Article

Urban Uprisings: The Troubled Relationship Between Citizens and Police in France, the UK, and the USA

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Abstract Violent outbursts in Paris (2005), London (2011), and Ferguson (2014) illustrate the problematic and disturbing relationship between citizens and police in the 'West'. While these episodes are often portrayed as 'apolitical' and 'criminal' in media and political debates, they are in the academic literature predominantly seen as (unarticulated) forms of political protests against structural inequalities. Building on this political perspective, I will first argue that the interplay between structural, police, and 'private' violence is at the core of these urban uprisings. Subsequently, I will identify four common factors that contributed to the onset and legitimization of collective violence in Paris, London, and Ferguson: an emotive and symbolically significant incident, often with a young inhabitant of a marginalized neighbourhood as protagonist; police involvement; unclarity and pre-violence rumours; and pre-existing us-them divides. In the conclusion, I will emphasize the importance and need of a systemic approach towards police reform.

Introduction

On 27 October 2005, three boys hide in a power substation in the north Parisian suburb Clichy-sous-Bois after they have allegedly been chased by the police. The boys misstep and are electrocuted: 15-year-old Bouna and 17-year-old Zyed die. Their friend Muhuttin is severely injured, but survives. It is the start of an episode of urban violence that lasts for 21 days, spreads to 300 neighbourhoods across the French Republic, and leaves burnt-out shops, post offices, public libraries, and over 10,000 charred vehicles (Rivayrand, 2006).

Six years later, on 4 August 2011, 29-year-old Mark Duggan is shot by the police in Tottenham, London. Two days later, violence erupts: burnings, lootings, and fierce confrontations between young people and police. The violence spreads to 66 locations and lasts for five nights. Five people die and the material damage was estimated to be up to 300 million pounds (Lewis *et al.*, 2011, p. 27).

On 9 August 2014, at the other side of the Atlantic, 18-year-old Michael Brown is shot by the police in Ferguson (USA). While the police speak of self-defence and states that Michael Brown acted aggressively, others claim that he had his hands up and said 'don't shoot'. The incident sparked unrest and protest, both non-violent and violent.

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The above examples are illustrations of major urban uprisings in what Dikeç (2017) calls 'mature democracies'. These uprisings are not incidental or random events, but fit in a longer time frame. In France, similar manifestations of violence started in the 1970s and received increased political and media attention since the early 1980s. The car burnings and confrontations between young people and police during the summer of 1981 in Les Minguettes, a suburban area of Lyon, are often seen as the starting point of what they call in France *La crise des banlieues*: the 'suburban crisis' (Slooter, 2019). The crisis lasts until today.

In April 1981, just a couple of months prior to the burning cars in Lyon, violence erupted in the UK in the South London neighbourhood of Brixton (Benyon, 1987), to re-erupt again in the decades that followed (Bagguley and Hussain, 2008). Similarly, we see a history of urban unrest in the USA, with the Watts 'riots' in August 1965 and the unrest in Detroit in 1967 often referred to as key moments in the eruption of violence during the 1960s and 1970s.

These manifestations of violence have, of course, changed over time and the particular interplay between space, (racialized) identity dynamics, and violence differs across countries. While I am fully aware that the violence is strongly ingrained in temporal and local/national contexts, there are also relatively stable patterns and striking parallels to identify. This article examines the above-mentioned pivotal events in France, the UK, and the USA, and thereby contributes to the recent body of literature that surpasses the classical lens to study violent urban uprisings within national boundaries and focuses on international comparisons (Body-Gendrot, 2013; Dikeç, 2017; Moran and Waddington, 2016; Sutterlüty, 2014; Waddington *et al.*, 2009). While most other contributions to this special issue evaluate state police practices and focus on police reforms, this article draws predominantly on citizens' perspectives and takes three events in which the police were involved as starting point. In particular, it seeks to obtain a better understanding of the turning point towards episodes of collective urban violence in contemporary Western societies. What sparks these urban uprisings? What role do the police play in it? By analysing these three violent events, it seeks to advance our thinking about police reform and guarantees of non-recurrence.

In the first part of this article, I will give a brief overview of the main and divergent 'readings' of collective urban uprisings—portraying these as apolitical, post-political, or political events. Subsequently, I will zoom in on the political approach and argue that three forms of violence are at the core of the unrest in France, the UK, and the USA: collective 'private' violence, state/police violence, and structural violence. In the last part, I will show how these three forms of violence are interconnected and feed into each other by identifying four common factors that contributed to the onset of violence in the streets of Paris, London, and Ferguson. Based on this analysis, I will conclude by emphasizing the importance of a systemic approach and stressing the importance of longer term transformative policing goals.

Explaining violence: criminality, shopping for free, fighting injustice

In recent scholarship on contemporary urban uprisings in Western societies roughly, three positions can be distinguished. First, those who claim that the violence is 'apolitical'. The violence committed by young people at the streets, this approach argues, is irrational, senseless, spontaneous, and criminal. This view is clearly present in everyday talk, media, and political debates. For example, just before and during the 2005 events in France, then minister of Interior Affairs Nicolas Sarkozy labelled young inhabitants of the deprived *banlieues* as '*racaille*' (scum), therewith delegitimizing and depoliticizing their violent acts. In a similar vein,

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then prime minister David Cameron portrayed the 2011 UK violence as follows:

> These are sickening scenes – scenes of people looting, vandalising, thieving, robbing, scenes of people attacking police officers and even attacking fire crews as they're trying to put out fires. This is criminality, pure and simple, and it has to be confronted and defeated.[1]

While the 'apolitical' representation of violence is embraced and strategically used by some political leaders, it is often heavily critiqued by academics and is mainly used to 'argue against'. Although some scholars build on ideas of the 'irrationality of the crowd' (Borch, 2006), there are (as far as I know) no scholars in this field who dismiss these episodes of collective violence solely as forms of 'pure criminality'.

The second position, especially based on the 2011 violence in the UK, argues that the violence is 'post-political'. Treadwell *et al.* (2013), for example, see no alternative political project in the violent uprisings, and no breakdown of dominant societal norms. In fact, young people who engaged in looting would adhere to the dominant neo-liberal norms of consumerism. The authors (Treadwell *et al.*, 2013, p. 3) claim that '... these young people had nowhere to take their anger and resentment but the shops'. And later on: 'The majority of the people we interviewed had never heard of Mark Duggan, the man whose violent death precipitated the riots, but they certainly knew about Prada and Rolex' (Treadwell *et al.*, 2013, p. 11). Those young people, Treadwell *et al.* conclude, live by and confirm rather than contest the contemporary consumerist culture.

At the same time, this post-political position is heavily critiqued by others. While not denying that violent uprisings offer opportunities to 'shop for free', Sutterlüty (2014, p. 45) argues that it does not explain the very onset of the violent events and underemphasizes why police and institutions were important targets (Sutterlüty, 2014, p. 45). Akram (2014, p. 378) claims that the post-political position 'obscures, rather than helps, our understanding of emergent forms of protest'. Others argue that it overstates the extent and contemporary character of looting during the 2011 UK unrest and that it ignores the political characteristics of the violence (Moran and Waddington, 2016, p. 138; Newburn *et al.*, 2015). Although Treadwell *et al.* (2013, p. 13) do not claim that looting is a 'new' feature of urban disorder, Newburn *et al.* (2015, p. 991) emphasize its long-established, regular, and widespread character (see also, e.g. Keith, 1993).

The third perspective, which is most dominant in the academic studies on these events, sees the violence of young people as political. Violence is understood as an (unarticulated) justice movement, as a protest against the daily experiences of structural inequality, discrimination, and exclusion. This position mainly argues against 'apolitical' representations of urban violence and some advocate to speak of 'revolts', rather than 'riots' (Dikeç, 2007; 2017). While riots are often seen as criminal acts that lack political motivations, revolts are defined as 'reactions to persistent problems such as mass unemployment, discrimination, racism and police violence' (Dikeç, 2007, p. 15). The riot-or-revolts debate already existed in 1965[2] during the unrest in Los Angeles and has resurfaced during the manifestations of violence in Paris, London, and Ferguson. Dikeç labels the suburban violence in France as 'calls for justice and equality, even when these are not always expressed explicitly' (Dikeç, 2007, p. 7; see also, e.g. Kaulingfreks, 2015). It corresponds with Wacquant's answer (Wacquant, 2008, pp. 18–23) to the question whether the violence in France and the USA should be labelled as 'race riots

[1] *The Guardian*, 'David Cameron's full statement on the UK riots' (9 August 2011) https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2011/aug/09/david-cameron-full-statement-uk-riots (accessed 4 September 2019).
[2] See 1965 TV show CBS reports: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xg6HYwZ_ePQ (accessed 10 September 2019).

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or bread revolts'. He favours the latter and claims that 'the label "race riot" is misleading and hides another deeper phenomenon' (Wacquant, 2008, p. 22). According to Wacquant, two logics are combined 'a logic of protest against ethnoracial injustice' and 'a class logic pushing the impoverished fractions of the working class to rise up against economic deprivation and widening social inequalities' (Wacquant, 2008, p. 22). The 'violence from below', of which the events in Paris, London, and Ferguson are illustrations, is caused by 'violence from above' in the form of 'mass unemployment', 'relegation to decaying neighbourhoods', and 'heightened stigmatization in daily life' (Wacquant, 2008, p. 25). Also Waddington's flashpoint model to explain public unrest (Moran and Waddington, 2016; Waddington, 2010; Waddington *et al.*, 1989) falls within the political perspective. While he does not explicitly refer to structural violence or the 'violence from above', forms of structural deprivation are clearly embedded in the seven interdependent (and overlapping) levels that explain public disorder: structural, political/ideological, cultural, contextual, situational, interactional, and institutional/organizational.

In discussions about the classic dichotomy of (race) riots or (bread) revolts, it is also important not to oversimplify and homogenize those that participate in the violence. My research on the 2005 unrest in the French suburbs shows that people may resort to violence for very different reasons (Slooter, 2019). Some said to participate in the car burnings as a scream for help, as the only way left to voice their grievances and to protest against the everyday experiences of racism, discrimination, and exclusion. Others, however, claimed to participate in the events for fun, to gain status and respect, or to show that they could burn more cars than a neighbouring *banlieue*. Again others saw it as a great moment to take revenge on the police. It is especially after the onset of violence, once an environment of unrest is established, that other (young) people can step in. They can join the 'crowd' with possibly very divergent aims and motivations (see also, e.g. Bagguley and Hussain, 2008; Newburn *et al.*, 2015). It is therefore important to acknowledge the complexity and various layers of these events. While the political character of the violence may be dominant, revolts may also have criminal and opportunistic elements or may get these at a later stage in the escalation process. I propose therefore to identify different stages in these episodes of violence, distinguishing the onset of collective violence from the escalatory dynamics that follow (see also, e.g. Horowitz, 2001). I will focus in this article on the first, and less on the latter.

The political perspective: the interconnection of three forms of violence

In line with the political perspective and the systemic approach of the transformative police reforms that is advocated in this special issue, I argue that the violence in the streets of Paris, London, and Ferguson cannot be analysed without taking into account the structural violence that many young people living in deprived neighbourhoods experience on a daily basis. Many scholars agree that grievances and a collective sense of injustice play an important role in the eruption of urban violence. However, how does the structural 'violence from above' lead to the incidental eruption of 'violence from below'?

To better understand the onset of collective urban violence, I propose to add a third form of violence. Building on sociologist Schinkel's (2013) so-called *trias violentiae*, I see the interrelations between three ideal typical forms of violence at the core of the violent phenomena in Paris, London, and Ferguson: collective 'private' violence, state/police violence, and structural violence. Schinkel defines private violence as the visible violence committed by citizens, which is often deemed illegitimate. State violence, in contrast, is often perceived as legitimate and consists of 'the daily acts of sanctioning of and of the recognition of violence' by the state (Schinkel, 2013, p. 317). State violence is

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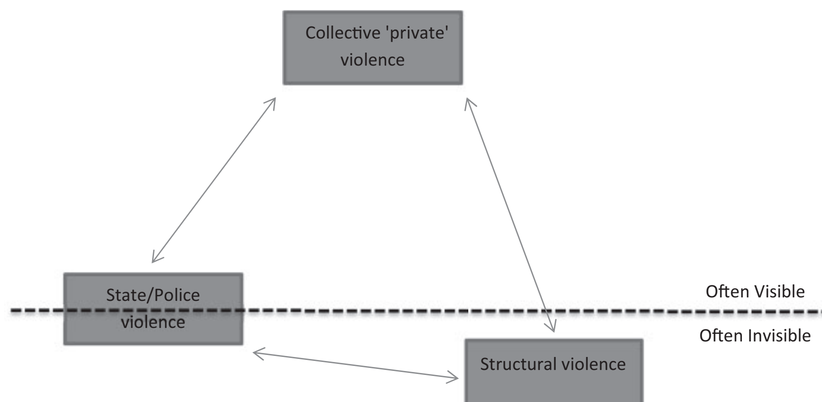

Figure 1: The interconnection of different forms of violence, based on Schinkel's (2013) '*trias violentiae*'.

often presented as a reaction to the private violence committed by citizens. The third form of violence, structural violence, is often invisible, not recognized and ingrained in the 'everyday order of social life' placing restraints on subjects (Schinkel, 2013, p. 320, see also Galtung, 1969). In a very simplified way, Schinkel's *trias violentiae* could be visualized as depicted in Fig. 1. Schinkel stresses the interdependencies of these three forms of violence, and argues that these lead to a particular 'regime of violence', which determines what is acceptable and legitimate and what is not.

The three episodes of urban violence central to this article could be seen as particular moments in time when 'private', state, and structural violence meet and when the *trias violentiae* become explicitly visible. In political debates in the aftermath of these events parties often emphasize one of these forms of violence and either blame the young people at the street corner that resort to violence (collective 'private' violence), the police (state violence) or perpetual poverty, unemployment, and discrimination (structural violence). I argue that for a full understanding of these episodes of violence we need to include all three forms of violence and study their interrelatedness. Even though urban violence in the UK, France, and the USA is recurrent (as mentioned above), the moments that it explodes are limited. Why does collective private violence erupt only episodically, even though structural violence is constantly present?

In an attempt to explain the relationship between structural violence and episodic outbursts of collective private violence, Akram (2014) builds on Bourdieu's 'habitus' and uses the 2011 events in the UK as her central case. Akram claims that grievances and motivations (structural violence) would be in a 'preconscious' (Akram, 2014, p. 385) 'dormant' and 'unactivated' state. These grievances would be '*stored* until they are *triggered* in the rioter's habitus' (Akram, 2014, p. 383; emphasis in original). In their recent book, *Riots: An International Comparison*, Moran and Waddington (2016) share and extrapolate Akram's analysis to unrest in France, Australia, Greece, and the USA. The triggers (or flashpoints, as they call it) that lead to public disorder allow 'dormant grievances to emerge in a contentious fashion' (Moran and Waddington, 2016, p. 62).

In contrast to Akram and Moran and Waddington, I argue that the trigger event not so much awakens the structural grievances, but legitimizes (for some young people) the violent enactment of these structural grievances. My own ethnographic research in the French *banlieues* (Slooter, 2019) shows that these grievances and motivations to protest are clearly present in everyday life, people are aware of these, articulate and enact them in various ways, for example, through graffiti on the walls ('fuck the police',

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'*nique la police*'), in online and offline everyday talk, in rap songs on discrimination, exclusion, and poverty, etc. Explicit and implicit forms of everyday resistance are thus constantly and omnipresent in these deprived neighbourhoods.

The grievances are possibly 'dormant' or 'un-activated' for those who do not endure them, for those living outside these marginalized neighbourhoods, those living outside the theatres where violence often takes place. Indeed, the violent spectacle may awaken and become suddenly visible for the wider audience through newspapers, television, and the screens of mobile phones that provide glimpses of everyday lives that are little known. However, the structural violence is and was already visible for those who live there. The trigger does not awaken or make them aware of the grievances, it does (for some) legitimize a violent enactment of their long-felt anger and frustrations. It is this turn to collective violence and its legitimization that is at stake here.

As Apter argues in his book *The Legitimation of Violence*: 'people do not commit political violence without discourse, they need to talk themselves into it' (Apter, 1997, p. 2; see also Demmers, 2017). In the next section, I will discuss the interplay between the three forms of violence and show how the step towards a collective violent enactment of structural grievances becomes to be seen as a legitimate course of action.

Four factors that trigger collective violence

By zooming in on the events in France, the UK, and the USA, I will identify a number of striking similarities that show how collective 'private', police, and structural violence feed into each other. Building on a rich and well-established body of literature on 'trigger events' of urban unrest (Adang *et al.*, 2010; Allport and Postman, 1947; Benyon, 1987; Body-Gendrot, 2013; Horowitz, 2001; Smelser, 1976 [1962]; Turner and Killian, 1987; Waddington *et al.*, 1989), I will discuss four common factors that are of crucial importance in the onset of collective violence in the streets of Paris, London, and Ferguson: a serious/fatal incident that is emotive and symbolically significant, often with a young inhabitant of a marginalized neighbourhood as protagonist; police involvement; unclarity about the nature of the incident and pre-violence rumours; and pre-existing us-them divides and rising levels of groupness. These factors are not so much meant to predict urban uprisings, but rather to improve our understanding of this phenomenon and its implications for police reform.

A highly emotive and symbolically significant incident and the portrayal of the victim

In the phase prior to the eruption of collective 'private' violence, there are often a number of events with a final spark that 'persuade people that violence is necessary and appropriate' (Horowitz, 2001, p. 71).[3] These sparks are generally 'highly emotive and symbolically significant' (Moran and Waddington, 2016, p. 58; see also, e.g. Adang *et al.*, 2010). In the case of Paris, London, and Ferguson, the deaths of young men of colour—Bouna, Zyed, Mark, and Michael—are clear illustrations of such pre-violence trigger events. Moreover, the victims were all criminalized post-mortem.

Bouna and Zyed died on 27 October 2005 in the north Parisian suburb Clichy-sous-Bois (about 20 kilometres from the city centre). Together with a group of friends they walked back home after a game of soccer. When they saw a police car driving by they feared an identity check, a state practice that young people are frequently subjected to, especially in these suburban neighbourhoods. The boys decided to run to avoid possible troubles with the police. Bouna and Zyed, together with their friend

[3] Horowitz's theory is based on incidences of 'deadly ethnic riots' across the globe. Although I certainly would not classify the events in France, the UK, and the USA as such, I do think that his ideas are wider applicable and useful in disaggregating the urban uprisings discussed in this article.

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Figure 2: Power substation in Clichy-sous-Bois (photo by the author).

Muhittin, climbed a barbed wire wall of a power substation of *Électricité de France* (EDF) to hide from the police. They ignored the signs on the wall that warned them of the danger of a high voltage site (Fig. 2). Not much later they took missteps. Bouna and Zyed died. A police report revealed that an officer had seen the kids climbing the wall of the EDF property and therefore knew that the lives of the kids were at risk. The police did however not undertake any action to protect them. In the aftermath of the event, Dominique de Villepin (then the French Prime Minister) and Nicolas Sarkozy (Minister of Interior Affairs) accused the boys of a burglary. Sarkozy suggested that the boys would not run away if they had not done anything (Body-Gendrot, 2007; Demiati, 2006; Fassin, 2006). Later on, however, these allegations were withdrawn and the police claimed that they were not running after the boys.

The 29-year-old Mark Duggan died on 4 August 2011 in the London neighbourhood of Tottenham during a police operation ('Operation Trident'), which focused on reducing gun possession/crimes in black communities (Moran and Waddington, 2015). First accounts of the police spoke of a threatening situation. Mark Duggan would have been armed and had opened the fire on a police officer. A bullet was found in the radio of the police car. In the aftermath, stories in the media claim that Duggan was a criminal gang member. Moreover, his nephew had been killed earlier that year and journalistic accounts say that it would have made him 'increasingly paranoid'[4]. On 4 August, he would have been on his way to take revenge. However, family members of Mark Duggan stated that he was unarmed and denied that he was a gangster. Later it turned out that Duggan did have a criminal record. A handgun was found at the location of the incident, but not on or close to Mark Duggan's body. Investigations revealed that it was not used and it remained unclear whether it had ever been possessed by Mark Duggan. The bullet in the police radio turned out to be from the police themselves. The bullet most likely ended up in the police radio after it pierced Mark's body. Later, the police acknowledged that the initial statement that Mark Duggan opened fire was false.

The death of 18-year-old Michael Brown on 9 August 2014 reveals many similarities with the two events described above. Police officer Darren Wilson, who fatally shot Michael Brown, spoke of an altercation and claimed that he was attacked by Michael. Moreover, Michael would have stolen a box of cigars from a nearby supermarket just before their struggle started. However, a friend who accompanied Michael claims that there was no fight between Wilson and Michael and that Michael was unarmed had his hands up in surrender and said 'don't shoot'. He claimed that Michael was killed in cold blood. An autopsy report later

[4] BBC News, 'Tottenham Police Shooting: Dead man was minicab passenger' (5 August 2011) https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-14423942 (accessed 4 September 2019).

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revealed that Michael Brown had been shot at least six times, including twice in his head.

In the aftermath, just as in the case of Bouna, Zyed, and Mark, Michael Brown was portrayed (by some) as a thug. Initially, media outlets used a picture of Michael as a student at his high school graduation, but later on a different photo became more dominant, one in which he wears wide sport cloths and makes a hand symbol—and such attire was referred to gang culture. It led to online protest under #Iftheygunnedmedown in which people posted two different pictures of themselves: one generally seen as positive and the other often seen as negative.

Hence, it seems that not only the death of Bouna, Zyed, Mark, and Michael incited anger but also their dominant criminalization, blaming the victims for what had occurred to them; blaming them for their own deaths. Newburn (2014, paragraph 6) sees these as efforts to 'divert attention from the shooting itself'. However, these attempts to blame, criminalize, and depoliticize seem to have had a contradictory effect and strengthened the idea of some young people in the streets that the resort to violence was a legitimate course of action.

Before turning to the second factor, it is important to emphasize that the emotive and symbolically significant event does not necessarily have to be fatal, as illustrated by a recent episode of urban violence in France. In February 2017, a stop-and-search in the Parisian suburb Aulnay-sous-Bois ended up in a struggle between the 22-year-old neighbourhood inhabitant Théo Luhaka and four police officers. Media reported that Théo had been beaten and allegedly raped with a police baton.[5] In the weeks that followed, we saw similar reactions as to the deaths of Bouna, Zyed, Mark, and Michael: (non)violent protests, car burnings, and clashes between young people and police.

Police involvement

A second factor and similarity between the cases is the involvement of the police in the trigger event. This can be in a direct way, as was the case with Mark (London) and Michael (Ferguson) who died through police bullets. It can also be in an indirect way, such as in Paris, with Bouna and Zyed who died while they were hiding from the police.

During my ethnographic research in the North Parisian *banlieue* of La Courneuve, I observed the heavily troubled relationship between young people and the police (Slooter, 2019). Many of the young inhabitants complained about the unjustified stop and search practices of the police, and accused them of blatant or more covert racism. At the same time, I noticed that some youngsters also clearly provoked the police and played their role in a continuous cat-and-mouse game. During my fieldwork, I was recurrently confronted with recent and older stories about events in the neighbourhood in which young inhabitants had been killed or ended up seriously injured. These events often led to increased tensions in the neighbourhood yet these did not always result in large-scale violence.[6] Remarkably, those events in which the police were not directly involved (either accidentally or as a result of police brutality) did not lead to collective unrest in the neighbourhood. I argue that it is especially after perceived 'state violence' that large-scale car burnings and clashes with the police can be legitimized more easily. The importance of police involvement is confirmed by other studies (Benyon, 1987; Dikeç,

[5] In February 2018, a year after the event, two medical examinations confirmed that there were grave injuries, but stated that the acts could not be defined as 'rape'—although the police baton damaged Theo's sphincter for almost 10 centimeters, there was no penetration of the anus (and therefore not a case of rape). See, e.g. https://www.franceinter.fr/justice/affaire-theo-les-expertises-concluent-a-l-absence-de-viol (accessed 4 September 2019).

[6] One of the recurrent stories in the neighbourhood, for example, was about an 11-year-old kid who was hit by a stray bullet in June 2005 while he was washing his dad's car. He was the accidental victim of a fight over a girl between groups in the neighbourhood. At the start of my ethnographic research (May 2010), a 28-year-old man was killed. The media reported that his death was related to the drug trade, but in the neighbourhood other stories circulate (Slooter, 2019). In both cases, the police were not directly involved and there was no eruption of collective 'private' violence.

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2017; Keith, 1993; Kokoreff, 2010, p. 53; Lewis *et al.*, 2011; Wieviorka, 1999, p. 31)

Unclarity and rumours

The third factor that is present in all three cases is the unclarity that emerges from these events due to poor communication of the police and the state government, the circulation of opposing accounts about what had happened and widespread rumours about the events. After the death of Bouna and Zyed, the exact role of the police was severely contested. Rumours circulating in the neighbourhood (and beyond) emphasized that the police had acted on purpose. '*Morts pour rien*' (death for nothing) was written on the banners of neighbourhood inhabitants during a silent march for the victims.

The death of Mark Duggan was also surrounded by unclarity. Crucial mistakes were made in the communication by the police and the family was informed rather late and improperly. There are various and contradicting accounts on when and how the family (or his parents) were informed. Maybe better to delete this and replace by 'improperly'. On 6 August 2011, a protest march was organized, ending at the Tottenham Court Road police station. Like in France in 2005, rumours spread and the police was accused of withholding crucial information. 'No Justice, No Peace' was shouted through the streets of London. Family members and friends demanded clarity about the circumstances of Mark's death. As Moran and Waddington describe, only after hours of waiting in front of the police station and when many protesters had already left, the high-ranked official that was asked for made its appearance. This 'perceived "breakdown of accommodation" was pivotal to the riot's immediate escalation' (Moran and Waddington, 2016, p. 133).

Unclarity and rumours were also present in the aftermath of the death of Michael Brown. The opposing accounts of what happened led to anger and frustrations and the fact that Brown's dead body laid on the street for 4 hours was seen as a sign of disrespect by the police. The same evening protests started and tensions arose. 'Hands up, Don't Shoot' was written on the banners of those who gathered at the streets.

These opposing and contested stories about the nature of the events and the role of the police match closely to what Horowitz calls 'pre-riot rumours' (see also, e.g. Allport and Postman, 1947, pp. 193–199; Turner and Killian, 1987). He defines these as short-lived, unverified reports in which incidents with the police are often central and women or children are the protagonists (Horowitz, 2001, p. 74). These rumours may be false or exaggerated, but they stress the hostile intentions of the local police against a certain group of people. Horowitz (2001, pp. 74–88) 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 all three cases, there was also a 'second trigger event' that further inflamed tensions, instigated new rumours, and confirmed for some the bad intentions of the police. In France, on the night of 30 October 2005 (the fourth night of unrest), a tear gas canister exploded at the entrance of a full Mosque in Clichy-sous-Bois, the suburb where Bouna and Zyed lived. It turned out that the tear gas canister belonged to the local police. Nicolas Sarkozy, then Interior Minister, was quick to comment in newspaper *Le Parisian* that:

> it did not explode inside the mosque, but at its exterior. We do not know if it was taken by someone or if it rolled by itself. Nobody did it with the intention to blaspheme a sacred place. It is necessary that everybody remains calm.[7]

[7] Le Parisien (2 November 2005), my translation, 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.*' See http://www.leparisien.fr/une/je-parle-avec-les-vrais-mots-02-11-2005-2006436049.php (accessed 4 September 2019).

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While the number of burnt cars went down prior to this incident, the protest was reignited afterwards.

In the UK, rumours circulated about a 16-year-old girl that would have been beaten by the police during the protest on 6 August 2011. This event was by some described as the 'real' trigger of collective violence (Reicher and Stott, 2011). In December 2011, Symeon Brown in newspaper *The Guardian* questions, however, whether the beating actually took place: 'Over three months have passed and the 16-year-old is yet to come forward, raising the questions, who is she, where is she – and does she exist?' It illustrates the ambivalence and unclarity that is typical for these episodes of urban uprisings: 'Even if the story is a fallacy its potential to be true in the aftermath of student protests and the case of Jody McIntyre,[8] and the death of Mark Duggan, reflects how the expectation held by many of the police as an abuser rather than a servant of the public can be devastating.'[9]

In Ferguson, rumours flared up when stories circulated about a police dog urinating on a memorial site for Michael Brown and a police car driving over it on the same evening that he died (Suereth, 2015, pp. 180–181, cited in Moran and Waddington (2016, pp. 156–157)). Just as in France and the UK, these rumours confirmed and strengthened the already existing image of a 'malicious police'. They provided a further legitimization to resort to violence.

Pre-existing social and spatial divides and rising levels of groupness: us versus them and here versus there

As Horowitz argues '. . . a rumor will not take hold unless there is a market for it, a need in an emerging situation' (2001, p. 75). The Kerner Report (1968) that analysed the 1967 'race riots' in the USA called it earlier a 'reservoir of underlying grievances'. This reservoir is present in all three cases and is composed of structural violence: mass unemployment, high levels of poverty, and stigmatization, which have contributed to the creation of socially and spatially divided cities in France, the UK, and the USA (Dikeç, 2017; Wacquant, 2008).

The reservoir of grievances is also characterized by a long and collective memory of police violence. The deaths of Bouna, Zyed, Mark, and Michael are emblematic for the very disturbed relationship between young inhabitants of migrant/black neighbourhoods and the police in France, the UK, and the USA (Body-Gendrot and Withol de Wenden, 2014; Fassin, 2013; Moran and Waddington, 2016; Vitale, 2018). The names of these men of colour can be added to the long list of young people that have died under similar circumstances.

The pre-existing social and spatial divides contributed to the fact that the trigger event was not perceived and framed as a random incident, but as part of a larger problem (see also Smelser, 1976 [1962], pp. 249–250). Not only family members and friends of Bouna, Zyed, Mark, and Michael were touched by their deaths but also those who could identify with them. Due to the presence of this reservoir of grievances, Bouna, Zyed, Mark, and Michael became the symbols of a bigger group of marginalized and spatialized young people.

The divides are often further encouraged by (new) media and the political portrayal of the events, blaming the victims and criminalizing the violence of young people in the streets. Roché and De Maillard (2009, p. 36), for example, discuss Sarkozy's labelling of *banlieue* youth as '*racaille*' (scum) prior to the 2005 car burnings and state: 'it is very unlikely that his words were enough to trigger the riots, but they might have infuriated some of the minority youth and increased their

[8] Jody McIntyre was pulled out of his wheelchair and dragged across the road by the police during a student demonstration in London in December 2010.

[9] See Symeon Brown in *The Guardian*, 'Were the Tottenham riots sparked by the beating of a 16-year-old girl?' (7 December 2011) https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/dec/07/tottenham-riots-16-year-old-girl (accessed 4 September 2019).

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determination to fight the police'. My earlier research on the 2005 car burnings reveals, however, that it might not even have upset them. Some of the young people that I interviewed and who participated in the events seemed rather indifferent and said not to be offended by the wording of Sarkozy. 'He says whatever he wants', said an interviewee. Nevertheless, by explicitly using the label '*racaille*', Sarkozy (unwillingly) made identity boundaries more salient and increased the 'mobilization potential' (Body-Gendrot, 2013). He contributed to what Brubaker (2004) calls the rise of 'levels of groupness', clearly emphasizing social and spatial boundaries of 'us' and 'them' and 'here' and 'there'. This broad and rather open identity label of '*racaille*' made that many young people living in deprived neighbourhoods across the country could join the violence (and did so with divergent motives).

Conclusion

How to avoid urban uprisings and future deaths, such as those of Bouna, Zyed, Mark, and Michael? How to arrive at guarantees of non-recurrence? These are, of course, complex questions to answer and this article should be seen as a small step on the road towards transformative police reforms. Although the disturbed relationship between citizens and police played an important role in the urban uprisings in Paris, London, and Ferguson, the causes of the unrest are much more complex and fundamental. In line with the systemic approach to transformative police reform advocated in this special issue and by drawing on Schinkel's '*trias violentiae*', I argue that three interconnected forms of violence are at the core of these events: collective 'private' violence, state/police violence, and structural violence. While the national contexts differ extensively, I identified a number of striking similarities between the three cases. Four common factors revealed the interplay between the three forms of violence and were crucial in the outbreak of collective urban violence: an emotive and symbolically significant incident, with a young inhabitant of a marginalized neighbourhood as protagonist; direct or indirect police involvement; unclarity and pre-violence rumours; and pre-existing social and spatial divides and rising levels of groupness. Building on the rich body of literature on 'triggers of urban unrest', I argue that these four factors do not so much function as making those inclined to resort to violence aware of their situation, but they do contribute to bringing about a moment in which collective violence is seen as a legitimate course of action for those who feel targeted both by structural and state violence.

The '*trias violentiae*' demonstrates how these three forms of violence feed into each other, and how they contribute to the maintenance of a particular 'regime of violence'. It corresponds with what Vitale (2018, p. 27) states in his recent book *The End of Policing*: 'the origins and function of the police are intimately tied to the management of inequalities of race and class'. Reforms such as diversity trainings, body cameras, and the re-establishment of the neighbourhood police in particular areas will have little impact if we do not reflect more fundamentally on the role of the police in our society. 'We must constantly reevaluate what the police are asked to do and what impact policing has on the lives of the policed' (Vitale, 2018, p. 27).

In this process of re-evaluation, it is also important to pay attention to the aftermath of these urban uprisings: the moment that collective 'private' violence has extinguished and the media spectacle of burning cars, clashes, and looting has vanished. At these moments, the structural violence of those living in marginalized neighbourhoods in France, the UK, and the USA becomes again largely invisible for the wider public. As Dikeç (2017, p. 124) argues for the French case: police killings remain a persistent source of grievance in these neighbourhoods, 'authorities systematically protect police officers . . . in the rare cases when a police officer is taken to court, the process takes several years'. Moreover, the 'police are often acquitted or given sentences seen as unfairly light'. The court case against the police for the death of Bouna and

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Zyed took 10 years. The two involved police officers were cleared for charges of failing to help persons in danger. In the UK, an inquiry by the Independent Police Complaints Commission, published in 2014, 'acquitted the police of any wrongdoing – an inquest at the Royal Courts of Justice also found that Duggan had been killed lawfully' (Moran and Waddington, 2016, p. 116). In the USA, a grand jury decided not to indict officer Wilson. The US Department of Justice stated that Wilson shot Michael Brown in self-defence.

The three cases thus also have in common that these episodes of urban violence remain open wounds in society. They contribute to existing feelings of injustice and feelings of impunity for the police—and therewith may contribute to the 'reservoir' of structural violence that may fuel the next episode of urban unrest in France, the UK, or the USA.

Above all, the three case examples discussed in this article reveal that this is not only a problem of police brutality but also a larger and longer term societal problem. Transformative police reform should therefore be embedded in larger efforts in which all three forms of violence (collective 'private', state, and structural) are taken into account.

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