‘Arab’, and ‘(radical) Muslim’. While ‘the spatialized other’ is increasingly seen as violent, dangerous and threatening, it is countered by others who categorize ‘youngsters from the *banlieues*’ merely as victims of injustices and various forms of discrimination.

These imposed categorizations form the starting point of this chapter. The scene described above reveals that one can find both in 4000*sud*: ‘gangsters’ and ‘poor people’. However, closer observations of everyday life disturb the simple, clichéd dichotomy between criminals and victims. Young people act upon and react to the categorizations that are attributed to them, and create new ones. As Wimmer (2008a: 995) in his work on the making and unmaking of ethnic<sup>104</sup> boundaries says:

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<sup>104</sup> Although Wimmer (2013; 2008a; 2008b) focuses specifically on *ethnic* boundaries, his framework is more broadly applicable to other types of social identities.

“While powerful actors can make their vision of the social world publicly known and consequential for the lives of all, subordinates may develop counter discourses and other modes of dividing the social world into groups than those propagated by the dominant actors” (see also Scott, 1990). The aim of this chapter is not to demonstrate that the image of *‘jeunes de cité’* is actually much rosier or gloomier; it is not to negate or confirm the cliché images. Instead, in this chapter I will explore how young people resist, negotiate or strengthen the imposed identity categorizations that were discussed in the first chapter. I will thereby use analytical tools that I have derived from sociological, anthropological and social psychological theories. I will especially draw on Wimmer’s taxonomy of boundary-making strategies (2013; 2008b).

The chapter consists of three parts. First, I will take a look at what identity is: how it is defined and what theoretical tools one can use to gain a better understanding of the making and unmaking of social identities. The second part focuses on how ‘youngsters from the *banlieue*’ are generally studied in academia. I criticize approaches that take ‘youngsters from the *banlieue*’ as a rather fixed and homogenous group, or that order them in various ideal type subgroups. In the last part of this chapter I suggest focusing on three sets of identification strategies that are frequently used by young people whom I have interviewed and observed. I will not try to pin down who they are by giving them a label; rather, I attempt to lay bare what they do and say, by which they distance themselves, alter or embrace the dominant ‘readings’ and ‘institutionalizations’ of who they are. I argue that the interviewed and observed young people navigate life through various dissociating, transforming and associating strategies.

This chapter builds on the underlying governmentality framework and elaborates it by (1) a theoretical exploration of the making and unmaking of social identities, and (2) the use of these theoretical tools to analyze how the state’s categorization of ‘youngsters from the *banlieue*’ is negotiated and contested internally through various alternative ‘languages of description’ and ‘technologies of governance’ that are expressed and enacted by these very ‘youngsters from the *banlieue*’.

#### 4.1 IDENTITIES: DEFINITIONS AND TOOLS

On 12 June 2010, I attend a debate on citizenship, organized by the municipality at 4000*sud*’s cultural centre, just next to apartment building *La Tour*. The main speakers include a lawyer, a medical doctor, a representative of the municipality and two women who run a local association. They all live in La Courneuve. During the debate they critique the way in which the inhabitants of the *banlieue* are generally portrayed. “They, at the other side of the *périphérique*, don’t associate La Courneuve with a lawyer or a doctor. Instead, what comes to mind is [...] police arrests and

100 kilos of cannabis<sup>105</sup>. They associate us with drug traffic, violence and scum”. At the end of the afternoon, Sylvain, a young man from La Courneuve, is asked on stage to rap a couple of self-written songs on the theme of the debate. He starts determinedly, but not much later he falters. He tries a second rap, but again fluffs his lines. “A big blackout”, he mumbles desperately. Sylvain leaves the stage, his head bowed [Diary notes 12 June 2010].

Two weeks later, I meet Sylvain in a local café for an interview. He’s 19 years old, born in France with parents who originally come from Cameroon. Sylvain is waiting for the results of his final high school exams. If he passes, he wants to go to university after the summer holiday. Sylvain, who’s somewhat shy, starts to talk about life in La Courneuve: “It’s difficult to live here...,” he says. He stares at the tabletop and then continues: “Well, actually it isn’t difficult. When you are born here, it is not difficult. But there are people coming from outside who make us reflect upon ourselves. And then it becomes complicated, you know what I mean? If we go to Paris... it’s very different over there. That doesn’t mean that everybody is pessimistic here... It is important that we don’t see ourselves as victims. That we can adjust ourselves if we go somewhere else. That we are aware that we have to talk differently or that we have to wear other clothes” [Interview Sylvain, 24 June 2010]. In more abstract terms, Sylvain refers to boundaries, similarities and differences; these are, as I will demonstrate later, key aspects of an analytical definition of social identity. Moreover, Sylvain refers to the core ingredients of identity-making processes: he talks about the changeable nature of identity, the dialectic processes of ‘outside’ categorization (how you are perceived by others) and ‘inside’ group identification (how you perceive yourself).

Let me start with a baseline definition of identity and from there look at how the various aspects mentioned above are incorporated. Psychologists often make a distinction between *personal* identity and *social* identity. Whereas the former often refers to personality or individual character traits, the latter is defined by Hewstone & Stroebe (2001: 602) as “a person’s sense of who he or she is, derived from his or her group membership(s)”<sup>106</sup>. I will focus in this chapter only on social identities.

Much of the recent academic literature on social identities, especially in sociology and anthropology, has dealt with particular manifestations of it, such as ‘ethnic’ or ‘national’ identity. I see these not as ontologically different but rather as various forms of the same underlying social identity concept. Discussions on ethnic identity in particular have, to my mind, contributed to a better conceptual understanding of social identities in general and have pointed to relevant avenues for empirical research. Two interrelated developments are important to mention

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<sup>105</sup> A couple of days earlier, several newspapers reported about a police operation in 4000*sud* that seized 100 kilos of cannabis and a number of arms. See, for example: Le Parisien (10 June 2010) «*La Courneuve : saisie de cannabis et d’armes à la cité des 4000*»; or Le Figaro (10 June 2010) «*Cannabis: 100 kg saisis à la Courneuve*».

<sup>106</sup> Of course, they build strongly here on Henri Tajfel’s classic definition of social identity: “that part of an individual self-concept which derives from his membership of a social group” (1978: 63).

here. First, during the second half of the last century essentialist and primordialist views on ethnic identity increasingly were replaced by a social constructivist approach (see e.g., Wimmer, 2013; Demmers, 2012; Fearon & Laitin, 2000; Baumann, 1999). In the eyes of primordialists, ethnicity is acquired by birth, fixed and inevitable. Although ethnic identities may often be presented in everyday life as if they were given by nature, the primordialist view has become heavily critiqued in academia. Social scientists now see ethnicities predominantly as socially constructed and changeable over time, fluid and dynamic. Ethnicity is, from the constructivist perspective, seen as “an aspect of a relationship, not a property of a group”; it is “constituted through social contact” (Eriksen, 1993: 12,18; cited in Baumann, 1999: 59) rather than given by birth. In a similar vein, sociologist Richard Jenkins states (2014: 18), “Identity can only be understood as a process of ‘being’ or ‘becoming’. One’s identity – one’s identities, indeed, for who we are is always multi-dimensional, singular *and* plural – is never a final or settled matter”. Michael Ignatieff (1999: 56), metaphorically, illuminates the difference between the primordial and constructivist views: “Ethnicity is sometimes described as if it were skin, a fate that cannot be changed. In fact, what is essential about ethnicity is its plasticity. It is not a skin, but a mask, constantly repainted”.

A second, and related, crucial development started more or less with the groundbreaking collection of essays *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* by cultural anthropologist Frederik Barth (1969). Barth showed through empirical research that there was often much cultural overlap *between* groups, and extensive cultural variety *within* groups. He proposed a shift from a focus, at the time common, on the *content* of identities to the *boundaries* that separate ethnic groups. According to Barth, it was more relevant to study how boundaries are maintained rather than to focus on what he called the ‘cultural stuff’. From that moment onwards, attention to boundary work grew extensively, and not merely within cultural anthropology but across the social sciences (see Lamont & Molnár, 2002: 167). Later, however, many argued, including Barth himself, that a profound analysis of identity cannot simply put ‘cultural stuff’ on the sideline (e.g., Wimmer, 2008a; Fearon & Laitin, 2000; Barth, 1994). In an attempt to include both aspects, Fearon & Laitin (2000: 848) define ethnic identities as “sets of people given a label (or labels) and distinguished by two main features (1) rules of membership that decide who is and who is not a member of the category; and (2) content, that is, sets of characteristics (such as beliefs, desires, moral commitments, and physical attributes) thought to be typical of members of the category or behaviours expected or obliged of members in certain situations (roles)”. This definition covers not only both aspects (boundaries and content) but also provides a more concrete definition of the earlier mentioned ‘membership’ of Hewstone and Stroebe’s definition.

Whereas the above insights deal in particular with ‘ethnic identity’, I contend that they are more widely applicable to the concept of social identity. The ‘spatial identity’ (being a *banlieusard*) that Sylvain spoke about to me corresponds with Fearon & Laitin’s definition. Sylvain refers to the *boundaries* between ‘outside’

(Paris) and ‘inside’ (his neighbourhood) and also the *content*: the beliefs (“we are not all pessimistic”) and characteristic enactments (particular slang and clothes).

In an influential article, Brubaker & Cooper (2000) reassessed the currently dominant constructivist approach to social identities. In many academic accounts they see an uneasy combination of essentialist and constructivist views on identity. The constructivist definition of ‘identity’ “routinely packaged with standard qualifiers, indicating that identity is multiple, unstable, in flux, contingent, fragmented, constructed, negotiated, and so on” (2000: 11), has led, according to Brubaker & Cooper, to an ‘ill-equipped’ and empty analytic tool. They advocate distinguishing between identity as a ‘category of practice’ referring to everyday identity talk; and identity as a ‘category of analysis’ (ibid: 4-5, see). Moreover, they argue that for analytic purposes the concept ‘identity’ itself is not needed; instead, they propose (among other alternatives) to speak of ‘identification’ and ‘categorization’ as it “calls attention to complex (and often ambivalent) *processes*, while the term “identity”, designating a *condition* rather than a *process*, implies too easy a fit between the individual and the social” (2000: 17).

Although a complete rejection of the ‘identity’ concept may, in my view, be too radical (see also Jenkins, 2014: 15-16), I sympathize with Brubaker & Cooper’s call to pay more attention to the *process* of identification. The two definitions mentioned above may help us here. These definitions of social/ethnic identities point to different aspects of this process. Whereas Hewstone & Stroebe talk about “a person’s sense of who he or she is, derived from his or her group membership(s)”, Fearon & Laitin refer to “sets of people given a label...”. The former thus emphasizes how you see *yourself*, while the latter stresses how *others* label you. That triggers the question whether social identities are merely self-chosen or imposed by others.

As Tajfel (1981: 297) already claimed decades ago, social identities are relational: “... we are what we are because ‘they’ are not what we are”. Jenkins (2014: 13) says something similar: “Who we think we are is intimately related to who we think others are, and vice versa”. He elaborates his point by stating that “... categorization is a routine and necessary contribution to how we make sense of, and impute predictability to, a complex human world of which our knowledge is always limited, and in which our knowledge of other humans is often particularly limited. Our ability to identify unfamiliar individuals as members of known categories allows us at least the illusion that we may know what to expect of them” (ibid: 107). However, “being labelled is neither uni-directional nor determinate” (ibid: 101). In line with Jenkins, I see identity-making as a dialectic process between categorization (externally imposed definition) and identification (internal self definition), in which “neither comes first and neither exists without the other” (ibid: 111). Of course, these practices of identification and being categorized do not occur in a vacuum but are restricted by the larger context and the power that parties have to identify themselves and categorize others in that particular context (see e.g., Wimmer 2013; 2008a, 2008b; Lamont 2001). In that sense, identities are

the “outcome of negotiated interactions between top-down and bottom-up exercise of power” (Tilly 2003: 619).

To summarize, I argue that social identities have both boundaries and content that are constantly subject to change. I will focus here mainly on the *process* of identity-making and unmaking by looking at the dialectic between external categorization and internal identification. The power context in which this process unfolds gives different degrees of weight to these internal and external definitions of identity.

A brief return to the first chapter, with the above discussion in mind, reveals that the dominant outside categorizations of ‘youngsters from the *banlieue*’ have both boundaries and content. The boundaries are mainly defined spatially as the dominant dividing line between ‘us’ and ‘them’ is based on where you live, an imagined separation between the inhabitants of the city centre and those who populate the zones beyond the *périphérique*. Of course, these spatial boundaries are more implicitly imbued with racial/ethnic, religious and gendered characteristics. The content, as we have seen, is either based on criminalized or victimized roles.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will study how young people cope with these outside categorizations. In other words, I will have a look at the other side of the identity-making process: self-identifications. However, first I feel the need to position my research in recent existing (mainly French) academic literature on this theme. Armed with the theoretical reflections above, I will critically look at how some other researchers have studied ‘youngsters from the *banlieue*’.

#### 4.2 STUDYING ‘JEUNES DES BANLIEUES /CITÉS’

The most straightforward approach is to take the ‘youngsters from the *banlieue*’ as a unitary, clearly bounded category that is stigmatized and marginalized by the rest of society, and subsequently to analyze or explain the beliefs, typical attitudes and acts, and problems that they are confronted with (see for a critique, Marlière, 2005: 24-27). However, such an approach solely looks at the *content* of social identity, which is problematic for at least two reasons. First, it often takes the category of ‘youngsters of the *cité*’ as a given entity and does not problematize the dynamic boundaries that separate them. It more or less corresponds with Baumann’s critique (1999: 146): “... yet when it comes to empirical studies of ethnicity, most students are still given topics such as “The Turks in Berlin”, “The Berbers in Paris”, or “The Sikhs in New York”. The focus is on a national, ethnic, or religious minority, as if anyone could know in advance how this minority is bounded and which processes proceed inside and which outside that assumed community. We have, in effect, created a little island; we study this island, and we usually conclude that the island is, in so many ways, an island. What a bore”. The only difference here is that it concerns not a national, ethnic or religious, but primarily a *spatialized*, group.

Secondly, this approach is problematic because it takes the dichotomous power relation between the dominant and the subordinate as the sole boundary between ‘us’ and ‘them’ and ignores relations *within* the categories and the boundaries with other reference groups. Verkuyten (2005: 115) argues in this regard: “With the common sense dichotomy of majority-minority or perpetrator-victim, it is difficult to make contact with the experiences of people who are in the process of arguing about belonging, exclusion and self-definition, and in doing so are making all kinds of comparisons and distinctions”.

In an attempt to move beyond the homogenous representation of ‘youngsters of the *cité*’ and to reveal the in-group variety, some academics who closely research everyday life in marginalized neighbourhoods turn to the creation of subcategories. The classic example is William Foote Whyte’s (1943) distinction between ‘College Boys’ and ‘Street Corner Boys’. In France, similar subdivisions have been proposed, some more elaborated than others. Sociologist Wihtol de Wenden (2006: 53), for example, ends her article on the 2005 November riots with the following phrase: “One must not forget also that most of them did not burn cars, did not participate in riots, and are trying to lead ordinary lives in an effort to better integrate with the society at large”. Thus she makes a mainly normative distinction between the ‘good’ guys who behave ‘normally’ and the ‘bad’ ones who resort to violence. It corresponds more or less with the quote from Aicha in the previous chapter: “... there are youngsters in this neighbourhood that want to move forward, but others prefer to stay at the bottom of their building” [Interview Aicha, 26 July 2010]. A distinction based on moral criteria.

Other researchers have made more elaborate attempts to break down the monolithic image of ‘youngsters of the *banlieue*’ by showing that they hold different social positions and embark on different cultural practices. Sociologist Eric Marlière (2008; 2005), for example, conducted ethnographic research in the *cité* where he himself grew up. He observed a fragmentation in the social linkages among young people that live in the same *cité* (2008: 718), which he explained by referring to “age, education level, affinities, and the origins of the family” (ibid: 711). Marlière differentiates between seven groups of young people who share the same social and residential space: ‘the veterans’ are those who grew up during the 1980s, adults now that still spend time in the *cité*; ‘the *galériens*’ are young people in between illegal activities and job integration; ‘the practicing Muslims’ focus their daily life on religion and religious practices; ‘the invisibles’ concentrate on their work and/or higher education; ‘youngsters in the process of integration’ are in between short-term higher education and temporary jobs; ‘the delinquents’ sell cannabis and/or handle stolen goods; and, finally, ‘the post-adolescents’ are at the crossroad between a ‘serious’ and a ‘delinquent’ path of life (ibid: 714-718). Despite his subdivision into seven groups, Marlière also sees shared cultural codes based on similar migratory histories, popular culture, Islam, the street, etc. These codes result, according to Marlière, in a “common consciousness” around a feeling of injustice. What these ‘cultural codes’ exactly entail and how and when they unite the seven different groups remains unclear, however. In a similar vein, sociologist

Manuel Boucher (2010), based on ethnographic research, makes a rough distinction between: ‘turbulent youngsters’ (*jeunes turbulents*), made up of *galériens*, rappers, college youth, and ultra-gangs; and different types of ‘indigenous pacifiers’, those youngsters who want to mediate and form a bridge between ‘us’ and ‘them’.

These subcategories give a deeper insight into the heterogeneity among young people who live in the *cités* and the functions and forms of various identity groups. Nevertheless, this subcategorization has not fundamentally resolved my critique immediately above. There is still a rather strong inclination toward what Brubaker calls ‘commonsense groupism’, which he defines as “the tendency to take discrete, sharply differentiated, internally homogeneous, and externally bounded groups as basic constituents of social life, chief protagonists of social conflicts, and fundamental units of social analysis” (Brubaker, 2004: 35). Instead of taking the larger group of ‘*banlieusards*’ as a single group, the subcategorizations of (among others) Wihtol de Wenden, Marlière and Boucher, have only lead us to a number of smaller and more differentiated groups. I consider this form of groupism, or what we now may call ‘subgroupism’, problematic as it fails to describe a recurrent observation that I made while in the *banlieue*: young people there often do not belong to a fixed group. Instead, depending on the particular situation they are in, they show different levels of what Brubaker calls ‘groupness’. “Shifting attention from groups to groupness, and treating groupness as variable and contingent rather than fixed and given, allows us to take account of – and potentially account for – phases of extraordinary cohesion, and moments of intensely felt collective solidarity, without implicitly treating high levels of groupness as constant, enduring, or definitionally present. It allows us to treat groupness as an event, as something that ‘happens’” (Brubaker, 2004: 38). An illustration of my encounters with Fadilah may clarify this point:

Fadilah is 21 years old, works at youth centre *La Tour* and goes to university in the neighbouring *banlieue* Saint-Denis, where she studies social psychology. One day I meet her in the metro. She’s on her way to the university faculty and looks tired. “I am totally worn-out... I have an exam in two hours. Biology, the anatomy of the brains... It is not my strongest subject...” and then more cheerful: “But after that I will have holidays. Three months. I am going to work to earn some money. Always the problem of money...” she says with a resigned smile [Diary notes 20 June 2011].

A couple of weeks later I ask Fadilah if I can interview some of her female friends. She tells me that they often sit together in the evenings and that she will check if they are willing to talk to me. The same evening, around eight o’clock, I receive a text message. It is Fadilah: “You can come to the swings, close to the tramway”. A couple of minutes later, I see them next to the soccer cages, where Abdel and Duna are in the middle of a match. I shake hands with Fadilah and greet her friend Yasmina, who has covered her hair with a veil. I can’t shake hands with her, she says.

Yasmina, Fadilah and I look for a quieter place further up the road. We install ourselves on a wooden bench next to the newly built primary school Joséphine Baker. After I have posed a couple of questions to Yasmina, 9-year-old Fedji drives by on his small bike. Fedji lives in 4000*sud* and often frequents the youth centre where Fadilah works. He asks Yasmina for a Mentos. When she gives him one, he asks for two more candies. Fedji stays with us the rest of the interview. Fedji circles round our bench and interferes whenever he feels like it. Because of Fedji's disturbance, it is hard for me to get a good picture of Yasmina and how she perceives life in 4000*sud*. I do however get a valuable insight: 'the changing face' of Fadilah.

- Fedji: "I am 14 years old". *He thinks, and then says*: "No no, hang on, I am 11 years old! No, 12! I am 12!"
- Fadilah: "Oh Fedji, shut the fuck up. You're 9 years old. Go home!"
- Fedji: "I am a *guetteur*<sup>107</sup>. Oh yes!! Yes, nice fine shit, and then you take it and it gives such a good feeling inside. It burns hmmm". (*He is pretending that he is smoking weed. Dizzy, his arms lifted up, his eyes half closed. He's smiling*).
- Fadilah: "How do you know all this??"
- Fedji: "I have seen friends of my brother doing it".
- Fadilah: "And in a while you are going to act just like them?"
- Fedji: (*Proud*) "Yes!"
- Fadilah: "Oh, Fedji, stop irritating us with your bullshit. Fuck off!"

Fedji stays. I continue the interview with Yasmina. Fadilah reads, or at least tries to read her book, entitled *Advice for Muslim Women* ("*Des conseils aux femmes musulmanes*"). Fedji keeps on disturbing us. Fadilah shouts at him and calls him names, sometimes with a racist streak. "Peanut-guy!" ("*Mec de cacahuètes!*" - Fedji is black). She is laughing together with Yasmina. And then again serious: "If you don't stop right now, I am going to call Olivier! [Fedji's older brother, and a friend of Idriss]. And I am gonna tell him what you are doing here". Fedji seems somewhat impressed by her words but continues a couple of seconds later. "I call Olivier!" says Fadilah decisively. While Fadilah is on the phone Fedji says to me: "You are going to marry her, aren't you?"

- Luuk: "No. Aren't *you* going to marry her?"
- Fedji: "No, I am too young for her"
- Luuk: "Well, you're 14, right?"
- Fedji: (*He does not answer my question and shouts instead*): "Fadilah! Fadilah! I am gonna put things on Facebook about you, so that everybody can read it!" (*Fadilah pretends that she doesn't hear him*).
- Luuk: "What kind of things?"
- Fedji: "Just things!"

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<sup>107</sup> A drug runner.

The example above illustrates the disciplining dynamics along age and gender lines discussed in the previous chapter. While Fedji applies the subtle threat of marking Fadilah as loose or as a whore on Facebook, Fadilah needs to keep him down based on age and connections with his older brother.

At the same time, it shows how Fadilah smoothly switches between two ways of communicating and acting, depending on the situation at hand. To me Fadilah is thoughtful, calm, serious and polite. To Fedji she is rude, threatening, hard, harsh. Corresponding more with the stereotypical and rough side of what some call the ‘street life’ or the ‘culture of the *cité*’ [Diary notes 11 July 2011].

According to the subdivision that Marlière proposes, I could categorize Fadilah as an ‘invisible’. She is a dedicated student at the university. However, I may also classify her as a ‘youngster in the process of integration’, as she is in between higher education and a short-time job. Fadilah may also fall under the category of ‘practicing Muslims’. Maybe not as dedicated as Yasmina, but she is reading about and interested in her religion. And then again, she is also relatively often outside, on the streets with her friends, which doesn’t really fit any of the subcategories.

The ideal type subcategories provide a deepening of the label *jeunes de cité*, they give ‘them’ various faces, but at the same time they impede and restrict our understanding. As Verkuyten (2005: 151) states: “There are many situations where social categories are less clear-cut, and the blending and mixing of meanings that occur require continuous negotiation”. Marlière focuses on the content of those groups (he describes acts that may be typical to those groups). But he pays little attention to the boundaries that separate them. Although Marlière admits that youngsters can switch between groups and that the boundaries between them may be porous (ibid: 718), he does not explain *how* and *when* such boundary crossing may occur.

The main problem with the approaches described above is that they iron out to a large extent the *inconsistencies* that are to my mind central in identity processes. Of course, every attempt to capture the social world will undercut the precision of the observations that you have made. Every attempt is a simplification. Every word on this paper is static. However, I propose to focus here on *what* people *do* (how they react, cope, negotiate outside categorizations, how they identify themselves), rather than trying to pin down *who* they *are* (or who they are not).

### 4.3 THREE SETS OF SOCIAL IDENTIFICATION STRATEGIES

On 4 May 2011, in the evening, I sit in the living room with Jean. We watch television. I ask Jean if something has changed in the neighbourhood during the last year. He thinks about it for a while and then says: “No. No, nothing has changed. Youngsters that don’t want to work for their money are still here. They want to earn quickly and easily by selling drugs”. Jean shifts his attention to the television screen [Diary notes 4 May 2011].

To understand the formation of social identities, it is necessary to look at the (power) context in which it occurs. Wimmer (2008a) argues that individual boundary-making strategies on the micro level are influenced by field characteristics on the macro level. However, negative social identity categorizations are, as Jean's remarks reveal, not only imposed from the macro level but also produced and reproduced closer to the research sites.

Many of the older respondents whom I interviewed and talked to, for example, complain about (some, especially male) 'youngsters in the neighbourhood'. 'They' are often portrayed as a lost generation, materialistic consumers, ill-mannered, violent, often involved in drug dealing. For example, David, sport instructor at the local gym, says: "I live here for 22 years now. And it goes up and down. It is quiet and then again turbulent and restless. The kids have become devils nowadays. In the 1970s and 1980s La Courneuve was really a great town. People used to show respect to each other. La Courneuve was really great. Today, young people only want money. Money. Money. Money. We work hard and we earn 1200 euros, sometimes 1400 a month, you see. These kids can earn 10,000. Dealing drugs. It leads to fights, people get injured, people are killed. We used to fight with someone *tête-à-tête*. Now, they say: 'Wait a minute'. They come back with a gun". David uses his hands to mimic the gesture of holding a gun. "Bang! Bang!" [Interview David, 1 June 2010].

Other older inhabitants categorize the violent 'other' with a racial component. Marie, for example, says: "It wasn't that bad in La Courneuve<sup>108</sup>. I live here since 1972. I was only 22 when I arrived. It is different now. You have the African youth, you know. Unemployment is no excuse. It is no excuse to rob old ladies. That's what they do. I used to be outside till late. At the bottom of the building. Chatting with my neighbours. Sometimes till eleven at night. That's no longer possible. Around half past six, seven o'clock everybody goes inside. Because we are scared. You can no longer step into the street with your handbag. They snatch it away. The African kids are bad. They are only eleven, twelve, thirteen years old. You know what I mean? And we don't know where they come from. They even attack firemen! Who cares about us? The Police? The mayor? He's afraid himself. These are the kids of a new generation. Parents are no longer in control of them. These kids decide for themselves. They should work, but they don't want to. They only want '*l'argent facile*' (easy money). They think that old ladies have money. So they rob them and then find out later that the old lady only has a two euro coin in her purse. And a photo of her dead husband... Yes, these kids are malicious. They attack old people. They are very young, but strong. Everybody practices judo nowadays. It used to be different in La Courneuve. Pleasant. Quiet. The doors used to be wide open. Now I always double lock my door. These kids tear through the streets on their motorbikes. They are really little bastards. They look at me: What do you want? They offend and insult you [Interview Marie, 7 June 2010].

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<sup>108</sup> The classic observation of a 'Golden Age', the happy past without violence and criminality is also described for example by e.g., Lepoutre (2001: 53); Stébé & Marchal (2009: 54).

These categorizations of ‘youngsters from the *banlieue*’ are thus imposed both from the macro level and closer to home. However, the definition of the making and unmaking of social identities at the beginning of this chapter revealed that one should not only study outside categorizations, but also pay attention to (self) identification. It is the interaction between these two processes that is central in the understanding of social identity dynamics. How then do youngsters categorized as *banlieusard* identify themselves in relation to the categorizations that are imposed on them? To answer that question I will draw on my observations and interviews, combined with a theoretical vocabulary that I have borrowed from Tilly’s (2005) ideas on social boundary mechanisms and Wimmer’s taxonomy of boundary-making strategies (2008b). Although Tilly and Wimmer speak of *boundary* mechanisms and strategies, they focus (as I will demonstrate later) on both aspects of the earlier established definition: identity *boundaries* and *content*. I propose therefore to speak of ‘social identification strategies’. While Wimmer presents an extensive model including over 20 strategies and sub-strategies, I will focus here, based on my empirical evidence, on three sets of frequently applied social identification strategies that I have named: dissociating, transforming, and associating. Figure 4.1 gives an overview of the possible strategies that young people can apply to escape from (dissociating), adjust (transforming) or reinforce (associating) the dominant outside categorizations. Whereas both boys and girls embark on dissociating and transforming strategies, the associating strategies are predominantly enacted by young males. I will elaborate the strategies one by one and present evidence by quoting various voices that are emblematic for larger patterns in my data set.

### **Dissociating strategies – Positional moves**

Dissociating strategies include what Wimmer calls a ‘positional move’ and what Tilly names ‘site transfer’ (2005: 144). The individual leaves the group that he is categorized in and tries to assimilate on the other side of the boundary. By applying a dissociating strategy, young people seek individually to detach themselves from the negative categorizations of victimized and criminalized *banlieusards*. They do not critique or adjust the dominant identity boundaries and content. Instead, they try to escape from the *banlieusard* label and attempt to become part of the other, more powerful, side of the ‘us-them divide’.

The case of Claude, who is now in his late forties and by some labeled as a ‘*français de souche*’ (an autochthone/’native’ Frenchman), illustrates the individual boundary crossing. “I have experienced both, the calm period and the turbulent years. The unrest started in the early 80s. The murders. My parents and my brother still live here. Sometimes, when I visit them, I am afraid. Afraid of my own neighbourhood... Youngsters come to me and ask me ‘What are you doing here?’ They don’t believe me when I say that I used to live in this neighbourhood as well. I didn’t have any friends in the neighbourhood. Just Farid and my brother. Nobody

else. My life was outside the *cité*. In Paris. We were lucky that our building was close to the railway, so you could easily escape. Others were much more isolated. If you live in *La Tour* for example, that's different" [Diary notes 13 July 2011].

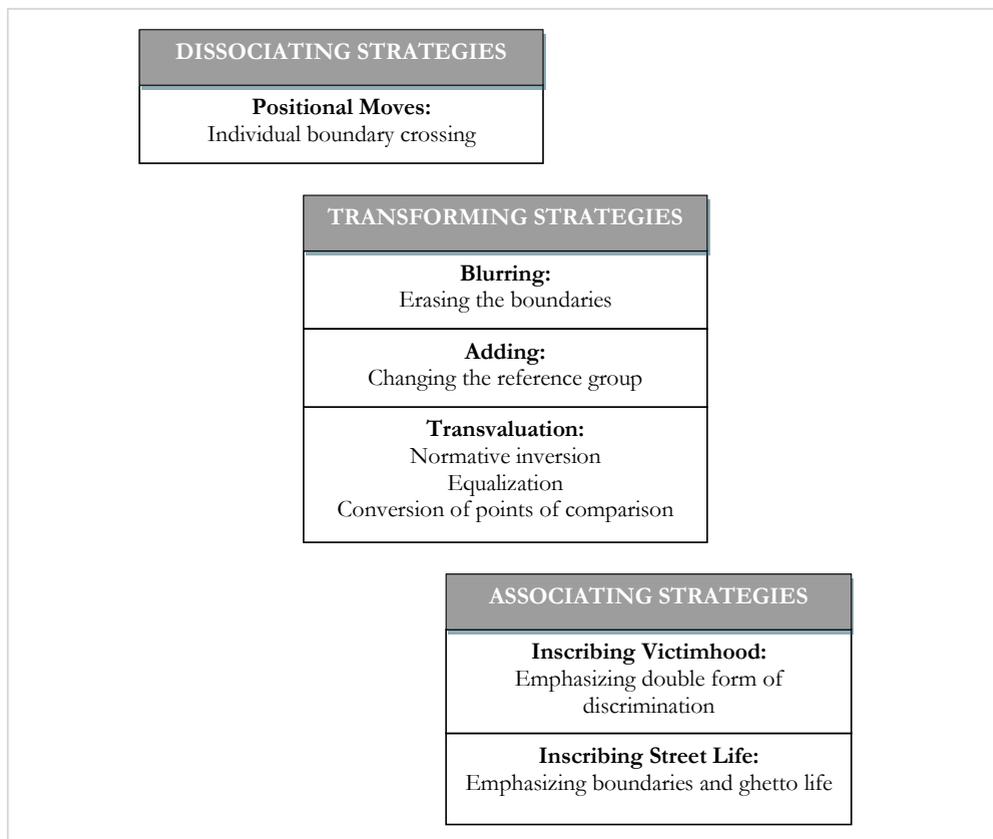


Figure 4.1: Three sets of social identification strategies.

Just like Claude, youth worker Idriss left 4000*sud* and lives in Paris now, though he still works at the youth centre, next to the building where he grew up. He says: “If you have succeeded you no longer live in La Courneuve. The successful ones have left the place. If you keep to the straight and narrow you don’t live here anymore” [Interview Idriss, 2 August 2011].

Salah (20 years old) also made a positional move by deliberately going to another school. “I have always lived in La Courneuve. In the same apartment building. But when it comes to schooling I always tried to avoid La Courneuve. I went to primary school in La Courneuve, but afterwards I went to Aubervilliers [a neighbouring town]. Because in La Courneuve there is a bigger chance of ending up badly than ending up successfully. Later I however learned that it is up to you. Whether you go for it till the end, or end up in troubles. [...] I now have my

BAC<sup>109</sup>. Thanks to my *college* and *lycée*. [...] I focused on my work. I worked, worked, worked. I didn't have any friends. No distraction. You see [...] My mother lives in La Courneuve since she was little. She knew that if I would have stayed in La Courneuve the chance of ending up in troubles, dealing drugs, would have been too high. And that wasn't possible, especially not in our family. We are lucky that we live in France. I am aware that a part of my family dreams of living in France... And we don't see it as a shame. It is worse than that. If you go back to your country [Egypt], even for holidays, and if you tell them that you had courses for free in an environment without any problems. If you tell them that you don't have your diploma and instead you came into conflict with the law... that's very bad. You can say goodbye to them. You can no longer be part of the family. You are lucky that you are in France, so now you have to bring your diplomas. The honour of the family. You see what I mean? You have to return with a diploma, with a job" [Interview Salah, 18 July 2011].

The interview extracts above show that Claude, Salah and Idriss reproduce the dominant identity content of the *banlieusard*: dangerous, in trouble, drug dealers and unsuccessful. Their positional moves often mean a literal crossing of the spatial boundary. The verb that is often used is '*s'en sortir*' (get oneself out of it). Being or becoming successful equates with leaving the neighbourhood. Youth worker Ahmed (29 years old) describes *s'en sortir* as "to live, to have a normal life. To have a dream and maybe buy one day your own house. To have the minimum... that you don't have to survive all the time" [Interview Ahmed, 2 August 2011]. Some move to another town. Others, like Salah, don't have that opportunity. They stay in their apartment building but downplay the importance of their neighbourhood. As Salah describes it: "It is a neighbourhood. It is an apartment. It is a bed. You see, to sleep in". For the rest, their lives take place somewhere 'outside' that place.

### **Transforming strategies – Blurring, adding and transvaluing**

The second set of strategies are applied to try and alter, engage and criticize the dominant negative categorizations. Through self-identification, alternative identity boundaries and content are suggested. By applying these strategies, youngsters seek to transform the unequal power balance between the 'outside' and the 'inside'. While blurring and adding are focused on transforming the identity boundaries, various forms of transvaluation strategies seek to alter the identity content. They are enacted both individually and more collectively.

#### *Blurring boundaries*

The strategy of blurring (Wimmer, 2008b: 1041-1043) is an attempt to unmake the imposed boundaries. In the interviews, respondents claim that the identity content

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<sup>109</sup> Secondary school diploma (*lycée*).

portrayed as being specific to ‘youngsters from the *banlieue*’ may just as well be attributed to people who live in other places. The strategy corresponds with what Tilly (2005: 143) describes as ‘erasure’.

Amira (21 years old), for example, applies this strategy by telling the following story: “If you are abroad, on holiday, in a park with other tourists and you tell them that you live in nine-three [deparment 93] ...they’ve heard about it, you know. Nine-three simply has a bad reputation. But it is not *us*”, she says. “*They* have done it, *they* have built the neighbourhood like this, *they* have planned and constructed it. It is not only the youngsters from the *banlieue*.... It are mainly the ‘*bourges*’ [bourgeoisie] from the 16<sup>th</sup> [*arrondissement* – Paris city centre] who consume [drugs]. These problems happen everywhere. Also on the countryside. Do you know the television show *Grand Frère* on TF1<sup>110</sup>? They help youngsters that go off the rails. I have seen very little *Arabes* and *Noirs* in that show. You see, problems happen also in the countryside, not just in the *banlieue*...” [Interview Amira, 30 May 2011].

Michel (23 years old) talks about the bad reputation of La Courneuve. I ask him why he thinks that many people have that negative image. “There is a *will* to show it like that. Whose will? Politicians. The media. But the biggest gangsters don’t live in La Courneuve. I don’t want to deny that people sell drugs here, but it happens just as well in the 16<sup>th</sup>. It is the environment. If you keep on talking negatively, always negative, then at a certain moment it sticks to you... you know what I mean?... Yeah, I don’t know, how I can explain it to you...” [Interview Michel, 2 August 2011].

On 9 June 2011 I go with youth worker Moussa (25 years old) to the fast food restaurant Quick for lunch. Later, his friends Fatima, Ibrahim and Hamza join us. Moussa says: “There is a number of people in this neighbourhood that only come to work here. We call them ‘*carreristes*’. Police and teachers, for example. They come from the south, not to stay here, but to make a career for themselves. For them it is a jungle here... They have based that image on what they have seen and read in the media. They think that everybody is criminal, *voyou* or *raquet*. In the south they have worked at a school in a class of 10, 12 kids. Here, they have a class of 27. That’s the difference. They don’t want to live here. Even if you would give them the most beautiful *pavillon* [a small detached house] in 93, they would not take it.... Maybe we look like gangsters...” *Moussa points to Hamza and himself* “...with my jacket, he with his hoodie, but we are not. What about you?” *Moussa looks at me*. “Didn’t you think it was very dangerous before you came here? And what do you think now? Maybe you have seen something. Minor crimes. It’s not all the time the case. And it happens everywhere. Even in politics. Sarkozy also steals, but he does it in such a way that nobody sees it” [Interview Moussa and friends, 9 June 2011].

The strategy of blurring is frequently applied to temper the idea that the *banlieues*, 93, La Courneuve or 4000*sud* is excessively violent and dangerous. In these comparisons, the ideal reference groups are the 16<sup>th</sup> arrondissement of Paris (one of

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<sup>110</sup> TF1 is the most popular private national television channel in France.

the richest neighbourhoods of the city) and political elites. The perceived higher status of these reference groups strengthens the impact of the blurring strategy. It is claimed that the same criminal identity content could be attributed to them. This strategy thus emphasizes that the imagined boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’ or ‘here’ and ‘there’ make no or little sense.

### *Adding boundaries*

Whereas blurring erases or reduces the salience of identity boundaries, the next strategy makes or emphasizes boundaries with lower status reference groups. In self-identifications, comparisons are no longer focused on the (equally criminal) inhabitants of the 16<sup>th</sup> *arrondissement*, but restricted to groups that are worse off (see also Brown, 2001: 507). When applying this strategy, youngsters compare themselves, for example, with a part of their *banlieue* or *cité* that they perceive as inferior. Hassan, who lives in 4000*nord*, says that those who live in 4000*sud* are more criminal. Similarly, those who live in apartment building *Le Mail* in 4000*sud* often compare themselves with those living in the *Balzac* building on the other side of the street. These youngsters from *Le Mail* claim that it is far more dangerous in the *Balzac* area. Likewise, those from the *Balzac* area compare themselves with an even lower status group. In the spring and summer of 2011, *banlieue* Sevrans became an apt reference group. The political and media debate drew attention to heightened tensions in Sevrans, supposedly related to drug trafficking<sup>111</sup>. “Have a look at Sevrans, there it is very very wild right now! Here it is calm”. Also the violent conflict in Ivory Coast in 2011 provided an opportunity to demonstrate that people elsewhere are worse off.

By applying this strategy, boundaries with lower status reference groups are thus added or emphasized to demonstrate that the group in which young inhabitants of 4000*sud* are dominantly categorized is not the lowest in the hierarchy. Hence, the bipolar us-them or minority-majority divide is replaced by a multitude of potential reference groups.

### *Transvaluation of identity content*

Transvaluation strategies are, in contrast to blurring and adding, not so much directed towards the unmaking and making of identity boundaries but focus instead on the normative valuation of identity content<sup>112</sup>. I will distinguish between three closely related strategies that fall under the heading of transvaluation: (1) normative inversion; (2) conversion of points of comparison; and (3) equalization.

<sup>111</sup> See for example: *Le Parisien* (20 March 2011) «*Tirs en plein jour à Sevrans*»; *Le Monde* (4 June 2011) «*Sevrans. Le maire réclame l'armée pour lutter contre les trafiquants de drogue*»; *Le Parisien* (20 June 2011) «*L'armée contre la drogue: onze élus opposés*»

<sup>112</sup> Although Wimmer defines transvaluation as a strategy to *boundary-making*, in practice it concentrates more on the normative valuation of identity *content*.

The normative inversion strategy transforms category features that are generally perceived as negative into positive ones (see also, for example, Lamont & Bail, 2005; Seul, 1999). A well-known example is the ‘black is beautiful’ slogan that arose from the civil rights movement in the 1960s in the USA. Black skin colour was transformed from a symbol of exclusion and discrimination into a symbol of power and strength. The strategies among young people that I interviewed and observed focus predominantly on altering spatial (sometimes combined with racial) stereotypes.

On 26 June 2010, for example, I attend an event called ‘*Ma Courneuve*’ (My Courneuve) organized by the municipality. At the main stage of the cultural centre in between apartment buildings *Balzac* and *Le Mail*, old grannies reminiscence about their childhoods in the neighbourhood, about WWII. There are belly dancers with oriental music; an old man reads his favourite poems; rappers give an ode to La Courneuve; and a boy reads out the love letter that he wrote for the girl he is secretly in love with. At the end of the evening they all come together on the stage and sing:

*My Courneuve*  
*She dances in my head*  
*And nothing stops her from going*  
*Without interruption*  
*My Courneuve,*  
*I don't remember*  
*Whether I come from here*  
*Or from somewhere else*  
*My Courneuve*  
*Is the one we live*  
*We learn*  
*To love life!<sup>13</sup>*

The old grannies stand next to the young rappers. They sing together the chorus:

*My Courneuve,*  
*I am proud of it,*  
*and too tired*  
*to always justify myself for living here.*

The song illustrates a collective inversion: from a negatively, ethnicized stereotyped suburb to a united place that people feel attached to and love. The lyrics of the widely known rap song at the beginning of this chapter is another illustration of this strategy. “*Je viens de là où on est fier de raconter d’où l’on vient ... C’est ici que j’ai grandi*

<sup>13</sup> My translation; original lyrics: « *Ma Courneuve/Elle danse dans ma tête/Et rien ne l’empêche/De tourner sans cesse/La Courneuve/Je ne sais plus/Si je suis d’ici/Ou bien d’ailleurs/La Courneuve/C’est que nous vivons/Que nous apprenons/A aimer la vie* ».

*et que je me suis construit... Je viens de la banlieue*” [I come from there, where we are proud to say where we come from ... It is here where I grew up and developed myself. I come from the *banlieue*].

The closely related second strategy, a conversion of points of comparison (see for example Seul, 1999), emphasizes identity content that leads to a positive image of the *banlieusard* and neglects negative aspects that are central to the outside categorizations (e.g., criminality, poverty, threat). For example, Michel says: “There is a certain solidarity in La Courneuve. If I walk through the neighbourhood I easily cross 15 people that I know. If you go and get your *baguette* and you see a mother packed with shopping bags, you help her. Unlike in Paris, where nobody knows each other” [Interview Michel, 2 August 2011]. Moussa says something similar: “The town of La Courneuve is lively. And that’s not only due to what the municipality does, it is mainly the neighbours. People stand by each other. We are like one big family. If I have forgotten to buy something at the supermarket, I’ll go to the neighbours and they will give to me what I need. No problem. All those big buildings are like a big family”.

In comparing themselves with others, Michel and Moussa emphasize solidarity and team spirit. Others claim that the nationally promoted principle of ‘equality’ (*égalité*) can only truly be found in the *cités*, where people from all different origins live together. They portray themselves as *avant-garde*, as the pioneers of a new multicultural society.

The third transvaluation strategy is closely related to symbolic inversion but does not explicitly claim a superior position with regard to the dominant group. Instead, it calls for equal rights and citizenship (see also Lamont et al., 2002: 396-398). This call for equalization is built on widespread narratives that point to a double form of discrimination based both on ‘immigrant origin’ and neighbourhood residence. Experiences of racial and territorial injustice and discrimination are often linked to difficulties on the job market, miserable housing conditions and discriminatory practices by the state.

Young residents of 4000*sud* (and other suburban areas) claim that they have more difficulties in finding a job than do people who live in other areas. Just having the postal code of La Courneuve on your CV is allegedly a reason to be pushed out of the pile of application forms. A high qualification, a university MA degree or even a PhD, supposedly will not bring you any further. They illustrate this claim by giving examples of friends who went to university and now work at the counter of fast-food restaurants Kentucky Fried Chicken or McDonalds. Diplomas of ‘coloured *banlieusards*’ have less value than those of ‘white Parisians’. They end up, as some say, with a “*BAC+4<sup>114</sup> fromage*”: a useless higher education diploma. From the narratives on high unemployment rates, it is an easy step to widespread poverty: stories about families that have no money to buy new clothes or go on holiday; stories of mothers, like the one at the beginning of this chapter,

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<sup>114</sup> The equivalent of a Master’s degree.

who are forced to steal in the supermarket because they have run out of money; stories of despair.

In a similar way, the bad social housing conditions are emphasized: the feeling of being locked up in the ghetto, imprisoned between concrete housing blocks. The bigger apartment buildings, especially *Balzac* and *Le Mail*, are sometimes called ‘rabbit hutches’ or ‘chicken coops’, implying that the inhabitants are treated like animals.

Moreover, the problematic relations with the state and especially with the police are emphasized (see for critical reflections on this theme, for example Fassin, 2013; Boucher, 2009: 233-237; Mohammed & Mucchielli, 2006; Body-Gendrot & Wihtol de Wenden, 2003). Stories about police controls with a racist twist are abundant. Some report that they have been put against the wall while they were walking home, or that they were taken to the police station without any demonstrable reason. Idriss explains: “There is very little communication between the police and young people here. The police act on the stereotypes that they have in mind. You are not seen as normal people here. They directly use their power and force that has an impact on the population in this neighbourhood. The police think: we are in La Courneuve, so you are here to sell drugs or to buy drugs” [Interview Idriss, 7 July 2010].

Apart from experiencing police controls myself (see Chapter 2), I see many interventions during my stay in 4000*sud*. For example, just before I interview Sylvain in June 2010, I see how two young men are put against the wall. The police search them intensively. We talk about it later. “That happens quite often to me”, says Sylvain. “One, two times a month. They ask for your ID and want to know if you carry dangerous objects. Sometimes it ends up in provocations or a *bavure* [a mistake, a blunder]. I have also been checked once in Paris, without any reason. They often do it based on your *tête* [face; in other words: skin colour] and your clothing. If you wear only black there is a bigger chance that you get stopped by the police” [Interview Sylvain, 24 June 2010].

The equalization strategy seeks to voice (and alter) these perceived injustices and to claim equal treatment and rights. The strategy is enacted in everyday stories in the neighbourhood, but also in blogs on the internet, in (rap) songs, through demonstrations organized by local associations and by actively supporting the broad campaign against territorial discrimination started by the municipality of La Courneuve<sup>115</sup>. Of the people I interviewed, for example, Sylvain contributes to it through rap songs about his daily life and youth worker Moussa has set up his own association to make his neighbourhood a better place.

Transforming strategies thus aim to alter the dominant categorizations of the *banlieusard* either by blurring or adding identity boundaries or by adjusting the identity content to portray the *banlieusard* more positively and to claim equal

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<sup>115</sup> See for more information the municipality website:  
<http://www.ville-la-courneuve.fr/lacourneuveporteplainte/accueil.php#>

treatment. It is both individuals and collectivities (in the form of demonstrations and local associations) that try to transform, socially, politically and culturally, the unequal relations that are experienced on a daily basis.

### **Associating strategies – Inscribing victimhood and street life**

Whereas the first and second strategies focused respectively on escaping from or adjusting the outside categorizations, the last set of strategies embraces, reinforces and hardens the imposed identity boundaries and content. It corresponds with what Tilly (2005: 143) calls ‘inscription’, heightening both similarity among ingroup members and differences with the others, to maintain the status quo. Moreover, it is in line with Barth’s observation that “... under varying circumstances, certain constellations of categorization and value orientation have a self-fulfilling character, ... others will tend to be falsified by experience, while others are incapable of consummation in interaction” (Barth, 1969: 30, cited in Jenkins, 2014: 125). Jenkins explains that: “Barth means by ‘self-fulfilling’ that participants will typically do their best, using ‘selective perception, tact, and sanctions’, to maintain identifications conventionally appropriate to the situation. If for no other reason, they do this because it is generally easier than coming up with alternative identifications or definitions of the situation” (ibid: 125).

As young (Arab/Black) males are most central in the portrayal of the *banlieusard* and most targeted in practices of discrimination and stigmatization (see also Kokoreff & Lapeyronnie, 2013: 32-35; Lapeyronnie, 2008), it is not surprising that it is predominantly boys and young men who engage in this last set of strategies. Not just because it is ‘easier’, as Jenkins suggests, but by applying this strategy they also create, as I will explain later, new subordinates (along age and gender lines) and aim to gain a higher power status *within* the neighbourhood. I will distinguish between a passive and an active variant of associating strategies. The first I have named ‘inscribing victimhood’ and is enacted both individually and collectively; the latter I have called ‘inscribing street life’ and is mainly a collective strategy encouraged among peers on the street corner.

#### *Inscribing victimhood*

I define inscribing victimhood as a strategy in which young people feel that they have limited or no individual agency. They see themselves as pawns ruled over by the outside power holders (politicians, media, ‘the rich’). The identity content that is embraced reinforces a catalogue of experiences of injustice and discrimination linked to their status as *banlieusard*. Whereas the transvaluation strategies are built upon the same perceived injustices and try to alter these (through equalization and symbolic inversion strategies enacted in participation in local demonstrations, setting up your own association to transform the neighbourhood, through cultural expressions, etc.), the inscribing victimhood strategy sees no way out of this misery.

I meet Hassan (27 years old) for the first time in front of the youth centre. He starts to talk about the neighbourhood. “Okay I am gonna tell you something that probably carries too far... Have you heard of the Shoah? ... The Germans that put the Jews in the ghetto? This is exactly the same. Only the barbed wire is missing. We live here together. We will die here together. That’s how it is. Guys in this neighbourhood don’t feel French. They know that they are different, even though almost all of these boys have the French nationality”. Hassan walks toward the guys who are standing against a parked car a couple of meters away from us. He singles out one of the boys and while he rests his hand on the shoulder of the kid, he continues: “I am sure that if he will later have a BAC+4<sup>116</sup> and there is somebody else from Paris also with a BAC+4, and they are both going to apply for a job, they will take the guy from Paris”. The young boy smiles timidly. Hassan looks at him and continues: “They won’t take him, because of his face. And because there is too much couscous in his name. Do you think it is strange that we support our own soccer team? That we don’t sing along the *Marseillaise*<sup>117</sup>?” [Diary notes 6 July 2010].

A couple of days later I have an interview with Hassan. We sit together in one of the rooms of the youth centre. Hassan is embittered, unhappy about the way his life unfolds. He tells me how his dad fell ill; that he had to stop university to earn some money for his family. He is disappointed in France, in the state. “I am against the state. Against the state. Did you hear about the Bettencourt case?<sup>118</sup> I am happy that we have religion. That gives a certain direction. Otherwise I wouldn’t know what to do. Where can you go? Who’s gonna help you when you are bowed down with injustice? I distrust a guy with a tie more than a guy with a hoody. You know what I mean? The man with the tie uses difficult words, an incomprehensible language, but in the meantime he knows exactly where he goes. Humans are bad. Humans are bad. We are here to clear up the shit of the Whites. That’s how I see it...” Hassan looks at me. “And I don’t mean it in a racist manner, *mon petit Luuk* [...] There is not any political party that represents the minority of the *quartiers*. I tell you: not any political party.”

Idriss enters the room where Hassan and I sit and says: “Ah Luuk, I see you’re talking to the biggest extremist!” Idriss and Hassan laugh. Hassan continues: “My dad always used to say: ‘You are Arab and French. You pick the one that suits you best at that moment. I don’t feel French. Not one single part of me is French. No single part’”. Hassan shows his hand, rubs over his fingers. “To the end of my finger tips, there is nothing French in me. As I was born in Algeria, I could choose

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<sup>116</sup> The equivalent of a Master’s degree.

<sup>117</sup> The *Marseillaise* is the French national anthem.

<sup>118</sup> Liliane Bettencourt is one of the principal shareholders of cosmetic company L’Oreal, and belongs among the wealthiest persons in the world. In 2010 she became involved in a growing number of scandals. Hassan is talking here about the rumours that Bettencourt had avoided paying taxes on a part of her fortune; her controversial relationship with Eric Woerth, Budget Minister at the time, who had supposedly proposed to let his wife manage Bettencourt’s wealth; and the secret envelopes with cash that Nicolas Sarkozy allegedly received from Bettencourt for his 2007 presidential campaign.

at the age of 18 if I wanted to have a French passport. I didn't take it, because my dad said: 'If you take a French passport you'll have to leave. You can no longer live in this house'. Later I wanted one as it is easier to get a visa when you want to go abroad. Just because of that, because it is more practical. But my application was suspended, because I had beaten a policeman in 2006 and I was stopped for a fight and possession of drugs. [...] I would never sing the *Marseillaise*. Never. You think it is strange that all those soccer players don't do it. The Black and Arab players don't sing along. I don't sing along. My grandpa has been killed in 1958 by the French and now they want me to sing the *Marseillaise*? Luuk, maybe you wonder: 'Why don't you go back to Algeria?' But no, I stay, because I want to start a family here, inshallah. But after that, I will go back. That's for sure!' [Interview Hassan, 16 July 2010].

Narratives of victimhood and experiences of injustice focus very much on the state, on the belief that politicians and other elites are corrupt and steal. References are made to actual cases, such as *l'affaire Bettencourt*. These elites don't do anything to help. They have promised for over thirty years that they would improve the situation in the neighbourhood and nothing has changed. Confidence has been lost; it is believed that nothing will change.

A defeatist attitude, embodied in being bored and indifferent, shrugging one's shoulders with a sigh, is typical for this strategy and is sometimes praised among those who hang out on the streets. I experienced it myself on a sunny afternoon in July 2010: I sit outside the youth centre with a couple of youngsters. They talk about the French soccer competition, and about the new shirts of Inter Milan. At other moments they are silent and simply sit and look around. We shake hands with almost every youngster who passes by. I am waiting for a girl whom I was supposed to interview this afternoon. She is late and I now guess that she won't show up. It has happened to me many times before: cancellations of interviews with youngsters, with or without notice. I stare aimlessly at apartment building *Le Mail* when Idriss comes to me. "What's up, Luuk? What are you doing?" I answer him, rather indifferently: "Nothing much". Idriss roars with laughter. "Nothing!" he repeats and keeps on laughing. "That's it!" claps my hand and then boxes his fist against mine (the typical way of greeting good friends). My answer seems to be very much appreciated [Diary notes 9 July 2010].

### *Inscribing street life*

The last strategy embraces what some may call 'street life' or 'ghetto life' (see also Anderson, 1999). Young people do no longer identify themselves as subordinate victims with little agency but instead claim powerful and governing roles by acting out the script of a tough, cool and potentially dangerous gangster. They do not want to adjust or change the dominant categorizations of criminalized *banlieusards* or *racaille* (scum) but actually want to be seen as such. Compared to the dissociating and transforming strategies discussed above, 'inscribing street life' is less focused

on a reconfiguration of youngsters' position in the larger 'us-them' divide; instead, this strategy is much more inward looking. Whereas the other strategies actively engage with the 'outside world' by making a positional move or by seeking to transform the boundaries or identity content of outside categorizations, this strategy merely conveys a message to the outside world: 'leave us alone, we rule here'. As indicated above, the strategy is predominantly enacted by boys and young men.

Inscribing street life means being explicitly present on the streets and involved in place-making routines (see previous chapter – especially 'trainer' and 'surveillance'). Visibility can be emphasized by big Dolce&Gabana sunglasses, an expensive ADIDAS shirt, new *baskets* and the correct up-to-date haircut. Ostentation is the rule. Good friends don't just give each other a handshake but have a ritual. There are several variations, but the most common is to first clap against the other's hand, box your fist against his, then move your fist to your heart. Embracing street life also often goes with a frequent use of *verlan*: a rapidly changing slang in which the syllables of words are inverted<sup>119</sup>.

By applying this strategy, young people identify themselves as tough and cool and their neighbourhood as (potentially) dangerous and threatening. In June 2011, for example, the local cinema *l'Etoile* projects a movie made by ten young rappers from La Courneuve. It is a report of their trip to New York and Washington that they made a couple of months earlier. The first part of the movie is shot in La Courneuve. The camera moves slowly along the endless row of monotonous apartments of *Balzac* and *Le Mail*. The viewer only sees windows and concrete. Neither the middle class houses in between, nor the renovated parts of the neighbourhood are shown. This is followed by scenes of badly illuminated doorways, where the guys hang out. Their faces are hardly recognizable; it accentuates their rough and vulgar language [Diary notes 23 June 2011]. A couple of weeks later I talk to people that were involved in the making of the film. "The boys did the editing. I wasn't happy when I saw the result in the cinema. Too black. Too gloomy. Well, it is their film. They have decided what to put in and what to leave out. I just told them to give it at least a bit of substance. Otherwise it would have been only 'assholes this, assholes that'. I was just wondering: Are you really like this? Or are you just playing a role to impress your friends?" [Diary notes 7 July 2011]. The portrayal of the rough and dark, dangerous side of the ghetto is emblematic for this 'inscription' strategy.

'Inscribing street life' not only emphasizes identity content but also (re)produces its own reading of the neighbourhood population. It creates

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<sup>119</sup> For example, the word 'noir' becomes 'renoi'. Sometimes *verlan*-words are taken over by mainstream society. These words are then sometimes re-*verlan*ized. The word 'arab', for example, was first turned into 'beur', and later re-*verlan*ized into 'rebeur' (see e.g., Lefkowitz, 1989). The slang is sometimes mixed with words from other languages, such as the Arab 'mesb' (what's up?). See also Sarré et al., 2007, *Lexik des Cités*, a dictionary made by youngsters from Parisian *banlieue* Evry. It covers the most frequently used words and expressions among young inhabitants of the French *cités*.

subordinates *within* the neighbourhood based on age, gender (see Chapter 3), and those who do not follow the identity content of ‘street life’. Based on my interviews and observations, I identified an internal divide between the lower status young boys (*‘les petits’*, 10-17 years old) and the higher status older guys (*‘les grands’*, 18+). Moreover, I found evidence for recurrent and rather fixed ideas about how boys and girls should act in the neighbourhood. Guys are outside, they feel at home on the street. Girls are at home and go out to the streets only to go somewhere else (shopping outside the *cité*). Boys rap, girls dance. In other words, this strategy is not so much concerned with critiquing the state’s project of governing but mainly replacing it with its own internal project of governing and (self)disciplining. The creation of subordinates *within* leads to other identity struggles and negotiations. The earlier described example of Fadilah and Fedji (see paragraph 4.2) illustrates these identity negotiations *within*. In that example, by inscribing street life (vulgar language) and by phoning Fedji’s older brother, Fadilah tried to keep down the much younger Fedji, when he threatened to depict her as a whore on Facebook.

As Mariam describes these negotiations: “For girls it is more difficult to grow up in this neighbourhood. Because of the rumours. People gossip a lot. Especially if you go out with a boy of your own neighbourhood. Everybody knows it. I was together with a guy for a couple of months and then everybody came to me to ask me how it goes, what we did... Actually, nowadays, girls only date guys from outside the *cité*. For boys it doesn’t really matter, they can go with everybody they like. There are good guys, but there are also ones that make up stories, you know. It doesn’t trouble me that much, but some other girls are really bothered by them” [Interview Mariam, 20 July 2010].

Hassan also underlines that girls and boys take different positions in the *cité*: “Sexuality is taboo in the *cité*. It’s not good, you know. Because everything you don’t say, comes out here”. Hassan points to his eyes. “That’s why all those boys in the *cité* stare when a girl comes by. My sister is doing fine. She is protected by her brothers. As long as there’s a family, affection, then everything is fine. But if all that is missing she becomes a *‘garçon manqué’* (a tomboy). She is going to behave like a guy. She hangs out in the *cité* and spits in the streets. She has to assume an attitude to survive in the *cité*”.

Salah says: “Everybody in the neighbourhood knows who the *‘mauvaises filles’* (bad girls) and the *‘bonnes filles’* (good girls) are. As a girl you have to reflect on everything you do. That’s a pity, it takes away their freedom. As I grew up with so many girls, I have been raised just like my sisters. But the strain placed upon girls is bigger. Once you have a reputation you can not change it. Once you are a whore, you are a whore for the rest of your life. She can live here. There are enough guys that want to have sex with her. She can live. But... do you know what a ball and chain is? That’s how she has to live, with a ball and chain attached to her leg. If they talk about a girl, it’s better when they say: ‘Who? I don’t know her’ than ‘Oh right. Yeah, she did this and that...’ All my girlfriends didn’t live in La Courneuve. [...] As my dad used to say: ‘If you can avoid problems, avoid them!’”.

All my respondents, both boys and girls, said that it is difficult to start a love affair in the *cité*. Out of fear of stories, rumours, and gossiping, many seek amorous adventures outside the neighbourhood. Or they meet somewhere secretly: in the residential area next to the RER station, for example, where they know fewer people. I observed little physical contact in the streets of 4000*sud*, especially when compared to the abundant kissing on the bridges of the Seine in Paris city centre.

The experiences of boys and girls described above not only show that they take other positions within the *cité*, it also demonstrate that people keep an eye on you. Hence, the strategy of inscribing street life is also actively involved in a project of (self)disciplining. Youngsters who do not follow the preferred identity content are sometimes openly critiqued by their peers. Yannick (23 years old) sees the pressure during his work. He has a job at the music studio of the youth centre, where he records rap tracks with kids. “Yes, it’s the pressure of the crew. Sometimes I talk to one guy who’s very enthusiastic about recording a track and then he comes with three others to the studio. They sprawl on the bench and no longer feel like it. [...] The other day I played a song of Marvin Gaye. They didn’t like it. Because it isn’t rap... You know Michel, right? [a good friend of Yannick]. He just makes what he likes himself, but during a concert a while ago somebody threw a rotten tomato to his face. Because he did something different [Interview Yannick, 8 July 2011]. In a similar vein, Xavier (28 years old) who does not live in the area but works at a local association, says: “If I let my hair grow it will frizzle. I am sure that people will say things about it. Also with regard to what you wear. It’s better if a girl wears a black pair of trousers than jeans. It’s not only like that in 4000*sud*, but in all *cités* across France” [Interview Xavier, 20 June 2011]. Just as Xavier describes, Salah is critiqued for his haircut. When I enter the youth centre where he works, I bump into Hassan in the hallway. I ask him if he knows where Salah is. Hassan says: “Ah you mean rasta-man!” Salah does not have an exaggerated Afro hairstyle, but his hair is about a centimeter longer than the average haircut of my male respondents, and that is enough to generate comments from his peers.

Pressure from peers is not only experienced with regard to looks and appearances. Salah explains during the interview how some of his friends from childhood went to university and now have a normal job but others sell drugs at the bottom of his apartment building. He says he is happy about no longer feeling the pressure of these friendships: “I just say ‘*bonjour*’ and ‘*au revoir*’, ‘how are you?’ and that’s it. There is no longer this complicity that we had before. Somehow I am happy that I no longer have it. When you have a complicity with someone, it takes you up. When you acknowledge his friendship. When he acknowledges your friendship. You’re in it. That means: as soon as he has a problem, you will dive into it. Without reflection. As soon he has a fight with somebody, you go with him. It goes like that. You see what I mean? Always. Always. And that... [I no longer have that] complicity, that prevented me to become involved in fights, that prevented me of having problems with the police, or selling or shopping, you see what I mean? The moment that there is no longer this link I don’t say anything about this

person, and he doesn't say anything to me. The moment you don't see each other anymore... everyone takes his own path and it is difficult to come back, you see? So there is no longer a link, there is no longer ... 'I will be with him', *coûte-que-coûte*, there is... no longer 'you are with him'. That helped me to stay out of trouble. You see I know a lot [of guys] that are controlled; they are arrested every two weeks. I know that if I would have stayed with them I would have ended up in problems."

Youth worker Idriss also sees the peer pressure at the youth centre. Moreover, he experienced it himself. It is one of the reasons that he moved to Paris. He speaks with great emotion: "I left. If you stay here you will always feel the pressure. Always the pressure. From everybody. Also from your parents that don't have money and still have to manage it every month. If you stay you will always have this sickening pressure (*pression de dengue*)". Idriss walks away, tears in his eyes [Interview Idriss, 2 August 2011].

## NAVIGATING STRATEGIES

Above I have discussed three sets of social identification strategies (dissociating, transforming and associating) that give insight into the dynamics between outside categorization and self-identification. The above discussion may suggest that my respondents can be subdivided neatly into one of the three sets of strategies but my observations and interviews showed that young people often engage not in one but in several strategies. A short extract of the conversation that Gaba, Ibi and Murad have while hanging out in the gaming room of the youth centre shows how identification strategies are combined [Diary notes 11 July 2011]:

- Murad: In other places kids go and get a *baguette* only once they are at the age of 13 or 14. Here you are used to go to the bakery by yourself from early childhood. Youngsters hang out at the streets. It's normal to us. We're used to it. It is not Kinshasa here.
- Gaba: That's the capital of Ivory Coast, right?
- Murad: Congo, Congo. We're not in Iraq, you know what I mean, where you have dead bodies every single day. Like everywhere else there are good and bad people here. People think it is different here, because they see things on television.
- Gaba: Yeah, especially TF1<sup>120</sup>.
- Murad: It blocks stuff, you know. When looking for a job for example. But actually, I don't give a shit. I focus on myself, my neighbour, that's it. It's every man for himself. If I don't leave the house through that door, I'll take the other one (*Murad points to the two doors in the room*).

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<sup>120</sup> The most popular private national television channel in France.

Murad blurs the boundaries by stating that you have ‘bad people’ everywhere; he adds boundaries by comparing his situation to other subordinate groups (it is worse in Iraq and Kinshasa); and he talks about leaving the *cité*, a positional move (‘leaving the house’).

Even seemingly opposing strategies are applied by the same youngsters. Fouad, for example, who works at the youth centre, is often on the street corner, dresses in the latest street fashion, and talks somewhat boastfully about his trips to Dubai, his favourite vacation spot. He admires the place where he grew up and inscribes street life. However, when I ask him if he wants to stay in La Courneuve, he says: “No, if I get kids I will leave La Courneuve. You don’t feel at ease when your wife is out there alone at night. And I don’t want my kids to grow up in this neighbourhood. I had a great time here. I have many friends in this neighbourhood. But if you have ten friends, then maybe six succeed and four not. They are in prison or in crime, one is dead. You know what I mean? There is always a risk here<sup>121</sup>”. Fouad simultaneously associates and dissociates himself from the outside categorizations.

Oumar says: “Everybody has two sides... a bit of the *cité* side etcetera... and the friendly side, the family side, for example among neighbours when someone is out of salt or rice or so you give it to them. That’s how we do it here, you don’t see that in other neighbourhoods. [...] The *cité* side is when we are among ourselves, we drive without license, or on our motorbikes without helmet, in the wrong direction of the road. It’s our game, you know. Our game... it could be dangerous for others, that’s how we play it. It’s like that... [...] our way to earn money... our way to.. that’s for me the *cité* side” [Interview Oumar, 30 June 2011].

These observations relate to what sociologist Anderson (1999:36) calls ‘code-switching’. In his research about inner-city black America, he makes a distinction between ‘decent’ and ‘street’ people, each having their own codes and rules. People may switch to another style and way of acting, depending at the situation they find themselves in. On the street corner, the codes and beliefs of a ‘decent’ guy have little value. In order to survive and establish a certain degree of safety, particularly ‘decent’ kids would present themselves differently on the street corner than at home. Related to Anderson’s ‘code-switching’ is ‘social navigation’, described by anthropologists Utas (2005)<sup>122</sup> and Vigh (2003). They show how people navigate through difficult situations by tactically deploying a variety of different self-representations.

Let’s have another look at what Sylvain said at the beginning of this chapter: “It is difficult to live here. Well, actually it isn’t difficult. When you are born here, it is not difficult. But there are people coming from outside who make us reflect upon ourselves. And then it becomes complicated, you know what I mean?” [Interview Sylvain, 24 June 2010].

<sup>121</sup> See also what Dubet (1987) called ‘*Le trou noir*’.

<sup>122</sup> Utas did research into social navigation among women during the civil war in Liberia. Depending on the situation, women sometimes presented themselves as victims, at other times as warriors.

Oumar says something similar: "... when we leave [the neighbourhood] we try to adapt ourselves to the environment we go to... but, for example, sometimes when Frenchmen come to our place... well Frenchmen... eh... when Parisians come to our place, *we* adapt to them... that is to say that if we are in Paris, when we go to a company or so we dress appropriately, we go in a suit. Normally, when they come to us you would expect them to dress normally... in trousers... but NO they wear a tie, a suit. I find that interesting if we go to them we adjust ourselves, if they come to us they stay exactly the same! That means that we always try to adapt ourselves to people, to be like... well it means that we are not stable" [Interview Oumar, 30 June 2011].

The words of Sylvain and Oumar reveal the contrast and power imbalance between outside and inside expectations. While navigating life through social identification strategies, young people need to take into account simultaneously external and internal projects of governing and (self)disciplining. Both sides attract and put off (see figure 4.2).

Fouad's example above shows that inscribing street life gives him identity, face, status in the neighbourhood. He may even see himself at the top of the power hierarchy. However, outside the neighbourhood his self-identification as a 'gangster' is much less valued, and he is probably categorized at the very opposite side of the power hierarchy, somewhere in the lowest subscale.

In a similar vein, Mariam says it is difficult for a girl to grow up in the *cité*, because she has a subordinate role in the neighbourhood. Hanging out on the street is seen as inappropriate, and dating a guy from her neighbourhood will probably lead to all kinds of rumours and an infamous reputation. Leila (21 years old) has a different reading: "It is not more difficult, but easier for girls [to live in the *cité*]. They are inclined to study more, because they are less influenced by the groups that hang out in the streets. And they are more protected by their parents" [Interview Leila, 17 July 2010]. Whereas Leila positions herself with regard to the expectations of the 'outside world', where obtaining a university degree is valued and hanging out on the streets is seen as a waste of time, Mariam talks from the perspective of the 'inside world' of the neighbourhood, where she has a subordinate position as a girl.

Others, however, seem to have less difficulty navigating between 'outside' and 'inside' expectations. An example is Jamel, who is a student at one of France's top academic institutes. "I was confronted with a different universe. It's another world. In the beginning, when I told them that I come from La Courneuve, a couple of students asked me: 'Isn't it too dangerous?' [...] The first couple of weeks I had a culture shock. Now I am in a different social class. The class of the bourgeoisie." Jamel laughs. "People that come from different social horizons. Yes, that was quite a shock. You need to take some time to get acclimatized. The people. They don't have the same socialization. They don't have the same way of talking. I am now in a group with the elites of the nation. At the beginning of the year we had an introduction week. We came together in small groups to get to know each other. In my group there was someone with a 20,30 for his BAC [final

exam at high school]. Here we are happy if we get a 14 out of 20 [points]. So it changes almost everything that I was used to. I did everything here. But after two months or so I was used to them. I made friends. It's not difficult to combine these two worlds. I am happy that La Courneuve is close to Paris, so I can stay here. I see my friends with whom I grew up. And I also meet my friends from university. Sometimes we do things together. Even if they don't have always the same interests, they also have many things in common" [Interview Jamel, 16 June 2011].

While my data clearly shows that switching depends on peer pressure to identify with the street and external pressure to adjust to the norms of broader French society, more research is needed to explain in detail *when* young people switch from one strategy to another.

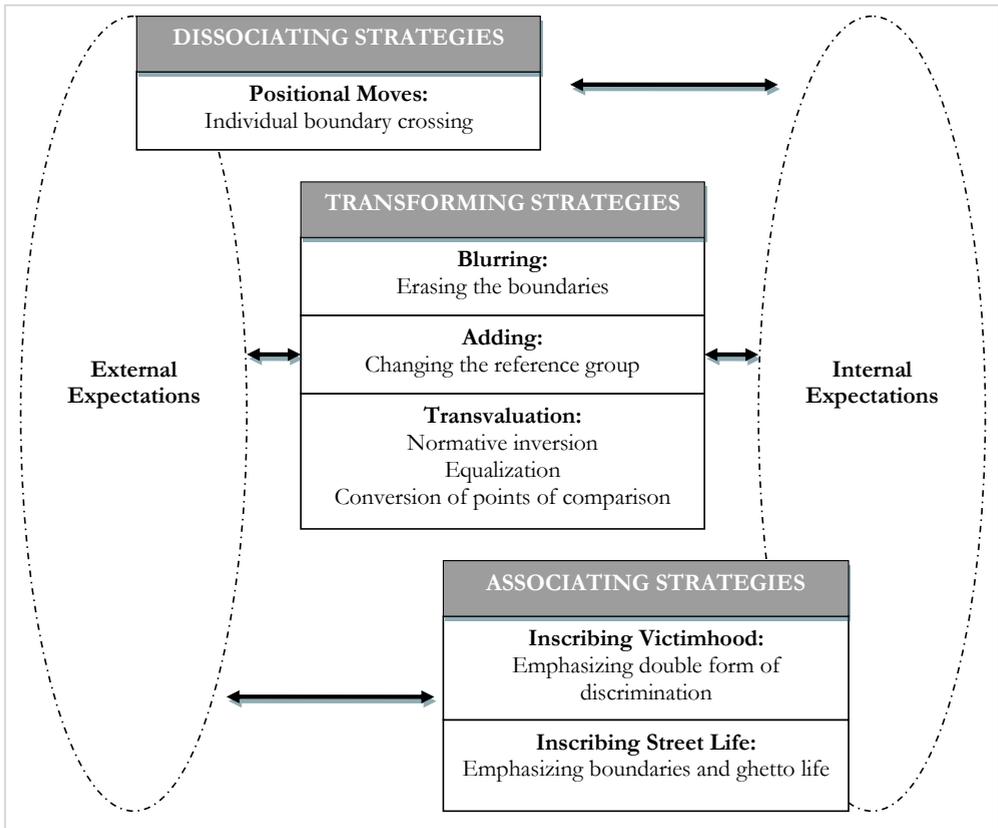


Figure 4.2: Social Navigation and External and Internal (self)Disciplining.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter focused on the identity of ‘youngsters from the *banlieue*’. Rather than taking this group as a given unit of analysis, I have focused on the making and unmaking of this social identity. I have argued that we can understand this process by looking at the interaction between outside categorizations and (self)identifications. In the first chapter, I showed how the state’s governing frames and practices over the past decades have contributed to the making of ‘youngsters from the *banlieue*’. This rather reified outside categorization draws boundaries that are predominantly spatial, and more implicitly based on gender (male) and immigrant origin (Arab/Blacks); and it attributes identity content that emphasizes either criminal or victim roles.

Based on my empirical data, and by drawing upon Wimmer’s theoretical vocabulary, I have distinguished in this chapter between three sets of social identification strategies that interact with the outside categorizations: dissociating, transforming and associating strategies. While the first and second set of strategies are enacted by both boys and girls, associating strategies are predominantly enacted by boys and young males.

By acting on what I call dissociating strategies, young residents do not identify as *banlieusard* and instead individually seek to cross the boundary by physically or psychologically leaving the neighbourhood. In the second set, transforming strategies, young people try (either individually or collectively) to alter the boundaries or content of the outside categorizations. They protest, oppose and try to transform their subordinate position in a relationship that is characterized by experiences of injustice and discrimination. In the third set, associating strategies, youngsters identify as *banlieusard* and embrace the victimized or criminalized identity content. Whereas ‘inscribing victimhood’ sees no way out of misery, ‘inscribing street life’ actively (and often collectively) reinforces the outside stereotypes of dangerous and threatening *banlieusards*. Young males, in particular, act out roles that are already expected of them. Moreover, the strategy produces and reproduces an internal project of governing and disciplining; it creates subordinates *within*, along age and gender lines. The place-making routines (in particular ‘*trainer*’ and ‘*surveillance*’), which I discussed in the previous chapter, are actively acted out by young males who embark on the associating strategies.

Furthermore, I argued in this chapter that young people do not simply follow one set of strategies but combine and switch between them, depending on the situation in which they find themselves. These identity negotiations take place along two central relations: the outside-inside relations (in which the young migrant male is most prominently categorized and stigmatized) and the relations *within* the neighbourhood (in which some young males try to turn younger boys and girls into subordinates). The analysis of identity dynamics shows how youngsters, in their need to *belong*, may escape from or transform the relation between the outside and inside, but also how they may be sucked into an internal world with different power relations, boundaries and roles. In going back and forth between strategies, young

residents of 4000*sud* need to think about both outside and inside expectations. They need to navigate life while taking into account two (often conflicting) projects of governing and (self)disciplining, one instigated by the state, the other on the street corner.

The past chapters have offered an understanding of the interaction between the state's project of governing and the opposition and alternative projects of reading and governing places and people instigated at the neighbourhood level. Now, that the contested place-making and social identity processes have been theoretically and ethnographically explored, there is one aspect of the puzzle that needs to be studied more closely and to which the next chapter will turn: violence. It will discuss how both transforming and associating strategies can be linked to acts of violence.

# Chapter 5

Manifestations and Interpretations of Violence

*Burning Cars and Dealing Drugs behind Le Mail*

## ***This Fire***

Eyes  
Boring a way through me  
Paralyse  
Controlling completely  
Now  
There is a fire in me  
Fire that burns  
Fire that burns

*This fire is out of control  
I'm going to burn this city  
Burn this city  
If this fire is out of control  
Then I  
I'm out of control  
And I burn*

Eyes  
Burning a way to me  
Overwhelm  
Destroying so sweetly  
Now  
There is a fire in me  
Fire that burns  
Fire that burns  
This fire...

Franz Ferdinand, *This Fire* (2004)

15 June 2011, around six p.m. The calm, warm late afternoon breeze is disturbed by a continuous noise: a helicopter hovering over the neighbourhood. When I walk from Jean's apartment toward the train station to see what is going on, some ten police cars pass by. The *'guetteurs'* on the lookout shout and nervously signal each other. Some whistle through their fingers. A young man quickly jumps into a passing van. To my surprise, the police do not stop at the hallways where drug 'stores' are set up. Instead, they head for the end of the street: *Place du Château d'Eau*. When I get there, the square is hermetically sealed off by riot police wearing bulletproof vests, flash-balls in their hands. The activity concentrates around 'Green Ice', a bar that sells kebab, burgers and ice creams. Yesterday, Xavier, who works at a local association, told me that it is the place where the local drug money is laundered. I see two policemen with cameras and one who is filming the scene and I start to wonder whether I am watching the shooting of a new action movie or real events. "No no, it's real", says a man next to me, who works at a shop at the other side of the square. "They have just raided Green Ice and make a report for France 2 [a public French television channel]. To show it all on television". The kebab bar lights up now and then from camera flashes. The cameraman takes some shots of the gathered crowd, mainly teenage boys but also some girls looking with full attention at the commotion. The atmosphere is relatively resigned. Some younger kids of about 6 years old rally around a policeman. They look up at his 'battle' gear and his big black sunglasses. Next to me a man says: "You know our president? "The little one... (*Le petit*)."

The man, who is himself about 1.65m tall, brings his hand to the middle of his chest to give an indication of Sarkozy's height. "The little one...", he laughs, "... used to be a lawyer. He knows exactly how to deal with this. In one year we will have presidential elections... so he has to run his cinema. This will happen more often from now on". The man sighs: "He should do something about the unemployment in this district rather than this... Why does it take so long? It's not that difficult to arrest a number of people... but no, they didn't take a good picture of this or that, the shot was not right. So they do it again". Two guys sit on the ground in front of Green Ice, handcuffed. Another one is taken away with blaring sirens. When he passes by in the backseat of the police car, he smiles at the crowd, feigning indifference to what is happening to him [Diary notes 15 June 2011].

In the first chapter, I discussed how three violent events and their subsequent reading and enactment contributed to the imagination and hardening of the *banlieues* and the categorization of its young inhabitants. The above example is another illustration of the state's enactment. State coercion and repression is, as examined in the first chapter, one of numerous technologies of governance for responding to the reading of violent events that occur in the *banlieues*. The state shows its presence in an attempt to convince, both the local public and the wider audience, that it has control over its subjects and territory: from above by a hovering helicopter, and on the ground by the mobilization of a massive and heavily armed police force.

The above example returns the discussion to ‘violent events’ that the state reads and reacts to. As noted in the Introduction, Paul Brass (1996: 1) claims “the power to define and interpret local incidents of violence, to place them in specific contexts based on local knowledge, have been removed from the local societies in which they occur”. He claims that outside ‘authorities’ provide ready-made contexts and frames in which the local events are placed, which in the end may result in “an ‘official’ interpretation that finally becomes universally accepted, but which is often if not usually, very far removed, often unrecognizable, from the original precipitating events” (ibid: 15). The current chapter will therefore closely observe, situate and disaggregate violence from a local perspective. I will take a closer look at the local readings and enactment of violence and argue that young people resort to violence both to critique the state’s project of governing and to establish their own internal project of governing, that is, to control the neighbourhood and its inhabitants. I will argue that the former can be linked to ‘transforming strategies’ discussed in Chapter 4, while the latter is connected to ‘associating strategies’.

This chapter consists of three parts. It starts with a theoretical exploration of the ‘slippery’ concept of violence. I propose to distinguish between objective manifestation of violence and its subjective interpretation. The second part of the chapter follows this analytical divide and disaggregates violence by looking at the manifestation of two common repertoires of violence, each with their own actors, targets, timing, place, organization and degree of visibility, and to various meanings that are attached to these repertoires of violence. The last part of this chapter takes a closer look at the consequences and effectiveness of violent acts in the governing of the neighbourhood. The constant presence of violence, even when direct acts are absent, contributes to the (self)disciplining and ordering of the neighbourhood. The ‘code of the street’ is propagated through narratives about past violence, warnings for future violence, and the rule to keep silent.

## 5.1 VIOLENCE: TOWARDS A BETTER GRIP ON A SLIPPERY CONCEPT

When discussing or studying violence, journalists, policymakers and academics often focus in the first instance on an explanation of the event, that is, on the causes of the violence. Why does violence occur? The answers to that question vary, ranging from economic crises, unemployment, racial and territorial discrimination and poverty (i.e., relative deprivation), economic greed and profit (i.e., rational choice), to intrinsic cultural or religious traits and irrational senseless acts. The emphasis on the *causes* of violence, however, may shed insufficient light on other, both empirical and theoretical, aspects of violence.

First, an overemphasis on the causes of violence may distract from a careful *empirical* observation of the actual violence. Different forms of violence may easily be lumped together and understood as all of one kind. In their search for a

definition of ‘ethnic’ and ‘nationalist’ forms of violence, Brubaker & Laitin (1998: 427) remark: “The problem is not that there is no agreement on *how* things are to be explained; it is that there is no agreement on *what* is to be explained, or *whether* there is a single set of phenomena to be explained”. Hence, violent events are explained without a proper idea and careful study of *what* has happened and how it may differ from other violent events. Car burnings and drug-related violence, once they occur in the *banlieue*, are often framed as a monolithic danger, threat or incidence of criminality from the *banlieue*. Categorization in this case is solely based on space (Where did the violence happen?), rather than on other relevant questions, such as: When did it happen? Who was involved? Who or what was targeted? I propose that studying violence always needs a micro-analytical empirical exploration of what has happened, of what it is precisely that one tries to understand or explain.

Secondly, and related, an overemphasis on explanations may easily treat violence solely as an independent variable. It is what Kalyvas (2006: 21) calls the ‘blackboxing’ of it. Violence is in this sense mainly seen as an outcome or result, rather than as part of a dynamic process (see also Schinkel, 2010: 36, 78-80). “The focus is on instances of violence rather than the complex, and often invisible, nonviolent actions and mechanisms that precede and follow them” (Kalyvas, 2006: 21). In a similar line, Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois (2004: 1) propose instead to speak about “chains, spirals, and mirrors of violence [...] a continuum of violence”.

The above two points lead to a more fundamental, underlying question: What is violence? The omnipresence of violence in our daily lives, experienced directly, or indirectly through the media, may suppose that a commonsense definition of the concept suffices. However, by equating the everyday language to a social analytical concept one runs the risk of “distorting the social processes due to be uncovered” (Riches, 1986: 1). As Riches argues “the terms of everyday language are used in particular situations by particular individuals who have particular designs; the sense these terms convey is therefore bound to vary subtly with the context” (ibid: 1).

The pliability of the notion of violence and the task of social researchers to look beyond an everyday understanding of the concept is also acknowledged by others. Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004: 1) state in the introduction of their *Anthology of Violence in War and Peace* that “Violence is a slippery concept – nonlinear, productive, destructive, *and* reproductive”. Also Schinkel (2010: 3) and Levi & Maguire (2002) speak of a “slippery” term. Charles Tilly (1978: 174, cited in Brubaker & Laitin, 1998: 427), called it an ambiguous and elastic concept. Violence thus seems to be difficult to capture. Violence “defies easy categorization. It can be everything and nothing; legitimate or illegitimate; visible or invisible; necessary or useless; senseless and gratuitous or utterly rational and strategic” (Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois, 2004: 2). Why is violence so slippery?

A first answer has to do with the fuzzy boundaries of the concept. Bufacchi (2005), like many others<sup>123</sup>, classifies the academic debate over the conceptual boundaries of violence into two camps: on one side, academics who propagate a ‘minimalist conception of violence’, and on the other, those who favour a ‘comprehensive concept of violence’. Bufacchi (2005: 199) adds that this classification entails not only a narrow opposed to a broad conception of violence, but he also stresses that the former takes the perpetrator as a starting point, while the latter concentrates on the victim.

Violence, in the restricted sense, is often mainly defined as physical and related to acts of ‘force’. It focuses on the visible and intentional harm to other persons or to objects. Marsh et al. (1978: 24, emphasis in original), for example, define violence as “an act of *physical interference* with another, whether or not mediated by the use of a weapon. The physical interference need not be sufficiently forceful or well-aimed to result in some form of damage or destruction to a proper part of the victim, though we suppose that a violent action would generally be painful to the recipient”. In a similar vein, anthropologist David Riches (1986: 8) defines violence as “an act of physical hurt deemed legitimate by the performer and illegitimate by (some) witnesses”. This often cited and praised definition by Riches (see e.g., Schröder & Schmidt, 2001) emphasizes, in addition to the physical element, the contested legitimacy<sup>124</sup> inherent in the act of violence.

Others, however, critique this narrow definition that understands violence purely and exclusively as physical (e.g., Schinkel, 2010: 34-36). Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004) argue that “[v]iolence also includes assaults on the personhood, dignity, sense of worth or value of the victim. The social and cultural dimensions of violence are what gives violence its power and meaning” (ibid: 1). Their understanding of violence correspond better with the comprehensive, extended or inclusive concept of violence. In the late 1960s, Johan Galtung pointed to the necessity of a broad definition of violence. Galtung argued that “violence is present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential” (1969: 168). Violence, according to Galtung, may both be physical and psychological, positive and negative, intended and not intended, latent and manifest, with and without subjects, with and without objects (ibid: 169-174). Jacoby (2008: 34-44) explains that Galtung’s broad conceptualization of violence was a response to and should be seen in the context of developments in the social sciences and in particular in the field of conflict studies during the 1960s. Two camps emerged that opposed the narrow behavioral school of mainly North American academics and European theorists. The former

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<sup>123</sup> See for example Schinkel (2010), who distinguishes between a ‘limited’ and an ‘extended’ concept of violence; or De Haan (2008), who speaks of a ‘restrictive’ and an ‘inclusive’ definition of violence.

<sup>124</sup> Schinkel (2010: 35) argues that Riches’s understanding of contested legitimacy is too restrictive. In fact, the performer may resort to violence precisely because he is aware of its illegitimacy. Furthermore, the witnesses may deem violence legitimate, for example when he/she is befriended by the performer of violence.

focused on manifest violence while the latter, inspired by South American *dependencia* theory, heavily critiqued the narrow school for being blind to the detrimental consequences of capitalist and neocolonial Western policies for peace and development. Galtung more or less bridged the two camps by embracing the divide between personal *direct* violence and structural *indirect* violence. In relation to this, he makes a distinction between *negative* peace (the absence of direct violence) and *positive* peace (the absence of direct, but also cultural and structural violence). As Demmers (2012: 57) argues: ‘clearly, by drawing this new definitional boundary, Galtung aims to politicize and bring to the fore what is largely taken for granted. By labeling poverty and underdevelopment as violence, he is casting blame and responsibility, pointing at the underlying forces supporting and legitimizing this’.

Bourdieu also embraces a broad definition of violence. Related to Galtung’s ‘structural violence’, he speaks of ‘symbolic violence’, which he describes as forms of social and cultural domination that are often taken for granted and experienced as ‘natural’, even by its victims. Symbolic violence, with gender domination as a prime example, “accomplishes itself through an act of cognition and of misrecognition that lies beyond – or beneath – the controls of consciousness and will” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2004: 273; Bourdieu, 1977).

Schinkel, influenced by Galtung, defines violence as the “reduction of being” and argues that “there is a certain degree of violence in every situation” (ibid: 53). Schinkel proposes “to liquify, or make fluid, what theories of violence all too often solidify” (2010: 4).

The main critique of these broader definitions is that violence is everything and everywhere at any time. How can violence be differentiated from other social phenomena? Where does it start? And where does it end? (see for example Achterhuis, 2006; Waddington, Badger & Bull, 2005; Marsh et al, 1978: 24). Some, however, have made attempts to clarify the boundaries of structural violence and (partly) operationalized the concept (e.g., Alcock & Köhler, 1979; Høivik, 1977; Köhler & Alcock, 1976; Galtung & Høivik, 1971; see also Jacoby, 2008: 44-49). However, these studies mainly focus on life and death: on the potential increase in life expectancy in particular contexts that embody severe forms of structural violence; they pay less attention to nonfatal sufferings due to systemic exploitation, injustice and discrimination.

An alternative to the dichotomous typology of minimalist and comprehensive conceptualizations of violence is Schinkel’s ‘*trias violentiae*’ (2013; 2010). Schinkel argues that violence should be understood from what he calls a ‘regime of violence’, which emphasizes the relations and translations between different forms of violence: private violence, state violence, and structural violence. Schinkel explains: “For violence only ever emerges within a web of social relations that attributes the reference ‘violence’ to actions, and it only appears within a ‘frame’ that is to a large extent circumscribed by the state. That is to say that what counts as violence, and is recognized as such, and what is not, are also dependent on mediation by a certain ‘frame’. [...] Blindness to an existing regime of violence

means an implicit acceptance of the prevalent ways of defining and recognizing violence” (ibid: 6-7).

Apart from the academic debate about the conceptual breadth of the concept, another, related, question haunts the concept and may explain the slipperiness of the notion of violence: the debate between those who treat the concept as objective and those who see it as subjective. Can violence be reduced to a number of universally observable facts? Or is it instead a matter of experience and perception? Postmodernists would probably focus exclusively on the latter. Violence is subjective, they would argue, because it is not stable, it varies in time and space, and it depends on who resorts to it. What used to be seen as violence in the past may not necessarily still be considered violence today, and vice versa. Joanna Bourke’s work (2007) on the changing definition of rape and rapists in British, American and Australian societies is a telling illustration of this variability. Incest, for example, which is today generally regarded as sexual violence, was not a crime by law before 1908 in England and Wales (ibid: 9). Moreover, what is seen as violence depends on where you are. Female circumcision, for example, is in many countries seen as a violent act, whereas elsewhere it is perceived as a non-violent part of tradition. Kicking someone in the face in a fight arena is part of the game, while the same act, when walking on the street or sitting in a bar, would be perceived as violent. Likewise, violence that is committed by the modern state is often considered as legitimate and ‘good’, whereas it is generally seen as illegitimate when the same acts are committed by other actors than those who hold the supposed monopoly on it. Violence is thus difficult to capture because it is an inherently normative, emotional and evaluative concept. Whether something is violence depends on the interpretations of the actor, victim, or audience, who attaches meaning to what is experienced.

Nevertheless, I argue that violent acts can be described and studied beyond pure experience. Although people may disagree whether any particular act should be labeled as violent, the act itself has a number of characteristics which can be more or less objectively diagnosed. At least for analytical purposes, we can make a distinction between the *manifestation* and *interpretation* of violence. In line with Wieviorka (2009; 1999: 12-16), I propose therefore not to choose between the subjective and objective perspective, but rather to study the interaction between them. As Wieviorka (1999: 12) suggests, it is the task of the researcher to study both sides of the spectrum, plus discrepancies between empirical observations of the manifestation of violence and the representations that are attached to it by various actors. Although I will build upon Wieviorka’s definitions, it is important to note that his distinction between ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ violence is different from Žižek’s understanding of the terms. Žižek sees objective violence mainly as ‘systemic’ and ‘anonymous’ violence ingrained in capitalism. He defines subjective violence, in contrast, as the more visible violence that is committed by ‘social agents’, ‘evil individuals’ or ‘fanatic crowds’. Žižek argues that the latter is too often the focus of attention, whereas the former receives insufficient attention (2008: 10-11).

The starting point of the above discussion was that, while setting out to study violence in the *banlieue*, the concept of violence itself can too easily slip through the researcher's fingers. My aim, in the above discussion, was not to present a comprehensive and exhaustive review of the entire academic debate on the definition of violence. A more elaborate discussion on violence can be found in recent and very rich academic writings, such as the ones by Schinkel (2010) and Wieviorka (2009) in sociology, and Achterhuis (2006) in philosophy. Neither did I want to turn 'slippery violence' into a stiff or fixed concept. My aim, rather, was to get a better grip on its fluidity. The above discussion produced two main insights that are, to my mind, important for a further exploration of violence at the sites where I gathered my empirical data. First, violence is not simply an outcome or result but part of a process. Second, violence is both objective and subjective. I will elaborate both on the manifestation of violent acts that can be more or less objectively described, and the interpretation of violence, paying attention to how violent acts are experienced. I am aware that the divide is somewhat artificial and that each and every description of manifestations of violent acts contains coded, and thus interpretative, elements. Nevertheless, as I will illustrate below, I am convinced that such a divide is fruitful in obtaining a better understanding of violence.

## 5.2 THE MANIFESTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF VIOLENCE

### 5.2.1. The manifestation of violence

While walking through the streets of 4000*sud*, I observed several manifestations of violence. I not only noticed drug dealing activity and the state's attempt to stop it, as described at the beginning of this chapter, but I also saw burning cars, clashes between police and young people, and everyday acts of mischief. Based on these observations and my interviews, I will distinguish between what I will here call two common repertoires of violence. I loosely borrow the term from Tilly & Tarrow (2007: 49; see also Wieviorka, 1999: 29), who define a repertoire as "arrays of contentious performances that are currently known and available within some set of political actors". The term repertoire is, in my view, appropriate here, as it refers to a number of recurrently observed and rather scripted and codified acts of violence that I have identified in my collected data. I classify the observed car-burnings, police-youth clashes and *conneries* (stupidities/mischief) as 'audience-oriented violence', while I label drug dealing and related escalations of violence as 'backstage-oriented violence'. The former is sometimes generally described as a form of 'expressive violence', while the latter would fit in the category of 'instrumental violence'. This classic dichotomy (see e.g., Ray, 2011; Ramsbotham et al., 2011; Wieviorka, 2009) focuses mainly on the motive or source of violence. Expressive (also 'hot' or 'symbolic'<sup>125</sup>) violence is associated with emotions and

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<sup>125</sup> Note that this usage of the term is different from Bourdieu's 'symbolic violence'.

passions; according to this notion, people resort to certain types of violence driven by aggression or pleasure. In contrast, instrumental (also ‘cold’ or ‘practical’) violence is mainly seen as goal-oriented. Rational actors make cost-benefit calculations and resort to violence to *gain* something. Although the dichotomy may be helpful in certain regards, it is often difficult to make a clear-cut distinction between what drives human violence. Many forms of violence have both instrumental and expressive elements (see Ray, 2011; Wiewiorka, 2009). Fights related to drug trade, for example, may be goal-directed (to weaken or chase away a drug dealer from another turf) and arouse at the same time strong emotions (aggression, the feeling of being in power). Setting a car on fire may be rooted in feelings of frustration but also have the goal to act out against discrimination or to swindle the insurance company (see further below). Furthermore, the instrumental/expressive dichotomy can be critiqued for singling out one feature of violence. As I will illustrate below, the difference between car-burnings, police-youth clashes and *conneries* on the one hand and drug related violence on the other hand is more complex. The two repertoires have their own actors, targets, timing, place and degree of visibility. The labeling that I propose, ‘audience-oriented’ and ‘backstage-oriented’ repertoires of violence, not only leaves room for a variety of motivations (both expressive and instrumental), but also implies that violence can have a different quality and occurs in different locations. Moreover, it suggests, to stay with the theatre metaphor, that most attention of the audience may go to the front stage, while the actual power is located at the backstage. It is the directors and producers, whom we often don’t see, that are most influential in controlling and governing the stage.

Before I elaborate on the manifestation of these two repertoires, it is important to note two things. First, I am aware that the two proposed repertoires are not all-inclusive. The categorization neglects, for example, forms of domestic violence, theft and burglaries that are also present in the area under research. Rather than presenting a wide-angle view, I will discuss and study in detail those acts that were most salient in my interviews and observations. Further, the selected acts of violence have a more collective character and seem to have a greater and more continuous impact on everyday life in the neighbourhood (rather than on individual lives).

Secondly, it is important to keep in mind that the acts that make up the two repertoires may not be qualified by all involved actors as ‘violence’. Where some may see pure violence, others, may perceive the act merely as a form of self-defense or as a playful ritual. As I will demonstrate later, the acts may be read and weighted differently by the various involved actors, victims and witnesses. For practical reasons I will, however, speak below of various repertoires and acts of violence, knowing though that some would label it differently.

## Repertoire 1: Audience-oriented violence

The first repertoire includes acts of violence that are intentionally performed to reach a large public. They are often highly visible and target elements that are perceived as ‘external’ or ‘alien’ by those who resort to the violence. The repertoire includes two types of acts. The first set of acts (car-burning and police-youth clashes) is rather narrowly defined and occurs only at particular moments in time, while the second set (*conneries*) includes a broader range of actions and has a more everyday character.

### *Car-burnings and police-youth clashes*

What started as so-called *rodéos* in the late 1970s soon turned into a repertoire: recurring suburban car-burnings and clashes between young people and police, with the 2005 episode as a climax (see Chapter 1). Although these events are generally labeled as riots (*émeutes*), some claim that we should rather speak of ‘revolts’ (e.g., Dikeç, 2007) or ‘urban violence’ (e.g., Body-Gendrot, 2007). My aim in this section is not to deal with the different *readings* of the events, but to identify and describe their more objective and recurrent characteristics.

The car-burnings and police-youth clashes that have occurred in the past decades vary in their manifestations. Nevertheless, a number of key characteristics can be identified, related to (1) timing; (2) involved actors; (3) location; and (4) targets.

First, when do car-burning episodes take place? Violence often does not erupt spontaneously, but follows a certain pattern. Horowitz’s (2001: 72) extensive study on riots<sup>126</sup> around the globe and through the ages reveals a full episode of rioting can be characterized as a bell curve, with growing and then declining intensity of violence (2001: 72). He distinguishes several phases: the pre-riot phase, the lull (a relatively quiet period before the onset of violence), the massive outbreak of violence, and the final stage which shows a return to a non-violent or ‘normal’ situation. Horowitz stresses the crucial importance of the pre-riot phase, which contains a trigger event followed by rumours that may legitimize the resort to violence. As discussed in Chapter 1, the trigger that heralded the 2005 car burnings was the electrocution of Bouna and Zyed in the EDF power substation in Clichy-sous-Bois. Accountability for their deaths was heavily contested. The police denied

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<sup>126</sup> Horowitz builds his theory specifically on the empirical study of ‘deadly ethnic riots’. The violent episodes discussed here do not neatly correspond with his categorization. Although the events in the French suburbs may erupt after a fatal encounter, the car-burnings and clashes themselves seldom have a ‘deadly’ character. Moreover, the events are not primarily ‘ethnic’. The acts are generally not rooted in tensions between two or more ethnic groups. Youngsters do not resort to violence for the proliferation or defense of their ethnic identity. And finally, as stated above, there is debate about whether one should classify the car-burnings and clashes as ‘riots’. Nonetheless, I think that the rhythm that Horowitz describes is broadly applicable and fruitful for understanding the timing and duration of the car-burning episodes and police-youth clashes.

any involvement or responsibility, while neighbourhood inhabitants claimed that the boys were deliberately chased to death by the police. A similar trigger event occurred two years later, in November 2007 in the north Parisian suburb Villiers-le-Bel. As already indicated in the Introduction to this book, two boys, Moshin and Laramy, died after an accident with a police car. Opposing stories about the responsibility for their deaths spread both locally and at the national level through media coverage and political debates. Again the police and the Ministry of Interior Affairs denied any responsibility for the death of the two boys; they contended that Moshin and Laramy had driven too fast, without protective head gear, on a motor bike that was not allowed to drive on public roads. In contrast, others said that the police deliberately drove into the boys and that this was, with the events of 2005 in the back of their minds, another illustration of injustice committed by the police<sup>127</sup>.

Emblematic of these trigger events is that they remain unclarified and evoke rumours about the exact nature of the event. These rumours may be false or exaggerated, but they stress the hostile intentions of or the aggression committed by the target group [in this case the local police] against another group [in this case ‘youngsters from the *banlieue*’] (2001: 74-88). Horowitz points out that rumours are not just tales but have a function in that they can mobilize people and create a common cause. Rumours may serve to legitimize the resort to violence.

In the autumn of 2005, cars burned in 4000*sud* and other parts of La Courneuve. What is remarkable, however, is that other events in La Courneuve, such as the accidental death of the 11-year-old Sid-Ahmed in 2005 (see Chapter 3) did not lead to collective car-burnings; neither did the murder of the 28-year-old Sid-Ahmed at the bottom of the *Balsac* building a couple of days before my arrival in the neighbourhood (see Chapter 2). These events also produced local rumours and were politicized and covered by national media. However, in these two cases the police were not directly involved. Hence, it seems that it was not so much the *intensity* of the event that provokes rumours that was crucial here but merely the actors involved and the already established tense relations between them. As Horowitz argues “... a rumor will not take hold unless there is a market for it, a need in an emerging situation” (2001: 75). Only after perceived ‘state violence’ directed against a particular group of people, can large-scale car-burnings and clashes with the police be legitimized. The importance of police involvement is confirmed by other studies that included not only France but also, regarding similar violent events, in Great-Britain and the United States (see e.g., Kokoreff, 2010: 53; Wieviorka, 1999: 31; Benyon, 1987).

The events in Parisian suburb Trappes in July 2013 further demonstrate that the trigger event does not necessarily have to be fatal. Car-burnings and youth-police clashes started in Trappes after a police confrontation with a veiled woman. Since 2011, wearing a full *burka* or *niqab* in public is forbidden in France<sup>128</sup>. The

<sup>127</sup> For a more detailed description of the events in Villiers-le-Bel, see Moran (2012) or Kokoreff (2010).

<sup>128</sup> Law number 2010-1192 - *Loi interdisant la dissimulation du visage dans l'espace public* (Act prohibiting concealment of the face in public space) passed by the French senate in September

police claimed that the family members of the veiled woman turned aggressive and that they therefore decided to arrest her husband. However, the man denied that he attacked the police and said in contrast that it was the police who provoked and aggressively treated him and his family<sup>129</sup>. Violence started the next day. What is decisive here is the perceived injustice and the unclarified circumstances surrounding the nature of the event in an already tense climate, where rumours confirm an already existing narrative of a state that discriminates against a particular group of people.

After a trigger event and rumours, violence often erupts immediately (e.g., in Clichy-sous-Bois and Villiers-le-Bel) or after a short lull<sup>130</sup> (e.g., in Trappes). Car-burnings and clashes between youth and police predominantly take place in the evening and at night, whereas during the day it is generally calm and quiet. Most episodes last for a couple of days and remain limited to one or a few neighbourhoods. As indicated earlier, the violence in the autumn of 2005 was exceptional, both for its long duration (21 days) and its geographic spread on the national level (300 neighbourhoods across the Republic were affected).

Apart from the issue of *timing*, a second key characteristic of the car-burnings and youth-police clashes are its *actors*. The youngsters that are involved in these acts of violence are generally male and fairly young, between 15-20 years-old (see Delon & Muchielli, 2007; Lagrange, 2006). Earlier research on the 2005 events that I conducted in *banlieue* Montfermeil and some other suburbs in the north Parisian 93-district (Slooter, 2007) revealed that these youngsters are loosely organized and often operate in small groups of friends (see also Roché, 2006: 48). At the time, youth worker Fouad (26 years old from *banlieue* Bondy), who did not participate in the 2005 riots, told me that the car-burnings were not organized. He regarded it as a natural process: “The youngsters were irritated, always, always irritated, always irritated; always stressed. So in the end it explodes. When it explodes everybody will join. That’s all.” Aissatou (19 years old, La Courneuve), who did participate, confirms that it was a spontaneous coming together: he just talked with friends in his neighbourhood. Kamel (18 years old, Montfermeil), who participated in the violence as well, said: “We organized? That goes very quickly, you take a stone and you throw” (Slooter, 2007: 46).

A third shared characteristic is the *location* where the burnings and clashes take place. Those who resort to violence generally do not leave their neighbourhood and stay close to their own apartment building. My interviews with those who participated in the 2005 violence (Slooter, 2007) reveal that the reasons for staying close to home are mainly practical. As these boys spend entire days on the street, they know the terrain and know where to hide. If you go to other places,

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2010. Since April 2011, it is forbidden to wear face-covering veils and masks. Often legitimized by referring to the Republican ideal of *laïcité* (the strict separation of church and state).

<sup>129</sup> See e.g., newspaper article “Trappes: « A aucun moment je n’ai porté atteinte à un des policiers ». *Le Monde*, 24 July 2013.

<sup>130</sup> A lull is defined by Horowitz as an “expectant interval between the last precipitant and the onset of serious violence” (2001: 89).

the chance to get caught is much higher. Burning cars close to home gives you the opportunity to appear on stage and, if necessary, to leave as quickly as you came.

The fourth and final common characteristic of the car-burnings and clashes are the *targets*. Although these episodes of violence are mostly known for the burning of cars, other objects are also set on fire: trash cans, private property, and public buildings, such as schools, libraries or post offices. In the aftermath of the 2005 events, some commentators explained the targeting of cars as the deliberate destruction of symbols of mobility, something that many youngsters in deprived neighbourhoods lack. Their anger and frustration rooted in feelings of immobility would thus be expressed in the target of their actions. Moran (2012: 58), for example, referring to a journalistic article of Alec Hargreaves, claims that: “The widespread destruction of cars represented what Hargreaves terms as an attack on the symbols of a ‘social mobility and modes of consumption from which the rioters know they are excluded through structural inequalities and discriminatory practices’”. However, my research on the 2005 events show that those who resorted to violence explain the target choice in less metaphoric terms: “cars burn easily and long” (Slooter, 2007: 50). Also, sociologist Roché (2006: 46) emphasizes the practical rather than the symbolic aspects of the target choice. Roché argues that cars have two advantages: availability (cars can be found at every street corner) and vulnerability (cars are rather unprotected against fires). Furthermore, my earlier research on the 2005 events (Slooter, 2007) showed that youngsters do not set fire to cars indiscriminately. As they know their neighbourhood very well, they know which cars belong to whom. So, they burn neglected cars or vehicles of people from whom they do not fear any trouble afterwards.

The police are often the main *human* target. An active participant in the 2005 events explains how cars are used to trigger police-youth clashes: “It is easy to explain. You burn a car; firemen will arrive. For the security of the firemen, they need the police. When the police arrive, you face the police and the clash can begin. It’s as easy as that” (Slooter, 2007: 50). Whereas provocations and fights with the police have been part of the acts since the late 1970s, they have become more violent in recent years. During the 2007 episode in Villiers-le-Bel, for example, 120 police officers were injured. Two-thirds of the injured police had been hit by bullets coming from shot or air-guns, and four of them were severely wounded (Kokoreff, 2010: 50).

Car-burnings and police-youth clashes, however, do not occur only after trigger events and rumours that may legitimize the resort to violence. At particular moments in the year, such acts have a more ritual character and are highly predictable: the traditional car-burning nights of 13 and 14 July and New Years Eve.

On 13 July 2010, Salim, Abdel and Duna hang out at *La Courneuve Plage*, a yearly event organized by the municipality. The boys sit at one of the tables on the artificial beach in the middle of the town, behind them young children scream in the swimming pools, some older ones play on the beach volleyball fields. The boys talk about the upcoming *14 juillet*, a national day that commemorates the 1790 *Fête*

*de la Fédération*, which was held on the first anniversary of the storming of the Bastille in Paris in 1789, often seen as the start of the French Revolution. Abdel says to me, while he is eating an ice-cream:

Abdel: Sir, you have to go to the Champs-Élysées tomorrow night. Or to the Eiffel tower. For the big fireworks. You will like it. Or, in the morning, to the parade with the gendarmerie and so on. There's also many tourists at the Champs-Élysées. That's nice for you.

Duna: But they often get robbed.

Abdel: No no, that's mainly in the metro, not at the Champs-Élysées. Do you know how to get there? [*I give a nod*] By metro or train. Here, at La Courneuve little happens. At *Geo André* [the local sports stadium] there are fireworks tonight. And in 4000*sud* they're gonna burn everything. They do it every year. Also many firecrackers, you know. You will see it tonight.

*All three laugh. Then Salim quickly says:*

Salim: It's not us! We don't do it. We just go home. It's mainly the older guys. Some set their own car on fire, not the one of their neighbours. Cars that are broken down and then afterwards they claim money from the insurance company.

That same evening, at a quarter past eleven, I sit in the living room with Jean and two of his friends, also originally from Ivory Coast. When I tell them that I am going to *Stade Geo André* to watch the fireworks, Jean grumbles a bit. He wants me to stay inside. "Be careful", says one of his friends "we are in 93, you know. You'd better leave your valuable stuff here. Phone, wallet... but bring your identity card". Then the other friend says: "Well look at his face. He's white. They won't stop him. Ha-ha-ha".

Once outside, I hear two helicopters, their enormous searchlights move along the hallways of apartment buildings *Le Mail* and *Balzac*. In the streets there are numerous riot police vans. It remains fairly calm. Hours later, though, when I go to bed, I see from the bathroom window a burning car next to *Le Mail* and also some clouds of smoke behind *Balzac* [Diary notes 13 July 2010].

### *Conneries*

The second set of acts in this repertoire are '*conneries*'. Many of my respondents say that everybody, especially when you are young, commits some kind of *conneries* or *bêtises* (both of which translate, roughly, as small acts of stupidity or foolishness). I propose to categorize these in the same repertoire as the car-burning and police-youth clashes, as they have many shared characteristics: mainly young males resort to it, they are organized in small groups of friends who mainly stay within their own

neighbourhood, and they generally target elements that are seen as ‘external’. The timing is, however, different. *Conneries* and *betises* can happen at any moment and do not require a specific trigger event (or ritual date).

On 30 June 2011, for example, I have an appointment with 20-year-old Oumar. We meet at the Quick fast-food restaurant. During the interview, Abdel, Sofyan and Salim enter the Quick. We shake hands. Oumar tells me that Salim is his nephew. The boys move on to the counter to order some food. Soon afterwards, Oumar and I notice that the atmosphere changes in the restaurant. It becomes quieter, other customers stand up and look at the counter. As we sit in the back of the restaurant, behind some plastic plants, we cannot see what is going on. A number of people start to cough and Abdel passes by with red bleary eyes. Two police enter the restaurant, one of them with a raised baton in his hand. Two young mothers seem to inform the police about what they have seen. Little by little we understand that somebody has thrown a small teargas bomb next to the counter. Salim, Sofyan and Abdel have left the building, but when we look outside we notice that they have been stopped by the police. Salim has been handcuffed. He looks bewildered, but stays calm. Oumar shouts through the restaurant that the boys didn’t do it. The young mothers confirm what Oumar says. Salim, Sofyan and Abdel are released. Firemen arrive a little later. Oumar and I have to leave the restaurant. They close it for further investigation. The next day I bump into Salim. He seems to treat it all light-heartedly. “Well, we only entered *after* the teargas bomb, so we could not have done it. But I was wearing black clothes you know, that’s why they thought that I did it” [Diary notes 30 June/1 July 2011].

Another, and more serious, example of *conneries* are the fires in May 2011. A press release of the municipality explains what I had already seen and heard in the neighbourhood:

*“On the night of 8 and 9 May 2011, trash can fires damaged the new Joséphine-Baker school. By attacking a completely new school, the fire-setters show their contempt of families, children, teachers, community personnel. They also attacked the shared commitment of the municipality, the inhabitants, and the school community to give the best education for their children. This act is inexcusable...”*<sup>131</sup>

The school is located a couple of hundred meters from Jean’s apartment. The school’s facade is blackened and partly dissolved by the fire, the trash can in front of it has almost disappeared. Just some melted remains on the pavement point to the seat of the fire. Fouad says about the event: “It were young kids (*des petits*) who set the trash can on fire. They probably didn’t know that it was in front of a

<sup>131</sup> My translation. Original quote: « Dans la nuit du 8 au 9 mai 2011, des feux de poubelles ont endommagé la nouvelle école Joséphine-Baker. En s’en prenant à un groupe scolaire tout neuf, les incendiaires montrent leur mépris pour les familles, les enfants, les enseignants, le personnel communal. Ils s’en prennent également à la volonté partagée de la municipalité, des habitants, de la communauté scolaire de donner le meilleur aux enfants pour leur scolarité. Cet acte est inexcusable... »

school” [Interview Fouad, 13 May 2011].

A couple of days later the municipality publishes a press report about a second event. Two vans on a private and closed parking next to the *École de la deuxième chance* were set on fire, the exterior of the building and one classroom were severely damaged. The school, located between apartment buildings *Le Mail* and *Balzac*, gives youngsters, who have left school without qualification or diploma, a second chance by offering them a personal education trajectory alternating with internships at various companies. When I visit the school two and a half months later, Alice, one of its employees, shows me the burnt-out classroom. The windows are boarded up: “It looks less dramatic now, they’ve cleaned it up. During the summer break they’ll renovate this room and the facade”. I ask her whether she knows who set the fire, and she says: “Well, the police are still investigating the case. I think it was youngsters from this neighbourhood. They were probably angry because of the demolition of *Balzac*, because they can no longer sell their drugs... I don’t think it was a deliberate attack on the *École de la deuxième chance*. It was those vans next to the school that were set on fire, not the school itself at first.” She pauses for a bit. “I don’t know... maybe it is a loathing for institutions” [Interview Alice, 25 July 2011].

Other examples of *conneries* are flattening the tires of the newly installed *Vélib*-bicycles<sup>132</sup> or efforts to break apart these bikes. Also the housing units that replace the high-rise *tours* and *barres*, when still under construction, are good ‘external’ targets: many windows of the newly built apartments are smashed. Hence, *conneries* is a broad category of acts that involve different degrees of violence. Whereas the car-burning episodes attract the outside attention, the daily *conneries* are less suited for television and newspaper coverage. Nevertheless, the actors of these performances want their acts to be seen by others. However, the audience is smaller, mainly within the neighbourhood. These *conneries* may come close to what Wieviorka calls ‘incivilities’ (1999: 35-36; see also Goaziou, Le & Rojzman, 2006: 36-37). While these acts are generally considered less violent, they have a great impact on everyday life, not least because of their unpredictability and because they occur more often compared to the episodic car-burnings and youth-police clashes.

## Repertoire 2: Backstage-oriented violence

The second repertoire, backstage-oriented violence, mainly consists of drug trade<sup>133</sup> and related episodes of violence. It also includes, though to a lesser extent, trade in arms, selling barricaded apartments (see Chapter 3) and other illegal goods. As the

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<sup>132</sup> A public bicycle sharing system, introduced in 2007 in the city centre of Paris and later extended to several *banlieues*. In 2009, *Vélib*-stations were installed in several locations in La Courneuve. Beginning in May 2011 the service was suspended due the high number of stolen or damaged bicycles. In 2012, the project completely ended. See also local newspaper *Régards* (30-08-2012/12-09-2012 - number 364) “Bye-Bye, Velcom”.

<sup>133</sup> According to the stories of youngsters both hard and soft drugs are sold.

name implies, this repertoire of violence is not intended for a large audience. In contrast to youngsters who participate in car-burnings or commit *conneries*, the actors of backstage-oriented violence try to avoid exposure to the outside public. Only particular people have access to the backstage area: those directly involved in it and clients. Those who resort to backstage-oriented violence are also generally older, most above eighteen. Different from the car-burnings and *conneries* that each occur at various locations in the neighbourhood, backstage-oriented violence is much more fixed in a number of sites (*Balzac/petit Debussy* and behind *Le Mail*). Hence, whereas the actors of the first repertoire constantly walk around through the streets of ‘their neighbourhood’, the actors of the second repertoire generally stay at one location and protect their turf.

In contrast to the acts of first repertoire, which are loosely structured and mainly carried out by groups of friends, the second repertoire has set roles. Salah, who is not involved in the drug trade, explains the structure: “It’s like a normal shop. First you have the ‘*guetteurs*’ [those on the look-out for the police] Like you have a black guy standing in front of a shop for the security. It’s the same here. Then you have the one who takes the order. One who takes care of the money. One who brings the order. And the ‘*ravitailleur*’, when they are out of stock he replenishes it... call it the backside of the shop. The stock comes from La Courneuve itself. People grow plants at home. One has just been dismantled by the police, but there are still one or two left. And you have ‘*le go-fast nord et sud*’ [respectively the Netherlands and Spain/Morocco]. It is just like a shop” [Interview Salah, 20 July 2011].

Marc and Claire, both social workers and attached to La Courneuve for a couple of decades, remember that the drug trade was already going on in the 1980s, predominantly at *Balzac* and *Renoir*. “Many conflicts between families started in that period. For every site there was one family that controlled the drug trade...” Claire mentions the name of one of the families. Marc looks at her somewhat aghast. “Well, I can tell him...,” says Claire, “those names are publicly known”. Claire goes on: “The neighbourhood is different now. It has changed. The drug trade is better organized. Very hierarchic”. Marc, who lived for 30 years in 4000 but lives elsewhere now, adds: “Yes, they are well organized. If you stand on the lookout they want a copy of your identity card, so that they know where to find you. If you snitch, they will come to you and your family”. Claire says: “Indeed, well organized. There are two private security companies that are hired by the construction firms to protect the building sites, to prevent that the construction material is stolen or damaged. They are in charge of the security of the shopping centre as well. But those people who run the security firms are also the ones who control the drug trade. Or their family members.” Later Claire says: “Most important is that young people have no future here. That has not only to do with 4000. It’s also because of the crisis” [Interview Marc and Claire, 27 July 2011].

As Anderson (1999: 116) states: “Like any marketing enterprise, the drug trade requires production and distribution networks. Another requirement is social control. Among drug dealers that requirement is satisfied by the use and threat of

violence”. However, the use and threat of violence are not random. Targets are carefully selected. Children can and do play in the same area as the *guetteurs* stand on the lookout. Unlike youngsters who resort to riots and *conneries*, those involved in drug trade do not seek out clashes with the local police. Instead, they avoid them as much as possible. It is therefore not very likely that it was drug dealers who set the vans on fire next to the *École de la deuxième chance*, as Alice claimed (see above). Violence by the drug dealers has more specific targets, mainly to do with direct revenge or to settle scores with other ‘*équipes*’ (‘teams’) that try to take over either turf or clients. Hence, the destruction of *Balzac* (and the loss of a drug territory) may indeed lead to heightened tensions in the area. It would not lead to the burning of a school, however, but to threatening or attacking other rival players in the drug trade.

To summarize the above, table 5.1 gives an overview of the main differences between the manifestation of audience-oriented and backstage-oriented violence.

	Repertoire I: Audience-oriented	Repertoire II: Backstage-oriented
<b>Acts</b>	- Car-burnings and clashes between police and young people (episodic) - Conneries (everyday character)	Drug trade and related episodes of violence, sometimes resulting in fatal shootings.
<b>Age of Actors</b>	12-20 years old	18+
<b>Location</b>	Various spots/flexible	Fixed in particular sites/buildings.
<b>Organization</b>	Loosely, peer groups	Well-organized, along family lines, hierarchic, set roles
<b>Timing</b>	After a trigger event (car-burnings and clashes) or on a daily basis ( <i>conneries</i> ), mainly in the late afternoon, evening and at night.	Drug trade occurs on a daily basis from about 10h00-0h30; violent events are related to specific conflict of interests and can occur at any time.
<b>Target</b>	‘External elements’, loosely defined: Cars, public and private buildings, bikes, police.	‘Internal elements’, narrowly defined: other <i>équipes</i> who threatens the turf or trade
<b>Visibility</b>	Want their actions to be seen by others, both the larger public and local spectators.	Only particular people (clients)

Table 5.1: Two repertoires of violence

### 5.2.2. The interpretation of violence

Whereas the above discussion focused on the more or less objective patterns of two repertoires of violence, this section discusses its subjective side, the meanings attached to these repertoires by local actors who are directly involved in their enactment and by those who merely witness the repertoires. How do they draw boundaries between ‘right’ from ‘wrong’, illegitimate from legitimate acts? Based on an analysis of my interviews and observations, I discuss below a continuum of local frames that give meaning to the above-described repertoires of violence. At one extreme, violence is seen as completely illegitimate; at the other end, it is perceived as an appropriate way to gain respect and status. An intermediate position switches between these two extremes but is generally more supportive of audience-oriented violence, compared to backstage-oriented violence. The voices that I present below are emblematic of broader patterns in my data set.

#### 1. *Both repertoires are illegitimate – opposing the ‘code of the street’.*

The first local reading of violence makes no clear-cut distinction between the two repertoires. Car-burnings, *conneries*, and drug trade are all seen as illegitimate, deviant, morally improper acts. In the most extreme interpretations, the majority of young residents are portrayed as ‘devils’ who only want ‘*l’argent facile*’ (easy money). Whereas some claim that the *cité* is characterized by high levels of respect for each other among local inhabitants (especially in comparison with the city centre of Paris), this interpretation speaks of an increasing loss of ‘respect’ and ‘solidarity’, and about a deteriorating atmosphere in the neighbourhood. Salah explains what respect means: “that you greet someone and look someone in the eye. That you don’t judge someone. It’s about solidarity. That you don’t use words to hurt someone. The elderly know better what life is about. That’s why I have respect for them... It’s difficult to explain. It is different from admiration. I don’t admire them, but it’s that you do neither feel superior, nor inferior... You’re at the same level” [Interview Salah, 18 July 2011]. Apart from the centrality of the ‘loss of respect’, this first interpretation is in some cases combined with racial connotations, as reflected in the conversations reported below.

Jean’s remarks mostly correspond with this first category of interpretations. For example when I sit with him and 22-year-old housemate Alain in the living room, he starts a monologue: “People used to greet each other politely.” Jean demonstrates how to do it: he folds his arms and bows his head. Then he continues: “You offer your seat to older people. That is respect. Do you still see it today, that one offers one’s seat to someone? In France they have one way of raising kids, and we, in Africa, have our own way of doing it. Here in France, they put a kid in jail, so he becomes an even bigger gangster when he is released. There’s a guy in this neighbourhood, they have arrested him and thrown him in jail. But he doesn’t care to be in jail, just like his friends. That ain’t right! It is all the time: Shut up! Shut up! Where is the morality? Shut up to your mum. Shut up to your dad.

Shut up to the teacher. I see it happening here. Outside. On every street corner. I see it. Youngsters don't want to work. They don't feel like it. Even if you offer them a job, they don't take it. I don't say that everybody is like that. Some are well educated, but others just want *l'argent facile*. They steal from shops to resell it. That's the only thing they do. You have to beat them when they do it. When I did something wrong my dad gave me a beating". Alain who's sitting next to me on the couch disagrees.

Alain: You shouldn't beat kids.

Jean: Ohh, you have become too white. This guy has become white!

Alain: No, I just think that a beating is not the right thing to do. You can change your mind, if certain ideas appeal to you, right? It doesn't matter whether these ideas are Chinese, white or black.

Jean: No, if you beat a child at the very moment that he makes a mistake, he will no longer set everything on fire. He will no longer burn cars.

Alain: Well, in my country [Cameroon] they beat kids, but there are still cars burning.

Jean: No, that's not true. If you beat them they won't do it anymore.

Alain: They still do it! I have been beaten when I was a kid. That was pretty traumatic (Alain points to a scar on his arm)

Jean: No, no, no, it's not right. You don't understand it...

Jean's phone rings, it's the end of the discussion [Diary notes 2 June 2011].

Marie also talks about the loss of respect. She refers to the elevator in *La Tour*, the apartment building where she lives. "Everybody has to wait for his or her turn. Now, when it's busy everybody pushes himself in. The atmosphere is really unfriendly. My daughter went to Mali on holiday. Over there people are really friendly she told me, but here they are crap. The new generation, only the Africans you know. They spit on the street. They walk, they spit, they walk, they spit. And if you say something about it, they get irritated. There's no respect anymore.... Well, it's not everybody. It is just a number of hardcore shitheads that spoil the atmosphere in this neighbourhood" [Interview Marie, 3 June 2010].

Hence, this frame sees violence as disruptive and a symbol of the growing lack of respect. It calls for (repressive) state intervention to stop the repertoires of violence and restore tranquility in the neighbourhood.

## 2. *Both repertoires are legitimate – internal governing of the streets*

The second frame articulates the very opposite: violent acts of both repertoires are not seen as illegitimate but are rather valued as breeding status and respect (see De

Jong, 2007: 144-146). This, however, is different from the respect<sup>134</sup> that Marie, Jean and Salah talked about earlier. Instead, the type of respect that is central to this frame comes closer to how Marc explains it: "... to live up to the stereotype image. Stealing, traffic, that a youngster from the *banlieue* speaks a particular slang. It is a certain pride to be '*wesh*'<sup>135</sup> *wesh*', to wear your pants halfway down your bottom. If you don't comply with that image, you cannot live quietly in the *cit *. So, they identify with that image, and they become it. It gives you respect, if people fear you. That's why they feed that image, that they are '*wesh wesh*'. That they are not afraid of anyone. Someone with 'cojones' [balls]" [Interview Marc and Claire, 27 July 2011].

Malik (17 years old) also says that people respect you in the neighbourhood when you sell 'shit' (cannabis). "You should not be afraid of the police... you shouldn't be afraid of anybody, actually. If you are afraid, if you don't sell shit, you're a nobody. If you want to be respected you have to sell shit, burn motorbikes, burn cars... a lot of things, everything that is not right, but you have to do it to be respected" [Interview Malik, 18 July 2011].

In this second frame, backstage-oriented violence is often more respected and valued than audience-oriented violence. Whereas the latter is seen as rather insignificant acts committed by '*les petits*' (the young kids), the former is enacted by those who are really in charge of the streets. The framing of backstage-oriented violence as '*bizni *' emphasizes its normality and diminishes what is, by the previous frame, seen as the criminal or violent character of the trade. The profit from the drug trade is clearly visible in the *cit *. At some moments luxurious and expensive cars drive through the streets. The shining hoods of the Ferraris and Porches contrast sharply with the dull concrete of *Le Mail* and *Balzac*. Being involved in the drug traffic may be seen as a way out of unemployment and discrimination, a way to survive. But it can also do much more; it not only provides money to buy new *baskets*, clothes, phones, motorbikes, cars and airplane tickets to other parts of the world, it also gives power and status in the *cit *. Being a *ca d*, *caillera* or *gran voyou* (gangster) can therefore be very attractive to some.

There is a grey area between those who are directly involved and those who merely witness and approve the acts of violence. It comes close to Andersons's observation in the North American inner-city black ghetto (1999: 110): "... many inner-city boys admire drug dealers and emulate their style, making it difficult for outsiders to distinguish a dealer from a law-abiding teenager. Part of this style is to project a violent image, and boys who are only 'playing though' may find themselves challenged and honor bound to fight. In addition, the trappings of drug dealers (the Timberland boots, the gold chains) are expensive, encouraging those without drug profits or other financial resources simply to steal".

Audience-oriented violence, seen from this frame, is mainly motivated by fun, to show off to your peers, to show that your neighbourhood is the strongest or

<sup>134</sup> See for a similar observation De Jong (2007: 86), who speaks about the double meaning of 'respect' among youngsters at the street corner.

<sup>135</sup> '*Wesh*' comes from the Arab '*wesh rak*' which means 'how are you?' '*Wesh*' is often used by youngsters in the '*cit *' to greet each other.

most powerful. My earlier research on the 2005 car-burnings (Slooter, 2007) revealed testimonies that confirm this reading. Kamel (18 years old), for example, explained why he resorted to violence "...because of the two who died, and also as a way to amuse myself with friends ... I felt strong. You can't do this when you are alone. As everybody [his friends] is around you, they [the police] have no chance to do anything to you" (ibid: 50-51). Audience-oriented violence is also committed to impress the older guys in the neighbourhood. Resorting to it is an illustration of 'playing tough' and might get you in closer contact with those involved in backstage-oriented violence.

Hence, this frame portrays violence as legitimate. Fearing the police, or anybody else, is seen as a weakness. Violence is enacted by young males to gain power and status, and to govern the streets of the neighbourhood. Those who enact this violence compete with the state project of governing, which also aims to control the neighbourhood and tries to rule out violence through police interventions.

### *3. In between state governance and the code of the street*

The two interpretations described above are prototypical frames of violence at the opposite ends of a continuum. More often, however, young people frame violence in more ambivalent ways. The boundaries between what is seen as 'right' and 'wrong', 'violent' and 'non-violent', 'proper' and 'improper' are not fixed, but change over time (see also De Jong, 2007: 106). Therefore, a third interpretation can be identified: an intermediate, more ambiguous position with different views on the two repertoires. From this middle position, *conneries* and car-burnings are perceived as legitimate or at least understandable, whereas the drug trade and related violent episodes are more severely critiqued. In general, the narratives based on this interpretation switch in perspective, going back and forth between a dissociating 'they' and an inclusive 'we'. The narrators step in and out of the stories of violence. They are sometimes part of it, sometimes not.

Audience-oriented violence in particular is often seen as a legitimate response to structural violence (poverty, discrimination, segregation etc.), and/or state violence (perceived injustice committed by the police). Car-burning events are not so much seen as a simple form of entertainment as was the case in the previous frame, but merely perceived as a scream for help. Youngsters resort to violence as the only possible way left to express themselves. As 19-year-old jobless Aissatou, for example, explains about his involvement in the 2005 events: "Malinese, Yugoslav, Senegalese... [*Aissatou points to his friends Babakar, Ivan and himself*] ... We are all together. And we will be all together to fuck the state again [...] It will get worse and worse. And there will be more and more casualties... They don't want to listen to us" (Slooter, 2007: 48).

Although audience-oriented violence in this frame is generally tolerated or approved, backstage-oriented violence is less so. Oumar, for example, sees a clear divide between youngsters who are involved in the drug trade and himself. He says

*bonjour* to them, as they used to go to the same school, but he says they have no shared topic of conversation. “There’s no exchange, *they* talk about their motorbikes, things that have burnt down, drugs. *I* talk about school, about my BAC [*exams*] about my boss ... there’s no exchange” [Interview Oumar, 30 June 2011]. Malik has a similar line of reasoning. He says that he doesn’t like “the fights, the burning of motorbikes, the burning of cars, the shit, the settling of scores, the fights between gangs, between groups”. He says that those who are involved in the drug trade live in their own world. “That means that they stay at their own corner, they have their own money. They stay in the building. They sell it all na na na...” But Malik still sees them as part of the family: “They are friendly, they are respectful to the parents, to the older guys (*les grands*). If we ask them for money if we need it, they give it to us. But what they do is not right. [...] They are there for their family. Whatever it is, they do it. So, if you ask them something, they give it. But sometimes they are annoyed, when they have to settle a score, then you’d better not talk to them”.

Also Michel says: “Everybody is *banlieusard*, we all have the same code. We talk more vulgarly...,” Michel laughs, “... that’s how it is. Then you have different types of people. You have delinquents and the *débrouillards*, that’s how I call them. It is the difference between wrong and right, to keep to the straight and narrow path. There is however no clear-cut boundary between those two groups. Somebody sells a kilo cocaine and I work 25 hours a week. That doesn’t mean that we don’t see each other. We have grown up together, we used to be friends. So I just talk to them. I am not afraid, because I am not in their environment. [...] Everybody does his own shit. Everybody lives his own life with good aspects and bad sides. We are all in the same boat. If someone does something wrong, he should decide for himself. I am against drugs, against weapons, because you sell the death. But it is the market that does it. I mean we did not make cocaine, we only profit from it. I don’t like it, but I understand it. Look, they also have to earn money. When I was eighteen I realized that you need money for everything. If you want a TV, you need money. If you want new *baskets*, you need money. If you want to have an apartment, you need money... well, then it is very tempting to turn to the traffic. I didn’t do it because of the consequences. Maybe for two years you will be fine, but in the end, when you do your best, maybe one day you will get a CDI [*a permanent contract*]. That gives you much more security... you can then have your own house and otherwise you are probably in jail or dead” [Interview, Michel 2 August 2011].

His friend Yannick says: “They want to belong to something. They want to show who they are. Through minor criminal acts. I am not talking about the guys who earn a million with heroine. Minor acts, theft, selling some drugs. Some condemn it, but in the eyes of others it is something good. I don’t give a shit about the street. I know the other side of the picture. If you are a dealer you only have yourself, your arms, and God. Yes, and the money of course. But it stops there. And I already don’t believe in God so ... ha-ha-ha” [Interview Yannick, 28 July 2011].

Yannick says he is fed up with the ‘code’ of the street, but at the same time I saw him in rap videos on YouTube in which he portrays the dark side of the ‘ghetto’, wearing a hoody and big sun glasses, smoking a joint, showing off. He’s in and out of the story. The same goes for Malik, who simultaneously seems to be attracted to and wants to dissociate himself from the violent performances at the corner of his apartment building. Many young people denounce the drug trade and gun violence but are at the same time attracted to it. They have a double moral: seen from the outside, they disapprove it, but from the inside they understand it, and some take part in it.

All too often ‘violence in the *banlieues*’ is portrayed as rather monolithic and imbued with a single meaning. Academic debates question, for example, whether violent events should be labeled either as ‘riots’ or ‘revolts’, whether violence is criminal, irrational and isolated *or* political in nature. Conversely, in the above discussion I have moved away from these attempts at uniformity and have shown that there are various manifestations and interpretations of violence. The above disaggregation of violence gives insight into the various repertoires of violence and the multiple local meanings that are attached to these. Whether or not the violent repertoires are seen as legitimate by young people (and other inhabitants) depends on the modes of thought that one reasons from, or to put it differently, the project of governing one is subjected to: the one propagated by the state, or the one imposed by young people on the street corner. Hence, there is a relation between the interpretation of violence and the position that one takes. The above frames strongly correspond with the identity strategies discussed in the previous chapter. The first frame, which sees both repertoires of violence as illegitimate, resonates closely with dissociating strategies (trying to escape from the ‘neighbourhood’) and thus the state’s project of governing; the second frame, which celebrates and values violence, strongly connects to associating strategies (strongly identifying with the neighbourhood) and thus with the neighbourhood’s project of governing. The third frame, which sees violence both as legitimate and illegitimate, corresponds with the previously discussed social navigation process, in which young people are both attracted to and distance themselves from the ‘code of the street’.

Moreover, the disaggregation of violence leads to a better understanding of its various *functions*. Audience-oriented violence seems to have a double function: on the one hand, it may contest and critique the state project of governing; on the other hand, it may contribute to the internal project of governing. Youngsters burn cars and provoke the police to protest against experiences of state and structural violence, and at the same time to gain *inside* status and respect. Direct testimonies of those who actively participated in the 2005 car-burnings confirm these ideas. Youngsters resorted to violence to protest against (police) discrimination, poverty, segregation, high levels of unemployment and other structural injustices (a protest directed to the ‘outside’). This then could be seen as a violent enactment of ‘transforming’ identity strategies, in which violence is a way to revolt and claim equal treatment. However, young people also resorted to violence because it was

fun, to entertain themselves, to show that they could burn more cars than a neighbouring *cité*, to show off to peers in the neighbourhood (an act to gain status ‘inside’), which corresponds with associating strategies. While some youngsters were more focused on the first function (outside protest), others mainly participated for the second (inside status). The function of backstage-oriented violence, in turn, is merely to *gain* or *maintain* status and respect and to be able to govern the streets (inside status). Hence, this is clearly an enactment of the associating strategies discussed in Chapter 4.

Violence, however, is not only functional at the moment that it is committed. As Schröder & Schmidt argue (2001: 6): “Violent acts are efficient because of their staging of power and legitimacy, probably even more so than due to their actual physical results. [...] violence as performance extends its efficacy over space and time and gets its message across clearly to the large majority of people who are not physically affected by it. Also, its performative quality makes violence an everyday experience (with all the consequences to society) without anybody actually experiencing physical hurt every day”. In the last part of this chapter I will take a closer look at the consequences and effectiveness of (especially backstage-oriented) violent acts, in the governing of the neighbourhood. Violent acts, even when absent (not actually occurring at the moment), are able to discipline and order the neighbourhood through fear and attraction.

### 5.3 THE EFFECTIVENESS OF VIOLENCE: THE PRESENCE OF ABSENCE

So far, this chapter may have given the impression that young residents of 4000*sud* resort to violence every day. But while I saw burning cars and the blackened facades of schools, these burnings are not going on all the time. I have seen the flowers on the pavement after a fatal episode in the drug or arms trade, but such deadly events are rather rare. Violent acts are not constantly present but pop up now and then. Most of the time, while walking around and observing daily life, it is rather quiet and calm. Most of the time I don’t *see* or *smell* violence. Nevertheless, I am reminded of it once I start talking to people. As Schröder & Schmidt (2001) argue, violence may be ‘present’ even when observable manifestations of violent acts are absent. Anthropologist Henrik Vigh (2011) made a similar observation during his research in long-term conflict environments. Vigh noticed that people living in these environments constantly anticipate violence. “Even when they are not manifest, violent forces and figures are seen as quasi-present, and this results in a feeling of inhabiting a fluctuating and fluid world in which disorder and uncertainty are constant states rather than momentary events” (ibid: 97-98). By building on Agamben’s (1999) idea of the ‘presence of absence’, Vigh defines this quasi presence of violence as “a social state that even when immaterialized is seen as always about to be. Whether or not it is present, it is there as a future possibility, as a passive directedness that is continuously on the verge of materializing itself,

forcing people to gain a forewarning of its movement into being” (ibid: 97). As a result, Vigh argues, people become ‘hyper-vigilant’ and develop a ‘sixth sense’, being constantly on the alert and aware of potential future dangers and threats. “They do not passively register the flow of people and events but seem to scan them for signs of what to expect in terms of possible mutations and negative potentialities” (ibid: 99)<sup>136</sup>.

I propose to develop Vigh’s ideas on ‘hyper-vigilance’ in two ways. First, Vigh mainly sees the ‘presence of absence’ and the hyper-vigilance as being rooted in a fear of future dangers. Based on the analysis of my empirical data, I argue that the quasi-presence of violence stems not only from fear but equally from the very opposite of it: fascination, attraction and ‘sexiness’ of violence.

Second, Vigh mainly explains *what* ‘hyper-vigilance’ is rather than developing *how* this quasi-presence of violence is transmitted. I propose that the ‘presence of absence’ is mainly (re)produced through narratives about violence, narratives that spread or propagate the ‘code of the street’. I will distinguish between grand narratives of past violent events in the neighbourhood, warnings for future dangers, and the ‘code’ to keep silent in the present.

### *Grand narratives of past violence*

There are a number of stories that are frequently shared in the neighbourhood, told and retold many times. These stories can be characterized either by the randomness of the victims or by the exceptional degree of violence. People often refer, for example, to the death of 9-year-old Toufik Ouannes in 1983 (see Chapter 2) and the stray bullet that killed 11-year-old Sid-Ahmed in 2005 (see Chapter 3). More recent events that received national media coverage are also recurrent topics of conversations.

On 27 July 2011, after my interview with Marc and Claire, Marc introduces me to Ron and Jamila. We sit outside in front of the building of the association that is run by Marc and Claire. Ron is in his late twenties, Jamila is about ten years younger. Ron refers to two grand narratives of the recent past: the murder of 28-year-old Sid-Ahmed three days before my arrival in La Courneuve (see Chapter 2), and a violent event in May 2009, when a police car was attacked by young men with Kalashnikovs, attempting to liberate a friend who had been arrested earlier.

Ron: They no longer have the same mentality. Respect has disappeared. It is directly Bang! Bang! Bang! [*Ron uses his hands to mimic the gesture of holding a gun*]. Really. Everybody used to know each other. Now everybody sits in his own apartment. [...] Look at our parents, they came here at the same moment, everybody knew each other.

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<sup>136</sup> See also De Jong (2007: 160-162), who identifies seven street values in an Amsterdam neighbourhood. Vigilance and being constantly on one’s guard (*‘scherp zijn’*) is one of them.

Marc: I remember, during Ramadan, that everybody gathered in the hallways of the apartment buildings. And that we shared the food. Now, people still meet each other, but it's less natural...

Ron: No, I can't say anything positive about La Courneuve, nothing positive. If you are going to sell [drugs] somewhere now, and you are not the *patron* [boss], you're dead. At *Balzac*, your life is worth 50 euros. [Ron points to the people around us]. Maybe you are worth 200 euros, you 20 euros. Bang! Bang! Bang! They are all armed and they shoot. It is like *Scarface* here. Really. You've heard about the guy that was killed last year? At *Balzac* they thought he provided the arms for *Le Mail*. He was just released from jail. Two weeks. I hadn't seen him for five years or so. I have seen it all. I was at my brother's place. He lives in *La Tour*, 21st floor. I saw all the ambulances. When I called a friend, I heard it was Sid-Ahmed and I knew he was dead. And all those kids, they have seen it all. He wasn't shot in the head, but in his back... they saw him lying on the floor and he said: 'I don't get air, I don't get air...'

*A boy, about 18 years old, walks out of the office of Marc and Claire's association. Ron sees him.*

Ron: Look he's a bandit!

*The boy grins sheepishly and walks towards us.*

Ron: A recidivist. Three times he has been sentenced.

*The boy doesn't say anything, but he hits Ron teasingly on the head and thrusts his crash helmet against Ron's knee.*

Ron: It's true, right? How many times have you been sentenced then? Say it!

*Ron laughs, the boy hits Ron again a number of times before he walks away with a smile on his face.*

*A bit later Ron explains how you get respect in the neighbourhood*

Ron: If you sell drugs, have a nice car, directly Bang! Bang! Bang! If you wait and think, you're dead, so you'd better shoot directly.

Marc: Eh, yes, I think he's right. In the old days you could have a discussion about the way of life. And that's why everybody is silent now. If you say something different than the rest, or when you start an argument, you run the risk to get hurt.

- Ron: And the police, they don't do anything. They know everything. They know who they are, what they do, where they live. But they don't do anything. If they drive by, the *guelteurs* shout: "They pass, they pass!"... And then the police look outside the window, like this... [*Ron pulls a terrified face...*] and then they drive on.
- Luuk: Why don't they do anything?
- Jamila: They are afraid.
- Ron: When did you arrive here?
- Luuk: In April.
- Ron: Yes, in April they've shot at a police car with a Kalashnikov.
- Luuk: Wasn't that last year?<sup>137</sup>
- Ron: Yes, last year. Imagine a police with his little gun facing these Kalashnikov guys.
- Jamila: It's mainly the black guys..

*At that very moment a black guy walks out the building he says: "Ah right, so it is because of me", he laughs and walks away.*

*Jamila is quiet for a while and then says:*

- Jamila: Yes, they make kids all the time and when they are two years old, they are kicked outside and stay on the street.

Marc tries to explain to Jamila that it is a difference in culture, a different way to raise kids. To no avail [Diary notes 27 July 2011].

Recounting the grand stories of the (recent) past is often linked to a definition of the present state of the *cit *. Both the stories of the past and the portrayal of the present are sometimes blown up to mythical proportions (see De Jong, 2007: 176-182; Reinders, 1996; Hannerz, 1969). Although fatal shootings are relatively rare, Ron claims that people get easily killed (bang! bang! bang!), just as in the movie *Scarface*. Ron condemns violence, but at the same time it seems to attract him. Boys and young men especially seem to derive a certain pleasure in sharing these stories that sometimes turn into glorifications of violence.

### *Warnings about future violence*

Violence is not only present through stories about the past but also through warnings about the future. These warnings are rooted in a same combination of fear and attraction. Some of these warnings are directed to me. Older inhabitants in particular tell me to be careful in the neighbourhood, even more so because I come from elsewhere. As I discussed in Chapter 3, Marie, for example, forbids me to go

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<sup>137</sup> Actually, the shooting was in May 2009, two years before the time of the interview.

to *Balzac* (“You’d better walk round it”) and Jean sometimes wants me to stay inside at night. However, it is not just me, the newcomer or outsider, who is warned. Instead, warnings are more widely spread and embedded in everyday life. For example, in the Leader Price budget supermarket in front of Jean’s apartment, two middle-aged men walk in and say to each other. “I’d rather leave my bags here at the entrance with the guard. They steal in this neighbourhood already before I was born” [Diary notes 2 June 2011].

The atmosphere in the neighbourhood is also often a topic of discussion. Yannick says one day to me, “It is a bit *chaud* (‘hot,’ literally, but meaning that something violent is about to happen) now in the neighbourhood”. I ask him how he knows that it is *chaud*. “That’s what people say. Michel and I know someone who used to be in the traffic and he has some friends that are still in the business. He said that he doesn’t want to see us at *Balzac* and *Le Mail* for a while. As *Balzac* no longer exists they have to go somewhere else. Something is gonna happen... but nobody knows what and when. For sure something will happen. When it’s all over, I will be better able to explain it to you. If you are already back in the Netherlands we can email or you can call me if you want. But I will then go to a call box or kiosk. It’s better, I am more at ease then, you know. I will explain you what is going on, but now I can’t say much about it, also because I don’t know exactly what is at stake” [Interview Yannick, 28 July 2011].

Marie, Jean and the men in the supermarket seem to warn mainly out of fear, but Yannick’s warning is different. Although he condemns violence, it also seems to attract him. He explicitly says to be aware of what is going on in the streets. His words suggest that he has exclusive access to the world of back-stage oriented violence, and his ‘informed’ warnings give him status.

*Be quiet and keep silent in the here and now*

Although people talk about violent events of the past and warn about the future, they generally keep silent in the here and now. Salim, 14 years old, explains it:

- Salim: No there are no rules... you shouldn’t snitch that’s all.  
 Luuk: You shouldn’t snitch...that means...?  
 Salim: For example, when you have someone who does something bad. And when the police arrives. You don’t snitch. That’s all. So you shouldn’t say it’s him who did it. That’s all.  
 Luuk: And everybody is aware of that rule?  
 Salim: Yes, everybody is aware. Here, when you are born, it is like that. It is not a matter of rules, I would say. It is natural. It is like that.  
 Luuk: And who taught you that rule?  
 Salim: I don’t know. You don’t learn it. Everybody... from the moment you are born it is like that. Even at primary school if you tell something to the teacher you snitch, you’re a traitor. From the moment that you are a kid...

- Luuk: Are there people in the neighbourhood that snitch?  
 Salim: Yes, there are people that snitch.  
 Luuk: And then...?  
 Salim: And then, they no longer hang out here. They are beaten up. And then they no longer hang out.  
 Luuk: You mean they move to another neighbourhood?  
 Salim: No they still live here, but they no longer hang out at the street. You no longer see them.

Many others, young and old, have similar stories. Salah says: “You don’t interfere in other people’s matters. You keep everything for yourself. I remember that I was six or eight years old. There was a guy who knocked on our door and he asked if he could enter, because the police was chasing him. My dad let him in and then a bit later the police came at our door... My dad said that he didn’t see anybody. It’s better not to talk about it” [Interview, Salah, 20 July 2011].

Marie once told me that she went to a police office outside the neighbourhood to file a complaint about nuisance of her upstairs neighbours. When she returned, somebody came to her and said: ‘Marie, I saw you at the police station, what did you do there?’ “People in the *cité* keep an eye on each other”, says Marie. She repeats once more that I should not mention her name and that I should not tell others about what she said to me [Interview Marie, 3 June 2010].

That snitching may have consequences for a person’s well-being in the *cité*, as Salim claims, is also revealed in Idriss’ story: “If you can earn 10,000 euros a week! It’s the yellow fever of money: the more you have, the more you want. The more you have, the more you consume. New *baskets*, holidays... There are guys in this *cité* who go three, four times on holiday. An average ticket costs 700 euros. Then they say: ‘Yeah, I was there and there... Yes in Dubai this and that na na na’. [...] If a son brings home 1000 euro to a mother who is unemployed for years, without any money. Well, she won’t say anything. She won’t ask where the money comes from, but will take it because she doesn’t see another way out. Those parents are happy when they see that their son is able to pay for his own driver’s license, to pay for his own clothes or to fill the fridge now and then. They won’t say anything. Other families don’t talk because they are afraid. If you talk, maybe the next day your car has been burned. If you snitch and you come from the police station, they drive you home. I mean the police. So that everybody can see it. They do it on purpose, so that we eat up each other. The police don’t care. We are just ‘arabs’ and ‘noirs’. That’s why everybody is silent. The police, they say it out in the open, when they come to your door: ‘We have received a complaint from your neighbour...’ and then that person thinks ‘Aha, so it’s my neighbour who blows the gaff on us...’ Well, then you’d better move to another place” [Interview Idriss, 2 August 2011].

The above examples are another illustration of the internal project of governing, in which young people on the street corner aim to gain control over the neighbourhood through ‘forms of knowing’ and ‘technologies of governance’.

People are watched and disciplined through (the threat of) violence. Moreover, they discipline themselves: they keep quiet. It may also explain why the drug trade is successful in this particular place and why cars burn more within the neighbourhood than they do elsewhere. The actors of violence know the place and the audience will remain silent. It is a protected theatre of violence. Yannick says: “The chance that you get caught elsewhere is much bigger. Two places, so a multiplication of the number of ears, eyes, and mouths. Elsewhere they don’t feel attached to you. The *cité* is also a protection” [Interview Yannick, 28 July 2011].

During the interview that I had with 17-year-old Malik, I realized that the mere suspicion that someone has snitched may have consequences. Malik and I sit in a room of youth centre *La Tour*. Malik does not mind that I record the interview, so I put my recorder on the table. After a while Tarik, one of Malik’s friends, enters the room and sees the recorder. He runs away. A minute later, someone bangs at the door and shouts: “*Mouchard!* [Rat!/Informer!]. I think the insult is directed to me, but Malik says: “No, it’s to me. Because I talk about the *cité*”. I look at Malik. He shrugs his shoulders. “I don’t care what they say”. It seems however that he is uncomfortable with the situation. A few minutes later two girls, Amita and Sonia, enter the room and say that they also want to do an interview with me later in the afternoon. “What is that?”, asks Amita, pointing to the recorder. “Oh a recorder, I am sorry...”, she says. When they walk away, Amita carelessly says “*mouchard*” to Malik, and then Sonia: “*Mouchard*”. Not much later about five of Malik’s friends bang loudly on the door and shout “*Mouchard!* Son of a bitch! You won’t leave this youth centre alive!” Malik gets up and says to me: “Hang on a sec..”. He leaves the room, I hear him talking in the hallway, but cannot understand what they say. When he comes back he says that everything is fine. “They are just joking”. I am not completely convinced and it seems that neither is he. When I ask Malik a bit later whether he commits *bêtises* [minor lawbreaking], he laughs. “Of course I commit *bêtises*. Everybody... all youngsters commit *bêtises*. But just little *bêtises*, not big ones. What kind of *bêtises*? I commit *bêtises*, but if I tell you what ... it is too...ha-ha-ha whatever, I do a lot of things...” Then we are again disturbed by a number of younger kids. Malik is visibly bothered, he snaps at one of the boys: “Respect Luuk, at least, while he is doing his work!” After the interview Malik immediately leaves the building. Tarik, Modi and three others, the main disturbers of the interview, play a game of Monopoly in another room of the youth centre. As I don’t want to make trouble for Malik, I say that they should leave him alone. The boys do not react and continue their game of Monopoly. In the end, one says that they were just joking. Two days later, I see Malik at a sports event organized by the municipality. He says that he’s fine. He didn’t get in trouble after the interview [Interview Malik/Diary notes 18 July 2011].

Don’t snitch, don’t name names, seems to be the golden rule of the *cité*. There is distrust towards the outside world, and in particular towards the police, but, as the example above illustrates, there is also internal suspicion and the threat of punishment for a snitch. Idriss says that youngsters talk very little to each other. “Maybe one, two words. They don’t trust each other either. About what happened

at the backside of *Le Mail* a month ago... Everybody knows it". Idriss earlier told me about the tense atmosphere at the backside of the apartment building. Fights and shootings allegedly occurred, related to a territory conflict between those involved in the drug traffic. Three or four people got injured, according to Idriss. "They've seen it all, they hang out their windows. But when you ask them, they say: 'No No, I don't know who did it'. Everybody keeps silent. They no longer trust their environment. And they no longer trust the police. Now more than ever. Today they see that the big thieves are politicians. Look at DSK<sup>138</sup>. Whether it is sexual intimidation or financial corruption. The government no longer serves as the example. Look at the French national team<sup>139</sup>. All institutions are involved. They should set the example. A youngster that grows up in this neighbourhood thinks at a given moment: okay forget it! By learning the *Marseillaise* by heart we won't become honest citizens. Youngsters see these politicians on television and internet and think: Well, in the end we are not the biggest fools here" [Interview, Idriss 2 August 2011].

The above gives insight into how what Vigh calls the 'presence of absence' is developed and transmitted. Narratives about the past warnings about the future, and the silence of today show how violence is propagated, either out of fear or fascination, or a mixture of both. Even though direct acts of violence are fairly rare, the discussion above shows that the potential threat of violence committed by young people on the street corner is a very effective technique of governance to control the neighbourhood and its inhabitants.

It has been a hot summer day. A couple of young mothers sit in front of *Le Mail*, their kids entertain themselves on the playground. At *Balzac* I see some police vans, the illegal immigrants camp on the street. It's quiet. As it is often remarkably quiet. Sometimes I wonder why I do research on violence in this area. Later, when I return to Jean's apartment, housemate Ishmael (26 years old) sits back at the couch. On the table his calculator and a notebook. He tells me that he is fed up with Jean. "He's nasty. He always wants to know where I go, what I do, with whom I was". Ishmael is initially a bit vague about his job. He says he works for the Public Gardens Department in a neighbouring suburb. Then his brother, whom I see for the first time tonight, enters the living room. He throws a thick envelope on the table. Ishmael jumps up, grabs the envelope, and pulls out of it a big pile of banknotes. They start to count. Mainly 10 and 20 Euro notes, but also notes of 100 and 200 euros pass through their hands. While I try to watch television, Ishmael carefully jots down the numbers in his notebook. I do not dare to ask where they

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<sup>138</sup> DSK stands for Dominique Strauss Kahn, former managing director of the International Monetary Fund. Idriss refers here to the fact that he was arrested in May 2011 in New York over allegations of sexual assault.

<sup>139</sup> Idriss refers to the '*quota polémique*' that received a lot of media attention in April 2011. National coach Laurent Blanc was accused of using racial quotas as a selection criterion for the national team. Blanc claimed that he was misquoted and denied being racist.

got the money from. It seems that I became entangled, for a moment, in the code to keep silent [Diary notes 8 July 2010].

## CONCLUSION

The first chapter discussed how the state's framing and enactment of violence contributed to the making of the *banlieue* and the categorization of its young inhabitants. Since this 'outside' framing is often removed from the local settings in which violence occurs, the present chapter took a closer look at the local enactment and readings of violence.

I avoided the common academic tendency to treat 'violence from the *banlieue*' as a single and monolithic phenomenon and instead studied its various forms, meanings and functions. As many other academics have already emphasized, violence is a slippery concept. The descriptions of violence given in this chapter confirm this: violence is seen as both legitimate and illegitimate, a symbol of disrespect but also a way to gain respect, both present and absent. In order to get a better grip on the concept, I disaggregated violence both theoretically and empirically. On a theoretical level, I distinguished between objective manifestations of violence and its subjective interpretations. Following this divide, I identified two objective repertoires of violence: 'audience-oriented' and 'backstage-oriented' violence, each with its respective acts, actors, location, organization, timing, targets and degree of visibility. Moreover, I unveiled a variety of local interpretations of violence. Seen from the state's project of governing, violence at the street corner is illegitimate and a sign of disrespect. In contrast, viewed from the street's project of governing, violence is a legitimate way to generate respect. Those who are actively involved in violence do so for various reasons. 'Audience-oriented' violence is committed both to critique the experiences of state and structural violence and simultaneously to gain internal status and power. Those involved in 'backstage-oriented' violence generally do so to maintain internal status and control over the neighbourhood and its inhabitants. The control over the neighbourhood is not only exercised by the actual presence of 'objective' acts of violence but also through the continuously present threat of violence, which is propagated by fearful and passionate narratives of past violence, warnings about the future, and the code to keep silent in the here and now.

Overall, the state and the street are both involved in similar but opposing projects of governance. Both try to 'read' and 'know' the population through practices of surveillance. Both show their presence through repression and (the threat of) violence: the state in the form of hovering helicopters, police interventions, and arrests of potential drug dealers; the boys and young males on the street corner through occupying the streets, (the threat of) violence and the imposition of a code of silence. These two projects of governing feed into each other: the actions of the other are needed to legitimize their own resort to violence. State violence or repression is legitimized by the violence committed by young

people on the street corner, and young people on the street corner, in turn, legitimize their violent acts (partly) by pointing to structural and state violence. The result is an uncertain and unstable environment subjected to opposing governmentalities by both the state and the street.

# Conclusion

*“Wat met de mensen niet lukte leefde de stad uit op haar parken.  
De voorstad mocht branden, op het gazon werd niet gelopen”.*

Adriaan van Dis, *De Wandelaar* (2007: 74)

On the last day of my research in 4000*sud*, Jean is searching for a new person to rent out the 14m<sup>2</sup> room where I stayed for the past months. Because Jean is still jobless, he urgently needs the money. An 18-year-old boy from LeHavre is visiting the apartment with his parents. He will start his studies at a Parisian university in September. I am just about to go outside for a last walk in the neighbourhood, when Jean comes to me and asks if I can stay for a while. “As you are white, you know... It gives them more confidence”. While Jean shows the room to the 18-year-old and his mum, the father comes back to the living room where I sit behind my computer. He speaks in a whisper: “Is he nice?” hinting with his head to the room where Jean is. “Not too much noise here? Not too cold or too warm?” When the 18-year-old and his mum reenter the living room, Jean dissociates himself from 4000*sud*. “I am so glad that we do not live in a *cité*. The *cité* is terrible!” The parents of the boy laugh somewhat reservedly and nod understandingly.

After they have left, I go outside. Salim and Abdel drive by on their bikes and say goodbye to me. Marie is having a chat with her friends on a wooden bench at the square next to the shopping centre. I stay for a while at the youth centre and watch how some youngsters play a game of Monopoly. Like all the other afternoons when I watched them playing, they make their own rules. They do not play individually but buy hotels in changing teams. They share profits, and may pay for another player when he is in trouble. The game is played at breakneck speed. Accusations of cheating are flying “How did you get so much money?? How much do you pay now?? Is he stealing from the bank?!”

Outside I say goodbye to youth workers Idriss and Ahmed. “We will still be here the next time you come to La Courneuve...”, says Idriss. “Well... at least, if we haven’t been hit by a stray bullet”, both laugh out loud. Ahmed then more serious: “I want to read your book”. “Yes, me too”, says Idriss.

Later in the afternoon, it is time to leave. Jean walks with me up to *Le Mail*, where we say goodbye. I pass the *gnetteurs* as they stand on the lookout on their corners. I take the train at the RER station and watch as a dilapidated part of *Balzac* and the enormous piles of crumbled concrete next to it slowly go out of my sight [Diary notes 5 August 2011].

I started my journey with the central aim to gain a better understanding of the making of the French suburban crisis. I took a journey through the past decades and a journey from the central state offices and the carefully laid out parks in Paris city centre to the heart of neighbourhood 4000*sud*. In the spirit of William Foote Whyte, I aimed to present in this book “a moving picture instead of a still photograph” (1981 [1943]: 323).

While looking back on the diverse range of voices presented in this book, I was reminded of Pierre, whom I only met once during my research stays in 4000*sud* (I briefly introduced him in Chapter 2). This is what he said to me: “Ahh, so you are here to study *us*. There have been so many sociologists that came to La Courneuve to study us. They have never shown any result. I have talked to many, but they have never ever come back to show me their results. They just come here

to gather their data to never come back again. We have become an object of study for sociologists. It's not a good thing. That's not good. They have all tried to find something here, but in the end they did never find anything. People are normal here..." [Diary notes 13 July 2011].

Pierre questioned the legitimacy of my stay in the neighbourhood. In this Conclusion, I will bring together the five main findings of my research, which I hope will answer Pierre's doubts. The Conclusion will focus not just on what I found but also on what I did not find, in particular the relative absence of religion (especially radical Islam) as a major factor in *La crise des banlieues*.

As described in the Introduction, social research is a dialogue between images and ideas (Ragin & Amoroso, 2011). While discussing my findings in this Conclusion, I will reflect on both empirical and theoretical aspects.

### 1. The suburban crisis is about relations

*A better understanding of the suburban crisis should not focus exclusively on the banlieue and its young inhabitants but rather on the 'external' and 'internal' construction of difference.*

The overall claim of this book is that a better understanding of *La crise des banlieues* can only be obtained by studying the central relations through which it is made. While describing or explaining the suburban crisis, the politician, journalist, and academic may easily be seduced to narrowly and exclusively focus on the *cités* and their young inhabitants as the main locus and subjects of the 'problem'. However, I argue that the *banlieue* crisis is just as much about the *banlieusards* in 4000*sud* as it is about a white bourgeoisie lady, living in the 16<sup>th</sup> *arrondissement*, who is afraid to take the suburban train to La Courneuve because she thinks that she will immediately be robbed or raped by youth gangs; it is also about the policeman who engages in ethnic profiling; about the politician that tries to gain votes by portraying suburban clichés; about the director of a company who does not invite a youngster for a job interview based on the migrant name and the suburban postal code on his CV; about a father who is nervous about renting a room in the *banlieue* for his student-son; about the spectacular images of violence that are exaggerated by a corporate media journalist. All this is to say that crucial in understanding the suburban crisis is an examination of the *relation* between outside categorizations and practices, and internal dynamics of everyday life.

In addition, throughout this book I have emphasized the need to problematize and disaggregate the 'Banlieue Crisis'. Rather than taking the *banlieues* and their young inhabitants as pre-existing or given places and people, I proposed to study the *construction* of difference over time and in its larger context. In doing so, I moved away from more *descriptive* questions that search to establish an ideal-typical image of the *banlieues* or *cités* and their young inhabitants, to more *analytical* questions that explore the dynamic and contested processes of the *making* of the *banlieues* and the *banlieusards*, and the role of violence therein.

In order to study the central relation between the ‘outside’ and the ‘inside’, I introduced in the first chapter a Foucauldian governmentality approach as the underlying theoretical foundation of this book. Central in projects of governing are the knowing and reading of the social world in ‘languages of description’ (frames) and the ‘technologies of governance’ (practices) to maintain that social world through forms of policing and (self)disciplining. It focuses attention thus simultaneously on the *imagining* and the *constitution* of subjects and places. To get a better idea of the ‘external’ imagining and practices, I studied the state’s project of governing (see Chapter 1). Subsequently, I paid attention to the ‘internal dynamics of everyday life’, to study how young people in 4000*sud* cope, negotiate and deal with the state’s imaginings and technologies of governance, and how especially boys and young males on the street corner have developed their own governmentality at the neighbourhood level. Throughout this book, I have studied how these ‘outside’ and ‘inside’ projects of governing feed into each other, how they contest but also mimic each other. While the governmentality approach provided the skeleton of my larger analysis, I drew on various bodies of academic literature that focused in particular on place-making processes, social identity dynamics and violence, to give more analytical depth to my exploration of the ‘making’ and reification of places and identity groups and the role of violence therein. The various bodies of literature combined with ethnographic data collection enabled me to present a ‘thick description’ of the making of the *banlieue* crisis.

## **2. The external construction of places and categorization of people**

*Over the past decades, the state’s spatial readings of incidents of violence and its subsequent policy measures have contributed to the constitution and hardening of the banlieues and the reifying categorization of its young (gendered/ethnicized) inhabitants as criminals or victims.*

As indicated above, I studied the ‘outside’ construction of difference by particularly zooming in on the French state’s project of governing. I analyzed how the state’s imaginings and techniques of governance contributed to the making of the *banlieues* and the categorization of *banlieusards* over the past decades (see Chapter 1). My analysis unveils a transition: from the physical construction of the *grands ensembles* and the rather positive meaning that was attributed to these modern high-rise apartment buildings in the mid-1950s, to a dominant negative imagination of these places as gloomy ghettos today; from worries about the architecture that allegedly made inhabitants (especially women) ill to an emphasis on youngsters (especially boys) who are seen as threatening ‘others’ in French society.

I argued that the development of the suburban crisis has gone through four major stages (phase 1: mid1950s-1981; phase 2: 1981-1990; phase 3: 1990-2005; and phase 4: 2005-today), each new phase beginning with what I called an iconic violent event. Although many violent incidents have occurred in suburban France over the

past decades, I claimed that the violent events in Les Minguettes in 1981, in Vaulx-en-Velin in 1990, and in Clichy-sous-Bois (and beyond) in 2005 can be seen as the founding moments of the suburban crisis. The iconic status of these three violent events in particular can be explained by a combination of: (a) their performative quality (the spectacular images of burning suburbs are well suited for mediatization); (b) state involvement (the police were involved in the trigger events that inflamed the actual violence and/or in the subsequent clashes with young people); (c) political functionality (all three events occurred at a moment that allowed them to be exploited in political campaigns); and (d) growing escalation (each violent episode surpassed the intensity of the previous event). By stressing the importance of these three iconic violent events, I reworked the earlier analyses of Dikeç (2007) and of Kokoreff & Lapeyronnie (2013).

Violent events, as compressed and highly emotional moments, call par excellence for legibility/readability and technologies of governance by the state that aims to control its territory and subjects. In the past 40 years, the state's reading and implemented policy practices in the aftermath of violence show various diagnoses of the problem, with both shared, enduring features, and more contested interpretations of the problem. The most prominent enduring feature in the state's governmentality is the strong spatial reading and institutionalization of the divide between the city centre and the peripheral *banlieues* or *cités*. The construction and interventions in 'urban policy neighbourhoods' (since the early 1980s), so called *Zones Urbaines Sensibles* (since 1996) and 'Priority neighbourhoods' (since 2013) are illustrations of these spatialized policies. Correspondingly, the main actors of violence are predominantly imagined as '*jeunes des banlieues*', '*banlieusards*', '*jeunes des cités*', '*jeunes issu des quartiers populaires*', '*jeunes de la rue*'. More implicitly, though (and rather explicitly by some, especially right wing, political actors), these young people are also gendered and ethnicized/racialized (as the 'Arab' or 'Black' young males from the *banlieue*).

Whereas in the state's governing projects the *banlieues* or *cités* are predominantly identified as the locus and the *banlieusards* as the main subject of the problem, the way in which violence, (violent) subjects, and the spaces that they inhabit should be understood has been contested over the past decades. I proposed to see their portrayal as a continuum in which young people are, on the one hand, increasingly portrayed as criminals living in uncivilized territories that resort to *violence gratuite* (senseless violence). These readings are, however, countered by frames that depict young people as victims, living in the forgotten, discriminated and stigmatized corners of the Republic, and expressing a violent cry of distress. The varying readings of violence lead to a range of state disciplining measures: from social projects to securitization. On the one hand, preventive measures have been taken, such as the '*anti-été chaud*' programme (summer leisure activities for youngsters) and projects that aim to reduce youth unemployment or poverty; on the other hand, repressive and security-oriented measures gained importance since the early 1990s and reached new heights in the early 2000s when Nicolas Sarkozy implemented his 'zero-tolerance campaign'.

To summarize, my analysis demonstrated that the state's reading of iconic violent events and the subsequent policy measures that were implemented were first and foremost spatial. These readings and practices played a crucial role in the development of the suburban crisis. Together they ordered and reordered, included and excluded, contributed to the drawing of boundaries between 'here' and 'there', between 'us' and 'them'. They produced, intentionally or unintentionally, particular places and subjects that can be governed.

Whereas the first chapter focused mainly on the dominant representations and the *how* of governing by the state, in subsequent chapters I examined how these techniques of governance affected those who are 'categorized' and 'localized' and how these state representations and techniques are contested and/or replaced by alternative imaginings and practices of governance.

### 3. The internal construction of place

*Young residents contest the state's imagination of the banlieue/cité and make their own neighbourhood through three mundane routines: narratives and naming, hanging out ('trainer') at the street corner, and surveillance.*

In line with the broader aim of this book to understand the 'construction of difference', I looked closely at a particular aspect of the governmentality project and studied in detail the process of place-making, the construction of 'here' and 'there'. As a starting point, I argued by drawing on Reinders (2013) and Raban (1974) that place-making processes have both 'hard' (material) and 'soft' (mental) dimensions and that places are constantly made and unmade by multiple actors. Based on my empirical data and ideas from Gieryn (2000) and Cresswell (1996), I disaggregated the place-making process into four interrelated mechanisms: (1) drawing boundaries to delineate what is and what is not part of a particular place; (2) ordering a place by arranging people and objects (buildings, roads, parks, etc.); (3) giving meaning and value to a particular place (places are named and identified, and evaluative/emotional notions are attached to them); and, (4) creating appropriate norms, that is, the formulation of a set of rules determining what is and what is not considered as appropriate acting in a given place (disciplining). These mechanisms are not carried out one by one but are, rather, embedded in various discursive representations and enactments that are carried out by multiple actors (of which the state on the one hand, and young residents from 4000*sud* on the other, are central in this book).

One of my first empirical findings is that the *banlieue* is most often imagined and treated as a rather reified, bounded and homogenous place from the 'outside', but 'internally' it is contested. The interviewed and observed young people often imagined their neighbourhood differently than the state institutions, and questions of where the neighbourhood starts or ends, what buildings constitute it, and who belongs to it and who does not, varied among my respondents. Close observation

of daily life revealed three mundane discursive and practical routines that encompass the place-making mechanisms mentioned above. I have labeled the first set of routines ‘naming and narratives’. Just as state actors delineate, name and label their policy neighbourhoods (such as ‘4000*sud*’, or in more general terms: ‘*Zone Urbaine Sensible*’ and ‘priority neighbourhood’), young people give names of their own to the neighbourhood (‘4*keus*’) and particular buildings (e.g., ‘*Balzac*’, ‘*Le Mail*’, ‘*La Tour*’). They inscribe these names in the physical terrain, through graffiti on the walls. Moreover, youngsters distinguish themselves from the outside world in everyday talk and draw boundaries to delineate their neighbourhood by referring to ethnicity, economic situation, morals and degrees of violence. However, these narratives do not lead to a neatly internally bounded place. Instead, youngsters come up with various readings and enactments of ‘their neighbourhood’. Who and what belongs differs, in part, based on the dynamic relations in the neighbourhood at a particular moment.

The second set of routines I have called ‘*trainer*’, a French word for ‘hanging out’. Many young people, especially boys and young men, are often out on the streets, to occupy ‘their territory’. I have discussed *trainer* not as a random activity but one that follows explicit and implicit rules that produce and reproduce both physical boundaries (spots that are attractive to hang out in and spots to avoid) and a form of internal social organization, mainly based on age and gender. Boys generally hang with other boys of the same age; it is less accepted for girls to hang out on the street corners.

The third set of routines is surveillance, meaning the determination of who is and who is not welcome in the neighbourhood. Just as the police do, boys and young males embark on practices of surveillance to control the area. Especially in the beginning of my research, I was subjected to these routines. Similar to the frequent ‘identity checks’ by the police that young inhabitants of 4000*sud* often complained about, I was stopped numerous times by male youngsters to check what I was doing in their neighbourhood. Graffiti on the walls also indicated who is out of place (e.g., “fuck police”) and who is ‘in’ (e.g., the names of buildings and local rap stars, the postal code of the neighbourhood).

These three mundane routines have a dual function. They are a form of resistance against constructions of the neighbourhood that come from the outside (e.g., institutionalized neighbourhood boundaries by policy makers, housing corporations that operate the buildings in the neighbourhood, local police who are involved in practices of surveillance). At the same time, they strive towards an internal social organization with its own boundaries, meanings, rules and regulations. Hence, these everyday routines produce and reproduce demarcations with the outside world, at the same time they organize and discipline the place internally, especially along age and gender lines. The result is overlapping and contested places that are simultaneously claimed and governed by the state and by, especially male, youngsters on the street.

The particular contribution of this book is that it empirically disaggregated the ‘neighbourhood’. It problematized and studied the contested making of the

*banlieue*, rather than taking it for granted as a given place or simply as the stage on which violence is performed. Moreover, my empirical material combined with ideas from Gieryn and Creswell, in particular, enabled me to theorize the internal place-making process by identifying the three mundane routines that play a key role in this process.

#### 4. The internal construction of identity

*Youngsters from the banlieue' should not be seen as a homogenous group or as a collection of subgroups. Instead, they negotiate their identity and switch between dissociating, transforming and associating strategies.*

Apart from the making of place, I also focused on and theorized the (un)making of 'subjects', as part of the larger governmentality projects. As indicated above, over the past decades young people have mainly been categorized spatially (and, more implicitly, based on ethnicity and gender). They have become a category that is externally associated with criminality and victimhood. Internally, these outside categorizations weigh heavy on them. However, identity-making is an interactive process of categorization and self-identification. Young people are not just categorized from the outside but also have agency to negotiate, contest or confirm the identity images that are ascribed to them. Through a dialogue between my empirical data and theory, which strongly build on Wimmer's taxonomy of boundary-making strategies (2013, 2008a), I have identified three sets of social identification strategies that are frequently expressed and enacted among the young people whom I have interviewed and observed.

First, by applying what I called dissociating strategies, youngsters individually seek to detach themselves from the dominant negative categorizations. Those who engage in this strategy do not critique or adjust the dominantly imposed identity boundaries and content, but rather try to escape from these images. They spend little time on the streets and, in some cases, permanently leave the neighbourhood to move to another place. The aim of this strategy is to become part of the other side of the dominant 'us-them divide'. Hence, young people try to side with the more powerful 'outside', are not involved in the place-making routines described above, and do not identify themselves as *banlieusards*.

The second set, which I have named 'transforming strategies', criticizes the dominant portrayal of boundaries and content and seeks, either individually or collectively, to transform the unequal relation. The aim is to find a new power balance between the 'inside' and the 'outside'. The strategies blur and add boundaries and reframe identity content. For example, youngsters downgrade the dangerous reputation of the *banlieues* and argue that violence happens everywhere (blurring) or point to other people who are worse-off or places that are more dangerous than their neighbourhood (adding boundaries). They also emphasize the positive aspects of 'being a *banlieusard*' (solidarity and team spirit among inhabitants of the *cité*), whereas more negative aspects are neglected (transvaluation). The

strategy expresses itself in everyday stories in the neighbourhood, but also in blogs on the internet, culturally in (rap) songs, through demonstrations organized by local associations and by actively supporting local or national campaigns against territorial/racial discrimination and claims for equal treatment.

Lastly, ‘associating strategies’ embrace and reinforce the roles that are externally expected of ‘youngsters from the *banlieue*’. They, often collectively, live and act out the imposed stereotypes and cliché images. Moreover, the strategies focus on gaining a power position ‘within’ by creating internal subordinates based on age (the older ones rule over the younger ones) and gender (boys rule over girls), and by disciplining those who do not follow the identity content of ‘street life’. This strategy focuses mainly on its own ruling of the neighbourhood. It has its own project of governing that ‘reads’ and (self)disciplines the neighbourhood population. It is especially in this strategy that the above mentioned place-making routines (*trainer*’ and ‘surveillance’ in particular) are enacted.

While the first and second set of strategies are enacted by both boys and girls, ‘associating strategies’ are predominantly enacted by boys and young males. This is not surprising, taking into account that the young (Arab/Black) male is most central in the portrayal of the ‘*banlieusard*’ and thereby most targeted in practices of discrimination and stigmatization (see also Kokoreff & Lapeyronnie, 2013: 32-35; Lapeyronnie, 2008).

My observations and interviews also showed that young people often engage not just in one of the three strategies but in several. They switch between neighbourhood solidarity and neighbourhood aversion. They want to escape from but also belong to the neighbourhood. They embrace and hate the negative stereotyped images that are imposed on them. While navigating life through various social identification strategies, young people need to take into account simultaneously external and internal projects of governing and (self)disciplining. Both sides attract and put off. Both sides provide feelings of belonging, but simultaneously the danger of becoming an ‘outsider’. Identifying with the ‘inside’ often means ‘outside’ exclusion, and vice versa. Some youngsters can aptly deal and cope with more than one set of these external and internal expectations, others are driven much more to one of the two extreme ends. This research clearly shows that switching depends on peer pressure to identify with the street and external pressure to adjust to the norms of broader French society. However, more research is needed to explain in detail *when* youngsters switch from one strategy to another.

The contribution of this book is that it criticizes approaches that take ‘youngsters from the *banlieue*’ as a rather fixed and homogenous group or that order them in various ideal type subgroups. The main problem of these approaches is that they iron out to a large extent the inconsistencies, both between and within youngsters that are to my mind central in identity processes. I have focused here on what young people say and do (how they react, cope, negotiate outside categorizations, how they identify themselves), rather than trying to pin down who they are (or who they are not). In line with cutting edge academic literature on social identity, I focused on the *process* of identification rather than on the *condition*

of identity, and elaborated both theoretically and empirically on three social identification strategies that were dominant among my respondents.

### 5. The role of violence in place-making processes and identity dynamics

*Violence is not monolithic, nor should it simply be seen as an outcome or result. Instead, violence manifests itself in different repertoires and is part of a process. Violence both critiques the state's governmentality and contributes to the 'internal' construction and disciplining of place and people.*

As explained above, the state's reading of violent events and the subsequent technologies of governance (ranging from the demolishing of high-rise apartment buildings and social projects aiming to reduce poverty and unemployment, to strong securitization measures in the form of (riot) police interventions) played a key role in the making of the *banlieue* and the spatial categorization of its young inhabitants. As these external readings are often removed from the local settings in which violence occurs, I took a closer look at the local enactment and readings of violence. Moreover, I studied the function of violence in relation to both external and internal projects of governing.

By drawing on Wieviorka's (2009; 1999) ideas on violence, I proposed that the concept of violence can best be studied by looking at both its 'objective' and 'subjective' sides. The objective side refers to the manifestation of violence, whereas the subjective side corresponds with the interpretations and meanings that people attach to violence.

Following this divide, and based on my empirical evidence, I identified two objective repertoires of violence that have a strong impact on daily life in the neighbourhood. I called these repertoires 'audience-oriented' and 'backstage-oriented' violence (see Chapter 5). Each repertoire has its respective acts, actors, locations, organization, timing, targets and degrees of visibility. Audience-oriented violence includes car burning episodes (such as the ones in 1981, 1990 and 2005) and *conneries* (mischief, stupidities). The acts are committed at various spots in the neighbourhood predominantly by young males (12-20 years old) who are loosely organized and seek the attention of an audience. They target both material property (e.g., cars, buildings, bikes) and human 'outsiders' (e.g., police and firemen). Whereas *conneries* occur on a daily basis, mainly in the afternoons, evenings and at night, the car burning episodes are less common, and erupt only after a particular, often rather scripted, trigger event in which the state is (in some way) involved.

Backstage-oriented violence, the second repertoire, includes drug related violence. In contrast with the first repertoire, the manifestations of this violence are often located in much more bounded and strictly hierarchically controlled areas, committed by older young males (often over 18 years old). The violent acts are more hidden and police attention is avoided. The targets of violence are limited to those who belong to rival groups of drugs dealers, or others who may threaten the drug turf or trade. Also, the timing is different from the first repertoire. Drug trade

takes place on a daily basis in rather fixed time slots: from the early morning till around midnight. Violent episodes are restricted to moments when incompatible interests arise (especially when the own turf or trade is threatened by others).

A closer look at the subjective side of violence revealed that my respondents interpret and attach different meanings to acts of violence. Whereas some morally condemn both repertoires, others take a more ambiguous stance in which audience-oriented violence is seen as legitimate (and explained as rooted in unemployment, discrimination, and a general lack of future perspectives) but backstage violence is disapproved. Again others celebrate danger, threat and the use of force. Violence is seen by them as a way to gain status and respect in the neighbourhood, attributing even more value to the backstage-oriented than the audience-oriented repertoire of violence.

Direct testimonies of youngsters who actually resort to audience-oriented violence show that they do so for various reasons: to critique and fight state and structural violence, and at the same time to gain inside status and respect. Those who actively participated in the 2005 car burnings claimed that they did so to protest against (police)discrimination, poverty, segregation, high levels of unemployment and other structural injustices. The resort to violence can then be seen as a critique on the imposed place-making practices (the feeling of being locked up in a ‘ghetto’) and the negative identity categorizations (the feeling of being treated as second-class citizens). However, youngsters also resorted to violence because it was fun, to entertain themselves, to show that they can burn more cars than a neighbouring *cité*, to show off to peers in the neighbourhood, to chase ‘outsiders’. Hence, audience-oriented violence has a double function: both to critique outside power holders and to gain inside status. The function of backstage-oriented violence, in turn, is (apart from the financial benefits) focused on gaining or maintaining status and respect in the neighbourhood and on governing the streets and controlling the turf and trade.

However, it is not only manifest acts of violence that contribute to the control and (self) disciplining of the neighbourhood. In fact, during my research stays in 4000*sud*, I only observed a limited number of car burnings, *conneries* and drug related tensions. Most of the time it was rather quiet in the neighbourhood. Nothing happened. Nevertheless, I noticed that the threat of violence and danger was constantly present even when observable manifestations of violent acts were absent, which revealed the effectiveness of violence as a technique of governance. The threat of violence was spread through narratives about highly emotional violent events that took place in the past, through warnings about future dangers, and through the constant reproduction of the code to keep silent. “You snitch, you’re in big trouble”, is one of the central rules in 4000*sud*. Some contribute to these narratives out of fear, others out of approval and fascination for violence, to strengthen their power and status in, and ruling of, the neighbourhood.

This analysis demonstrated that violence both critiques the external project of governmentality and functions as an internal technique of governance that contributes to place-making and identity formation. Violence can be seen as

another place-making routine, which complements the earlier mentioned ‘narratives and naming’, ‘*trainer*’ and ‘surveillance’. Violence can be used to chase away those who are considered ‘out of place’. Moreover, acts of violence can be linked to the above discussed identity strategies. It can be seen as a radical enactment of transforming strategies (a violent call for structural change and an outcry to protest against various forms of discrimination and stigmatization, a last resort to be heard) and as an enactment of associating strategies that see violence as a way to gain status and enable the disciplining of subordinates (younger boys and girls) in the neighbourhood.

In the end, violence is used by both the state and the street as a technology of governance. Both show their presence through repression and (the threat of) violence: the state through police forces, hovering helicopters and identity checks; the young people on the street corner through practices of surveillance, destroying property, and chasing those who are not wanted in the neighbourhood. Both need the actions of the other to legitimize their own resort to violence. The result is an uncertain and unstable environment subject to opposing projects of governing by both the state and the street.

The contribution of this book is that it disaggregates violence both theoretically and empirically. I avoided the frequent tendency in academia to treat incidents of suburban violence as single and monolithic outcomes or results. Instead, this book stressed the need to study and distinguish various repertoires, meanings and functions, and to analyze violence as part of a dialectic *process* of state and neighbourhood projects of governing.

In the above five central findings of this book, one factor is clearly, and for some perhaps surprisingly, absent: religion, and more particularly radical Islam. Its absence is even more pressing as the question of religion has recently gained even greater prominence in French political, public and academic debate. Although similar discussions can be traced across Western Europe, the particular urgency of the issue in France rose especially in the aftermath of a number of violent events. The attacks on the journalists of Charlie Hebdo and the fatal taking of hostages in a Jewish supermarket in January 2015 is the most prominent example<sup>140</sup>. As I have argued earlier in this book, violent events call for state readings and policy measures. In addition to a firm and direct militarization of the French urban landscape, the debate on underlying questions and more structural solutions is ongoing. How should French society deal with its Muslim population (the largest in Europe) after these attacks? Are these incidents of violence rooted in a clash of civilizations? Is this the end of the core Republican principle of ‘*laïcité*’ (the strict separation of state and religion) or should it be restored and strengthened? Also ‘the *banlieue*’ played a prominent role in the struggles over the interpretation of violence. Shortly after the attacks, Prime Minister Manuel Valls declared in an

<sup>140</sup> Also other events, such as the shootings of French soldiers and Jewish civilians by Mohamed Merah in 2012 in Toulouse and Montauban, and the beheading, allegedly inspired by Daesh, close to Lyon in June 2015, contribute to the centrality of religion in the French debate.

official speech for French media that France faces a ‘territorial, social and ethnic apartheid’. This explicit labeling by Valls was both critiqued and praised. In any case, he also, more implicitly, linked Islamic terrorism to ‘the *banlieues*’.

During my research I found little empirical evidence for a direct and strong relation between the *banlieue* and Islamic radicalism. The absence could be explained by particular constraints of this research. It is possible that radical Islam has less strongly developed in 4000*sud* compared to other *cités* in France. Another explanation for the absence of religion in my core findings is that the debate on radical Islam only grew in size exponentially after I gathered my empirical data in 4000*sud*. The debate in religious terms and the increasing categorization of Muslims as ‘threatening others’ may have changed the internal dynamics of the neighbourhood. A stronger outside categorization based on religion may also have triggered stronger self-identifications, following the dialectics as outlined above.

Despite these possible constraints, I would still argue that identifying jihadism with the *banlieues* is problematic for at least two reasons. First, the young people that I interviewed and observed were much more focused on the spatial and racialized divide that they experienced than on the religious one. They emphasized the experience of a double form of discrimination: based on neighbourhood and skin color. Religion was less often a central topic of conversation. That does not mean that Islam was absent in 4000*sud*. Some youngsters identified as Muslim, and actively prayed and observed Ramadan. Some said they found rest and drew strength from religion. Some older inhabitants expressed worries about radicalism but I did not meet young residents who shared with me any strong radical Islamist ideas. In the end, young people seemed to associate (or dissociate) themselves more strongly with their postal code than with Allah or the Prophet.

Second, reasoning from the repertoires of violence that I have outlined in Chapter 5, I argue that violent acts, such as the Charlie Hebdo attacks, need to be seen as a different repertoire of violence. Audience- and backstage-oriented violence mainly take place within the boundaries of the neighbourhood and target vehicles or rival drug dealers. In contrast, the Charlie Hebdo attacks took place in another ‘theatre’, the heart of the city centre, and targeted Jews, policemen and journalists. Moreover, I would suggest that those involved in radical Islam dissociate from their peers on the street corner. They surpass the boundaries of the *cité*, seek to get in contact with radical co-religionists in other parts of the city or country. They go to Syria, Iraq or Yemen. They mobilize through other (online) networks and operate on different stages. This is illustrated by the fact that the three perpetrators of the attacks in January 2015 came from different areas: the Kouachi brothers, who attacked the Charlie Hebdo office, radicalized in the so-called Buttes-Chaumont network in the 19<sup>th</sup> *arrondissement* of Paris city centre. Amedy Coulibaly, who killed a police officer and took hostages in a Jewish supermarket, lived in a *cité* of Parisian *banlieue* Grigny. Even though two of the three perpetrators did *not* live in a suburban area, public, political and media discussions focused much more on the *banlieues* than on the 19<sup>th</sup> *arrondissement* of Paris.

In uncertain times it may feel reassuring to locate the ‘terrorist’, the ‘barbaric’ or ‘uncivilized other’ in an existing narrative, as being different from ‘us’ and living somewhere in the periphery of ‘our’ lives, in the forgotten corners of the Republic. However, jihadism should not be emplaced too rapidly in the *banlieues*. Based on my experience and research, while jihadism is not absent from the *banlieue*, there is no evidence that it should be linked to these areas in particular. More research is needed to study *if* there is a relation between ‘problematic or poor migrant neighbourhoods’ and religious radicalism and if so *how* we should understand and explain that relation.

One risk of a strong political and policy focus on (radical) Islamism is that it comes to observe the world exclusively through these lenses and blinds observers to other problems deeply rooted in French society. This book gives an insight in how the *banlieue* crisis is made, and paid most empirical attention to how it is experienced by those who are targeted by it on a daily basis. It looks beyond a simple enumeration of poverty, unemployment, segregation and discrimination, and instead describes and analyzes the daily lives of those who live in a neighbourhood that has been labeled ‘problematic’ since the early 1980s. It shows how many of the observed and interviewed young people struggle between hanging out on the street or staying inside; between strongly identifying with or dissociating from the neighbourhood; between living by outside or inside rules; between seeing violence as morally wrong, as a desperate last resort to change structural inequality, or to gain status and respect in order to rule over others. These young people are, above all, just like everybody else, in search of dignity and safety, in search of a safe home and a feeling that they belong. However, inside safety often equals outside insecurity, and vice versa. Being involved in drug-related violence provides money and status in the neighbourhood but is seen from the outside as reprehensible. The postal code of 4000*sud* on your t-shirt is praised in the neighbourhood and shows that you belong, but the same numbers on your CV often mean exclusion in the world outside the neighbourhood. Many youngsters experience simultaneously the pressure from outside and from within. They switch between places, identities and the approval or condemnation of violence. They are between inclusion and exclusion of two worlds.

This book disaggregates the neighbourhood, identity and violence and attempts to provide a deeper understanding of the dialectical making of the *banlieue* crisis by viewing the process through the lens of opposing and contested external and internal projects of governmentality. On an empirical level, this book gives a detailed insight into a particular case. On a theoretical level, it draws on multiple academic bodies of literature that cross disciplinary boundaries and provides an analytical and conceptual toolkit that can, in my view, be applied beyond the French case.

Moreover, the insights presented here about the process of the making of the ‘*banlieue* crisis’ may also be a starting point for further reflection on the *unmaking* of the crisis. The (non-violent) transforming strategies that some young people

engage in, discussed in Chapter 4, aiming to change the relation on a political, social and/or cultural level, are the most hopeful seeds for change. However, these seeds can only flourish when the transformation strategies are also taken to heart and enacted by the white bourgeoisie French lady living in the 16<sup>th</sup> *arrondissement*, afraid to be robbed or raped by suburban youth gangs; the policeman who engages in ethnic profiling; the politician who indulges in suburban clichés; the director of a company who discriminates based on race and postal codes; the nervous father who hesitates to rent a suburban room for his student son; and the corporate media journalist who pleases his superiors by portraying violent spectacles.

## Postscript

In May 2014, I go back to 4000*sud* for a short visit. *Balzac* has completely disappeared. New apartments are under construction. The *guetteurs* are standing on their usual street corners, engaged in practices of surveillance. Further up the road, a police control is going on: a car has been stopped and the driver is being interrogated by three policemen. About twenty young people have gathered on the other side of the street to watch it. Apart from some minor changes in the ‘hard’ side of 4000*sud* (I come across some new and renovated buildings, and a new supermarket), it seems that the ‘soft’ side of the neighbourhood has little changed. I pass *Le Mail* and enter the street where I stayed during my research. I haven’t seen Jean for two years now. I ring the doorbell at the bottom of the apartment building, I hear a female voice through the intercom. She tells me that Jean has moved, he does no longer live in La Courneuve. On my way back to the RER station I find his telephone number and to my surprise he answers the phone. An hour later, I am sitting in his new living room in the 19<sup>th</sup> *arrondissement* of Paris city centre. I look around and think back to our first encounter. I see the same pictures on the wall and on the cupboard. No traces of 4000*sud*, only of a past in Ivory Coast. Jean has found a new job as a caretaker of an apartment building. He has moved into the staff residence just next to the entrance. He seems to be happy with his new life. He invites me to stay for dinner, he prepared his famous Ivorian dish. Around midnight I leave. Jean has finally found a stable job. He made it to the city centre. My thoughts are interrupted by a group of youngsters who stand in front of the gate of Jean’s apartment building. They ask me in a mood of gaiety: “Sir, are you a police officer?” I answer in the negative. “Great, because we’re going to smoke some shit”. They laugh out loud. “Have a good night, sir” [Diary notes 3 May 2014].



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# Annex 1

## List of in-depth interviews (excluding informal talks/observations)

The list below only gives an overview of the respondents I conducted in-depth interviews with. As explained in Chapter 2, most of the empirical material was gathered through participant observation in the neighbourhood. The numerous informal talks with many other young residents, but also with employees/volunteers of local associations and older inhabitants of 4000*sud* are **not** included in this list. For privacy reasons, all names in this book are fictitious.

	Name	Age	Male/ Female	Occupation	Date of Interview
1.	Sylvain	18	M	High school student	24 June 2010
2.	Idriss	27	M	Animateur	7 July 2010 2 August 2011
3.	Hassan	27	M	Animateur	16 July 2010
4.	Leila	21	F	Animateur	17 July 2010
5.	Mariam	19	F	Student BEP Vente	20 July 2010
6.	Aicha	21	F	Student BTS Commerce	26 July 2010
7.	Saeed	27	M	Jobless	26 July 2010
8.	Abdel	13	M	High school student	29 July 2010
9.	Duna	14	M	High school student	29 July 2010
10.	Sofyan	16	M	High school student	29 July 2010
11.	Fouad	30	M	Animateur	13 May 2011
12.	Dany	27	M	Animateur	30 May 2011
13.	Amira	21	F	University Student	30 May 2011
14.	Moussa	25	M	Animateur	9 June 2011
15.	Fatima	17	F	High school student	9 June 2011
16.	Hamza	27	M	Primary school teacher	9 June 2011
17.	Ibrahim		M	Works for local association	9 June 2011
18.	Jamel	19	M	University student	16 June 2011
19.	Alima	19	F	Intern at local association	23 June 2011
20.	Oumar	20	M	Student/Rap artist	30 June 2010
21.	Dabir	19	M	University student	1 July 2011
22.	Yasmina	19	F	Jobless	11 July 2011
23.	Fadilah	21	F	University student	11 July 2011
24.	Malik	18	M	High school student	18 July 2011

25.	Amita	17	F	High school student	18 July 2011
26.	Sonia	18	F	High school student	18 July 2011
27.	Salah	20	M	Animateur	18 July 2011
28.	Salif	16	M	High school student	19 July 2011
29.	Tarik	14	M	High school student	19 July 2011
30.	Salim	14	M	High school student	21 July 2011
31.	Yannick	23	M	Animateur/Rap artist	28 July 2011
32.	Amir	19	M	University student	29 July 2011
33.	Michel	23	M	Rap artist	2 August 2011
34.	Ahmed	29	M	Owner of small company	2 August 2011
35.	Ali	24	M	Student	5 August 2011

<b>Interviews with older inhabitants/local associations</b>				
	<b>Name</b>	<b>Male/ Female</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Date of Interview</b>
36.	Marie	F	Retired	3 June 2010
37.	Paul	M	Primary school teacher	27 May 2010
38.	David	M	Sport instructor at the local gym	1 June 2010
39.	Fatma	F	Employee at the municipal youth service	23 June 2010
40.	Jean-Marc	M	Employee at the municipal youth service	30 June 2010 29 July 2011
41.	Karim	M	Employee youth centre La Tour	13 July 2010
42.	Ines	F	Retired	6 June 2011
43.	Xavier	M	Works for local association	17 June 2011
44.	Nabil	M	Works for local association	14 June 2011
45.	Alice	F	Employee <i>École de la deuxième chance</i>	25 July 2011
46.	Claire	F	Works for local association	27 July 2011
47.	Marc	M	Works for local association	27 July 2011

# Nederlandse Samenvatting

## De constructie van de banlieue: een etnografie van ruimte, identiteit en geweld

Al decennia lang worstelen de Franse voorsteden met armoede, torenhoge werkloosheid, en een imago waarin geweld en dreiging de boventoon voeren. Dit proefschrift bestudeert en ontleedt de Franse voorstedelijke crisis, van buitenaf door de ogen van de staat, maar vooral van binnenuit door de ogen van jongeren op de straathoek. Het is een dialoog tussen theorie en empirie. Een dialoog tussen sociologische, antropologische en sociaal geografische ideeën, en observaties en interviews die verkregen zijn door maandenlang etnografisch onderzoek in 4000sud, een wijk in de Noord-Parijse voorstad La Courneuve. In *The Making of the Banlieue* ga ik niet zozeer op zoek naar vastomlijnde definities van de *banlieue* en haar jonge inwoners (vaak aangeduid als *banlieusards* of *jeunes des banlieues*), maar poog ik het wordingsproces in kaart te brengen. Ik onderzoek hoe deze ‘plaatsen’ en ‘identiteiten’ zowel van buitenaf als van binnenuit worden geconstrueerd, betwist en getransformeerd en ik laat zien dat geweld daarin een belangrijke rol speelt.

Het eerste deel van het boek is een reis door de tijd en bestudeert hoe, in de afgelopen decennia, van buitenaf de scheidslijnen tussen het centrum van de stad en de *banlieues* zijn verhard; hoe het verschil tussen ‘hier’ en ‘daar’ en tussen ‘wij’ en ‘zij’ ontstaan en veranderd is. In hoofdstuk 1 maak ik met behulp van Foucault’s ideeën over *governmentality* een analyse van de ontwikkeling van de *banlieue* crisis van 1955 tot 2015. Die ontwikkeling deel ik op in vier fases, waarbij elke nieuwe fase wordt ingeluid door een iconische episode van geweld (in 1981, 1990 en 2005). Ik laat zien dat in het politieke debat het geweld vooral territoriaal geduid wordt. Het theater waar het zich afspeelt staat centraal: de *banlieue*. Jongeren die overgaan tot geweld worden in de eerste plaats gecategoriseerd op basis van de plek waar ze wonen. In tegenstelling tot bijvoorbeeld het Engelse (‘Pakistanen’) of Nederlandse (‘Marokkanen’) debat waarin etnische classificaties dominant zijn, gaat het in Frankrijk bovenal over *jeunes des banlieues*, afwisselend geportretteerd als crimineel tuig of als slachtoffers van een discriminerend systeem. Het label ‘*banlieusard*’ wordt door de jaren heen een betekenisvolle identiteitscategorie, impliciet echter wel ingekleurd met verwijzingen naar afkomst (migrant, *noir* of *arabe*) en gender (vooral jongens staan centraal in het stereotype beeld van de *banlieusard*). Overeenkomstig met de dominante territoriale interpretaties komen beleidsmaatregelen van de Franse overheid (zowel sociale projecten als hardere repressie) vooral in de vorm van zones (zoals de *zones urbaines sensibles*, of meer recentelijk de *quartiers prioritaires*),

waarmee het verschil tussen de stad en de *banlieue* verder wordt geïnstitutionaliseerd.

Het tweede, en belangrijkste, deel is een reis van het centrum van Parijs naar het hart van de *banlieue*. Hoofdstuk 2 beschrijft mijn eerste stappen in wijk 4000sud, maakt kennis met een aantal hoofdpersonen in dit boek, maar geeft bovenal een uitvoerige definitie, beschrijving en onderbouwing van mijn methodologische strategie: etnografisch onderzoek. Ik bespreek de manieren waarop de empirische data is verzameld (aan de hand van observaties, informele gesprekken, 47 diepte interviews, en plattegronden die jongeren van hun wijk hebben getekend). Bovendien leg ik uit hoe ik ben omgegaan met twee centrale spanningen in etnografisch onderzoek: (1) de problematiek van de afbakening en definiëring van het 'veld' in veldonderzoek; en (2) de relatie tussen onderzoeker en informanten. Ik beschrijf hoe ik als (witte) onderzoeker in een migrantenwijk een opvallende verschijning was. Jongens op de straathoek hielden me staande vanwege het vermoeden dat ik een spion of geheim agent was. Surveillerende politieagenten achtervolgden, fouilleerden en ondervroegen me vier keer op verdenking van het kopen van drugs. Ik betoog dat deze, soms onplezierige, ontmoetingen niet gezien moeten worden als obstakels die toegang tot informanten bemoeilijken, zoals sommige etnografen stellen, maar juist als belangrijke bronnen van informatie. Ze geven dieper inzicht in de problematische en verharde grenzen tussen sommige voorstedelijke wijken en de buitenwereld.

In hoofdstuk 3 laat ik zien dat de voorstedelijke wijken niet alleen van buitenaf geconstrueerd worden, maar ook van binnenuit. Het hoofdstuk biedt een diepere theoretische verkenning van het begrip 'plaats'. Aan de hand van ideeën uit de sociologie en sociale geografie, ontleed ik het proces, waarbij verschillende actoren ruimte claimen en transformeren tot betekenisvolle plaatsen. Ik laat zien hoe voornamelijk jongens op de straathoek hun eigen wijk creëren en toe-eigenen: waar ze grenzen trekken, hoe ze de wijk ordenen, betekenis geven en organiseren. Op basis van mijn observaties en interviews stel ik dat drie alledaagse routines centraal staan in dat proces: (1) het vertellen van verhalen over de wijk en het geven van bijnamen aan gebouwen en plekken; (2) het hangen op straat (*trainer*); en (3) het surveilleren in de eigen wijk. Aan de hand van deze routines wordt bepaald waar de wijk begint en eindigt, wie er wel en niet thuis hoort, waar het wel en niet veilig is, en wat wel en niet acceptabel is. De routines veranderen de door de buitenwereld opgelegde scheidslijnen, en structureren tegelijkertijd de binnenwereld, voornamelijk op basis van leeftijd (waarbij ouderen zich boven jongeren plaatsen) en gender (waarbij jongens zich boven meisjes plaatsen). Ik leg uit dat deze lokale vorming van plaatsen gezien kan worden als onderdeel van een project van *governmentality* op buurtniveau, waarbij de staat wordt bekritiseerd en uitgedaagd, en waarop controle wordt verkregen over de binnenwereld van de wijk. Echter, niet iedereen neemt in dezelfde mate actief deel aan deze routines, sommigen nemen er zelfs expliciet afstand van.

Hoofdstuk 4 kijkt daarom naar hoe jongeren zich in verschillende mate binden aan hun wijk en hoe ze omgaan met het negatieve stereotype beeld dat vaak van buitenaf wordt opgeplakt. Het hoofdstuk start met een theoretische uitwerking van het concept sociale identiteit. Het bekritiseert eerder onderzoek, waarbij ‘jongeren uit de *banlieue*’ worden gezien als een min of meer vastomlijnde, homogene groep. Voortbouwend op ideeën van socioloog Andreas Wimmer, onderscheid ik drie identiteitsstrategieën: dissociëren (jongeren ontvluchten de wijk), transformeren (jongeren strijden tegen de ongelijke machtsrelatie en proberen het negatieve imago van de *banlieue* te veranderen) en associëren (jongeren bevestigen juist het stereotype beeld van ‘gangsters uit de getto’ en dragen het actief uit). Op zoek naar identiteit en waardigheid, kiezen veel jongeren niet voor één strategie, maar navigeren ze tussen verschillende strategieën. Het hoofdstuk beschrijft hoe velen worstelen met de druk van het negatieve beeld van buitenaf, en tegelijkertijd met de druk van binnenuit om te voldoen aan de verwachtingen van leeftijdsgenoten op de straathoek. Ze proberen zich tegelijkertijd staande te houden in de buitenwereld en in de binnenwereld van de wijk. Beide werelden trekken aan en stoten af. Beide werelden bieden bescherming, maar herbergen tegelijkertijd het risico om een buitenstaander te worden. Over het algemeen identificeren jongens zich sterker met de eigen wijk dan meisjes. Gezien het feit dat jongens centraal staan in het negatieve beeld dat de buitenwereld heeft van de *banlieusard*, is het niet verwonderlijk dat vooral zij hun blik naar binnen richten en een nieuwe en hogere machtspositie proberen te verkrijgen in de binnenwereld van de wijk.

Hoofdstuk 5 gaat over geweld in de lokale context waarin het zich afspeelt en zoekt naar de functie en betekenis die eraan wordt gegeven. Allereerst probeer ik grip te krijgen op het glibberige concept ‘geweld’. In navolging van Michel Wieviorka, maak ik onderscheid tussen de objectieve manifestatie en de subjectieve interpretatie van geweld. Bovendien, betoog ik dat geweld niet bestudeerd moet worden als uitkomst, maar als onderdeel van een voortdurend proces. Ik laat zien dat er in 4000*sud* sprake is van verschillende objectieve repertoires van geweld: ‘publieksgericht’ geweld (autobranden, confrontaties met de politie, alledaags kattenkwaad) en ‘backstage-gericht’ geweld (drugshandel en gerelateerde geweldsuitbarstingen). Elk repertoire heeft haar eigen actoren, locatie, organisatie, timing, doelwitten en mate van zichtbaarheid. Een bestudering van de subjectieve kant van geweld laat zien dat geweld lokaal op verschillende manieren wordt geïnterpreteerd: sommigen veroordelen beide repertoires, anderen hebben begrip voor publieksgericht geweld, weer anderen zien vooral backstage-gericht geweld als iets goeds en stoers. Ik breng de repertoires van geweld tenslotte in verband met de routines uit hoofdstuk 3 en de identiteitsstrategieën uit hoofdstuk 4. Geweld is, naast de verhalen, het hangen op straat en het surveilleren, een manier om de eigen wijk af te bakenen, buitenstaanders te verjagen en de binnenwereld te controleren. Geweld kan bovendien gekoppeld worden aan een radicale uiting van transformatie strategieën (geweld is dan een noodkreet om de dagelijkse ervaring van discriminatie en structurele ongelijkheid aan de kaak te stellen) en als uiting van

associërende identiteitsstrategieën, waarbij geweld of de dreiging daartoe wordt gezien als een manier om respect en status af te dwingen in de binnenwereld van de wijk. Publieksgericht geweld heeft daarmee een dubbele functie: het is een vorm van protest tegen de buitenwereld die plekken creëert (het gevoel geeft opgesloten te zijn in de ‘getto’) en negatieve identiteitscategorieën in stand houdt (het gevoel tweederangs burger te zijn). Tegelijkertijd, kan publieksgericht geweld dienen als bevestiging en controle over de binnenwereld (e.g. stoer doen naar leeftijdsgenoten, laten zien dat de eigen wijk gevaarlijker is dan andere wijken). Backstage-gericht geweld heeft, naast de financiële voordelen, voornamelijk het doel om macht, status en respect te krijgen of te behouden in de wijk.

In de conclusie benadruk ik dat de crisis van de voorsteden vooral gezien en bestudeerd dient te worden als een verstoorde en vertroebelde relatie tussen de buitenwereld en de binnenwereld. Plekken en identiteiten worden zowel van buitenaf als van binnenuit gecreëerd. Geweld wordt zowel door de staat als door jongens op de straathoek gebruikt. Beiden laten hun aanwezigheid zien door repressie en (de dreiging tot) geweld. Beiden hebben elkaar nodig om hun eigen acties te legitimeren. Het leidt tot een instabiele omgeving die tegelijkertijd onderworpen is aan de *governmentality* van de staat en die van jongens op de straathoek.

Tot slot sta ik kort stil bij de beperkte rol die religie, en de radicale islam, speelt in dit proefschrift en waarschuw ik voor een te snelle en exclusieve koppeling van jihadisme en radicalisering aan de Franse voorsteden.

# Résumé en français

## La construction de la banlieue: une ethnographie de l'espace, de l'identité et de la violence

Depuis des décennies, les banlieues françaises subissent la pauvreté, un taux de chômage extrêmement élevé ainsi qu'une image dans laquelle la violence et la menace dominant. Cette thèse étudie et analyse la crise de la banlieue française, à la fois d'un point de vue extérieur à travers le regard de l'Etat, mais surtout à partir de l'intérieur, à travers le regard des jeunes dans la rue. C'est en quelque sorte un dialogue entre la théorie et l'expérience empirique. Un dialogue entre des idées sociologiques, anthropologiques et sociographiques, ainsi que des observations et des interviews obtenues par des mois de recherches ethnographiques dans le quartier 4000sud, un quartier de la Courneuve dans la banlieue nord de Paris. Dans *La construction de la banlieue*, je ne cherche pas à me rapprocher des définitions toutes faites de la banlieue et de ses jeunes habitants (souvent décrits comme banlieusards ou jeunes des banlieues), mais je tente de décrire le processus de sa fabrication. J'étudie la façon dont ces 'lieux' et ces 'identités' sont construits, aussi bien de l'extérieur que de l'intérieur, et comment ils sont contestés et transformés. Je montre que la violence joue un rôle important dans ce processus.

La première partie de l'ouvrage est un voyage dans le temps. J'y décris comment, dans les décennies précédentes, les lignes de séparation entre le centre-ville et la banlieue se sont endurcies de l'extérieur; comment la différence entre 'ici' et 'là' et entre 'nous' et 'eux' s'est formée et a changé ensuite. Dans le premier chapitre, je m'appuie sur les idées de Foucault concernant la gouvernementalité pour analyser le développement de la crise des banlieues de 1955 jusqu'à 2015. Je découpe ce développement ensuite en quatre phases, qui sont chacune précédées par une phase de violence iconique (en 1981, 1990 et 2005). Je démontre que les interprétations politiques expliquent la violence essentiellement d'un point de vue territorial. Le théâtre dans lequel elle se déroule y occupe une place centrale: c'est la banlieue. Les jeunes qui se tournent vers la violence sont au premier abord catégorisés en fonction de leur lieu d'habitation. Contrairement au débat anglais (qui concerne les Pakistanais) ou néerlandais (les Marocains) dans lequel les classifications ethniques ont une place centrale, la discussion en France se concentre surtout sur les jeunes des banlieues, qui sont soit décrits comme de la racaille criminelle, soit comme des victimes d'un système discriminatoire. Au fil des années, le label 'banlieusard' est devenu une catégorie identitaire signifiant, qui renvoie néanmoins implicitement à l'origine (migrant, noir ou arabe) et au sexe

(l'image stéréotypée du banlieusard concerne surtout les garçons). Suivant la tendance dominante de l'interprétation territoriale, les mesures politiques du gouvernement français (qui concernent aussi bien des projets sociaux que des répressions renforcées) se traduisent essentiellement par la création de zones (comme les 'zones urbaines sensibles', ou plus récemment les 'quartiers prioritaires'), qui font que la différence entre la ville et la banlieue s'institutionnalise davantage.

La deuxième partie, qui est la plus importante, consiste en un voyage du centre de Paris au cœur de la banlieue. Le deuxième chapitre décrit mes premiers pas dans le quartier 4000sud et introduit quelques personnages principaux de cet ouvrage, mais j'y apporte surtout la définition détaillée, la description et la base de ma stratégie méthodologique: la recherche ethnographique. Je décris les façons dont les données empiriques ont été obtenues (à partir d'observations et de conversations informelles, de 47 interviews approfondis, ainsi que par des dessins que les jeunes ont faits de leur quartier). J'explique également comment j'ai traité les deux tensions centrales de la recherche ethnographique: (1) la problématique de la délimitation et la définition du 'terrain' dans l'enquête de terrain; et (2) la relation entre chercheur et informateurs. Je décris ma présence très visible en tant que chercheur (blanc) dans un quartier d'immigrants. Je me suis fait interpeller par des jeunes dans la rue qui pensaient que j'étais un espion ou un agent secret. Je me suis fait suivre par des agents de police qui m'ont fouillé et interrogé quatre fois, soupçonnant que je venais acheter de la drogue. J'estime que ces rencontres, pas toujours très agréables, ne doivent pas être perçues comme des obstacles empêchant l'accès aux informateurs, comme certains ethnographes ont tendance à dire, mais je les vois comme des sources d'informations importantes. Elles donnent une compréhension approfondie des frontières problématiques et plus marquées entre certaines banlieues et le monde extérieur.

Dans le troisième chapitre, je montre que les banlieues ne sont pas uniquement construites de l'extérieur, mais également de l'intérieur. Ce chapitre donne une exploration théorique plus approfondie du concept 'lieu'. A partir d'idées sociologiques et sociographiques, j'analyse le processus dans lequel plusieurs acteurs requièrent l'espace et le transforment en des lieux signifiants. Je montre comment, en l'occurrence, les garçons s'approprient et créent leur propre quartier: où ils marquent la frontière, comment le quartier est structuré et organisé et comment ils y donnent un sens. A partir de mes observations et interviews, je constate qu'il y a trois rituels quotidiens au cœur de ce processus: (1) raconter des histoires concernant le quartier et donner des surnoms aux bâtiments et aux lieux; (2) traîner dans la rue; et (3) surveiller son propre quartier. Ces routines déterminent les délimitations géographiques du quartier, elles indiquent qui en fait partie et qui en est exclu, quels endroits sont sûrs et lesquels ne le sont pas, ainsi que ce qui est acceptable ou pas. Ces routines modifient les lignes de séparation imposées par le monde extérieur, et elles structurent en même temps le monde intérieur,

principalement en fonction de l'âge (les aînés se plaçant au-dessus des plus jeunes) et du sexe (les garçons se plaçant au-dessus des filles). J'explique que cette formation locale des lieux peut être considérée comme la partie d'un projet de gouvernementalité au niveau du quartier, dans lequel l'Etat est critiqué et défié, et qui permet un contrôle sur le monde intérieur du quartier. Néanmoins, tout le monde ne participe pas de la même manière activement à ces routines, certains s'en distancient même explicitement.

Le quatrième chapitre s'interroge sur la façon dont les jeunes s'attachent à leur quartier et comment ils traitent l'image négative stéréotypée que le monde extérieur y colle bien souvent. Le chapitre débute par un traité théorique du concept de l'identité sociale. Il critique des recherches précédentes dans lesquelles les jeunes de la banlieue sont considérés comme un groupe plus ou moins délimité et homogène. En poursuivant les idées du sociologue Andreas Wimmer, je distingue trois stratégies d'identification: dissocier (les jeunes fuient du quartier), transformer (les jeunes se battent contre les relations de pouvoir inégales et essaient de changer l'image négative de la banlieue) et associer (les jeunes confirment l'image stéréotypée des 'gangsters du ghetto' et le montrent activement). Dans leur recherche d'identité et de dignité, beaucoup de jeunes ne choisissent pas une seule stratégie, mais naviguent entre plusieurs. Ce chapitre décrit comment beaucoup de ces jeunes luttent contre la pression de l'image négative venant de l'extérieur, et en même temps contre la pression interne pour répondre aux attentes de leurs camarades dans la rue. Ils essaient de tenir bon aussi bien dans le monde extérieur que dans le monde intérieur du quartier. Les deux mondes attirent et repoussent. Les deux mondes offrent de la protection, et impliquent en même temps le risque d'être exclu. Les garçons s'identifient en général plus avec leur propre quartier que les filles. Compte tenu du fait que les garçons sont le noyau central de l'image négative que le monde extérieur se fait du banlieusard, il n'est pas étonnant que ce soient surtout ces garçons qui orientent leur regard vers l'intérieur, en essayant d'obtenir plus de pouvoir et une nouvelle position plus élevée dans le monde intérieur du quartier.

Le cinquième chapitre parle de la violence dans le contexte local dans lequel elle se produit, et s'interroge en même temps sur la fonction et la signification que l'on y accorde. Tout d'abord, je tente de comprendre le concept plutôt instable de la violence. Tout comme Michel Wieviorka, je distingue la manifestation objective et l'interprétation subjective de la violence. De plus, j'explique que la violence ne doit pas être étudiée comme un résultat, mais comme une partie intégrante d'un processus continu. Je montre que le quartier 4000sud connaît différents répertoires objectifs de violence: de la violence publique (incendies de voitures, affrontements avec les forces de l'ordre, de la délinquance du quotidien), et de la violence pratiquée dans l'ombre (vente de drogues et des actes de violence relatés). Chaque répertoire a ses propres acteurs, lieux, organisations, timings, objectifs et degrés de visibilité. Une étude de l'aspect subjectif de la violence montre que la violence est

interprétée localement de différentes façons: certains condamnent les deux répertoires, d'autres comprennent la violence publique, d'autres encore estiment que la violence de l'ombre est bien et virile. Pour finir, je fais un lien entre les répertoires de la violence, les routines décrites au chapitre 3 et les stratégies d'identification du chapitre 4. Comme les trois rituels décrits au chapitre 3 (raconter des histoires, trainer dans la rue et surveiller), la violence permet également de délimiter son propre quartier, d'y éloigner les étrangers et de contrôler le monde intérieur. La violence peut aussi être associée à une expression radicale des stratégies de transformation (dans ce cas, la violence est un cri de détresse qui demande des changements structurels de l'inégalité vécue au quotidien), ainsi comme une expression de stratégies d'identification associées, dans laquelle la violence ou sa menace est perçue comme un moyen d'obtenir du respect dans le monde intérieur du quartier. La violence publique a ainsi une double fonction: c'est une forme de protestation contre le monde extérieur qui crée des lieux (et donne ainsi le sentiment d'être enfermé dans un ghetto) et qui maintient des catégories d'identifications négatives (le sentiment d'être un citoyen inférieur). La violence publique peut en même temps servir à confirmer et contrôler le monde intérieur (par exemple faire le caïd face aux copains du même âge, ou en montrant que son quartier est plus dangereux qu'un autre). La violence de l'ombre a, en dehors des avantages financiers, surtout comme but d'obtenir ou de garder du pouvoir et d'avoir un statut et du respect dans le quartier.

Dans la conclusion, je souligne que la crise des banlieues doit essentiellement être vue et étudiée comme une relation perturbée et troublée entre le monde extérieur et le monde intérieur. La construction des lieux et des identités se fait aussi bien de l'intérieur que de l'extérieur. La violence est aussi bien employée par l'État que par les jeunes dans la rue. Tous deux manifestent leur présence à travers la répression et (la menace de) la violence. Tous deux ont besoin l'un de l'autre pour justifier leurs actions. Le résultat est un environnement instable qui est en même temps soumis à la gouvernementalité de l'Etat et celle des jeunes dans la rue.

Pour terminer, j'indique que le rôle que jouent la religion et l'islam radical dans cette thèse est limité et je mets en garde contre un amalgame trop rapide et unilatéral entre le djihadisme et la radicalisation des banlieues françaises.

# Curriculum Vitae

Luuk Slooter was born on 27 May 1982 in Apeldoorn, the Netherlands. He studied Intercultural Social Psychology (MSc, 2006) and Conflict Studies and Human Rights (MA cum Laude, 2007), both at Utrecht University. His MA thesis *Cité Dreams – An Analysis of the French Suburban Riots of 2005*, was awarded the Hans Vliegenthart Thesis Award (2007) and the prestigious biennial Prix de Paris (2008). In 2008-2009 he lived in Paris and studied at the *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales* (EHESS). In September 2009 he came back to Utrecht and became junior lecturer at the Centre for Conflict Studies. At the same time, he started his PhD research, a joint doctorate supervised by Prof. Georg Frerks and Dr. Jolle Demmers at Utrecht University and by Prof. Michel Wieviorka at the EHESS.

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