Negotiating Space
A Study of the Production of Banlieues in Paris through Media Representations of Urban Youth Violence
Abstract

This essay explores the production of *banlieues*¹ through the medial representations of urban youth violence during the 2005 French riots. By analysing France’s two most widely read national newspapers, Le Monde and Le Figaro, the study shows how a negotiation about the role of the *banlieues* takes place through different representations of urban youth violence. Research on the *banlieues* focus on the study of a stigmatised area of the city that has emerged due to socioeconomic inequalities. Instead of studying the *banlieues* as marginalized, the essay displays how newspapers draw the lines of several cultural and social spaces. The analysis of media representations reveals that youth violence is both explained and rejected by different actors such as journalists, politicians, Muslim representatives or inhabitants of the *banlieues*. Media enable these different voices to express views on topics such as territory, age, religion and culture related to the *banlieues*. Departing from the notion of *production of space* by Henri Lefebvre, I analyse how representations of youth violence is crucial in constituting the idea of the *banlieues* in contemporary France.

Keywords: banlieues, production of space, media representation, youth violence

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¹ A suburban area of a city in France.
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1 INTRODUCTION

On the 27th of October 2005, two youths Zyed Benna and Bouna Traoré died of electrocution in an electrical substation in their effort to hide from a police control. With reminiscence of police violence against youths of the banlieues, this night would be the starting point of a violent uprising. During the first week, every night witnessed outbreaks of violence with cars burnt, police arrests and tear gas deployed in ‘battles’ between policemen and youths. On the 29th of October, a silent march was held in the department of Clichy-Sous-Bois outside of Paris, along with Muslim representatives calling on calmness of the violence. Only one day after, an unknown person threw a tear gas grenade into the mosque of Cité des Bousquets in the same department. The grenade was recognized as belonging to the police. The minister of interior Nicolas Sarkozy provoked both government interns and people in the banlieues by calling the youths “scum”, and in the following days, the violence came to its peak with 2,775 cars burnt. Because of the increased amount of violent acts, the Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin allowed police commissioners to call for a curfew in selected areas while the French Republic was declared as being under a state of emergency. Not until the 16th of November, the violence reported as to have calmed down, declaring an ending to the riots.

The banlieues are the “lost territories of the Republic”, a journalist writes about the urban youth violence in France that, according to him, has turned the banlieues into a space of ”barbary”. The youths disrupt the order of the state, and the question is how order could be brought back. Another journalist from the French newspapers says that rather than being lost, the banlieues are “abandoned”. The urban youths have had to endure discrimination to the extent that they have no choice but to commit violence in the form of riots to make their voices heard. Thus, a comparative and contextualised study of these two perspectives is necessary in order to understand

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2 Le Monde 2005 [1].
3 Le Monde 2005 [2].
4 Rioufol 2005.
5 Ibid.
6 Le Monde 2005 [3].
7 Ibid.
how urban youth violence is a phenomenon with various connotations when it is located in the *banlieues*. The common understanding of the *banlieues* is that it is a territory with a certain kind of people and culture.

When asking French about the *banlieues*, the discourse remain more or less the same: “I lived in the *banlieues* of France, but you know, that is not the real France” or “you, as a white girl, could not go there, it’s too dangerous”. If this area, clearly connoted with social and cultural presumptions, is not considered to be an area like any other in France, it is necessary to further investigate what cultural notions that constitute this *banlieues*. The purpose of this essay is to shed light on particular notions about urban spaces in a French context. It will scrutinize the phenomenon of *banlieues* as different, or similar, to other social spaces in the society, and provide perspectives on youth violence that is usually associated with such a phenomenon. Since media has an essential role in the construction of notions regarding urban spaces, the leading research question of this study is: when media negotiate the conception of the *banlieues*, what is the role of contrasting images of youth violence presented by different actors in French newspapers?

Actors that transmit an image of youth violence consist mainly of journalists, politicians, Muslim representatives as well as inhabitants if the *banlieues*.

Much research on the *banlieues* has been produced since the riots of 2005, not least to prove how they have become a stigmatized space in French society. Scholars have analysed the politics of resistance through everyday practices in order to understand how marginalisation can both provoke, and be productive, for political participation (Garbin & Millington 2011; Jazouli 1992). Other researchers seek to understand how marginalisation of suburbs has emerged in modern, neoliberal societies. Louïc Wacquant (2008) contrasts the *banlieues* to the ghettos in the US, stating that they emerge in different ways. According to Wacquant, what is described as ghettos consists of an increasingly ethnically homogenous group, while in Western-Europe, the progress is reverse, as the colonial immigration led to a more dispersed ethnic heterogeneity in the suburbs (ibid.: 160-161). Mustafa Dikeç (2007) also perceives the *banlieues* as marginal areas of France, but studies them through the discourse of documents and urban policy-makers. Categorization and representations of spaces in urban policy have particular significance for how people experience the *banlieues*. Dikeç thus goes deeper into policy discourse and representation to see how the
*banlieues* are understood today, in contrast to Wacquant, who wants to understand how the *banlieues* have emerged as a space of class inequality.

This study inscribes into the debate about the *banlieues’* contemporary social role and popular perception. The ambition is to go beyond the notion of it as a marginal or stigmatised space. Many scholars condemn the media as providing a negative image of youths in the *banlieues* (see example Wacquant 2008: 156). Rather, this study attempts to display how youth violence, and especially the ways in which it is presented in the media, serves to negotiate what perception of the *banlieues* should be dominant in French society. It will show that the media cannot be reduced to representing the *banlieues* as populated by delinquent youths, but instead understand how different actors provide a nuanced image of youth violence. As social groups are inscribed into a certain place, the consequence is that the *banlieues* appear to us as a natural territory. To use the terms of Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, “as actual places and localities become ever more blurred and indeterminate, ideas of culturally and ethnically distinct places become perhaps even more salient” (2014 [1992]: 378). Therefore, it is important to investigate what the discussion on what youth violence in the *banlieues* is in order to understand how different actors inscribe youth violence in this space.

**1.2 Theoretical Framework**

The study of social processes within the city has a starting point in the 60s, when anthropologists established the concept of the *urban* within the discipline. Ulf Hannerz (1980) was one of several researchers who applied theory of identity formation and cultural variations on modern, large-complex cities. In short, it was the study of social processes on a certain territory, the urban territory. Yet, with an increasingly globalizing world, international networks tend to blur national borders, making them less important for understanding how societies function. The focus on *space* in cities with physical boundaries has become impossible if one is to understand the complexity of migration and social groupings. Therefore, in anthropology, the study in the city has come to be a study of the city where perceived physical boundaries actually reflect cultural boundaries and segregation (Low 1996).
Henri Lefebvre made one attempt to theorise the urban by seeing beyond the dichotomy between *space* as physical; a mere mathematic measure, and a purely mental construction with no relation to the material world. In his work the *Production of Space* (1992), Lefebvre argues that a consequence of the modern neo-capitalist society is that it produces emerging social boundaries. Lefebvre uses *space* in order to understand how power relationships are not merely produced through material struggle, as Marx suggests, but it is an abstract, ideological work. By calling this procedure a new mode of production, he explains that social space is not an ensemble of people and things, but rather, a product of social relations. Space is produced through (1) spatial practices such as urban projects, (2) representations and ideas of space and (3) representational spaces, that is to say, how spaces are lived through different manifestations such as graffiti (Lefebvre 1992: 38).

The aim of this study, to understand how youth violence functions as a representation of the *banlieues*, lies within the second of the above listed modes of space production: representations and conceptions of space. Representations, as defined by Lefebvre, appear through verbal communication and their function is to structure, or conceptualize a space within a given ideological system (ibid.). These representations are neither concrete objects, nor abstracted media. They are part of a process, not a finished product, and they serve to produce and maintain a social order. The idea of symbolic representation was developed in the 1970s, as a critique to the scientific claim of objectivity. Cultural representation is part of an interpretive process, which is why every attempt to reflect a reality must always be seen as a subjective work (Geertz 2014 [1973]). In my study, the representations of youth violence are thus understood as media’s interpretation of the 2005 riots - as part of the production of the *banlieues*.

Scholars from all disciplines have supported their studies on Lefebvre’s to shed light on how to understand spatial representations and practices. One aspect of theorising a space is to see how identity and space collaborate in the creation of marginalisation or segregation in the city. The historian Chris Ealham (2005) points out how experts, politicians and urban planners justify “cleansing” projects in a certain area that separates individuals between those who “deserved”, or did not deserve, help from the state. In contrast, the human geographer Deirdre Conlon (2004) focuses on the interrelationship between sexual identity and space in Christopher Park in the US.
Queer identity is both formed and constrained by the possibility to perform manifestations of sexualities in the park. In sum, representations of space are used to conceptualize both social groups and identity, either to legitimize urban projects, or to perform a certain identity.

Throughout this study, the notions of *urban* as a physical territory in the city, *space* as social boundaries and *representation* as a conceptualising tool will be used to provide an analysis of how media conceive the *banlieues* through different actors’ discussions about youth violence.

### 1.3 Methodological Approach

The empirical data consists of articles from two daily national newspapers: Le Monde and Le Figaro. These newspapers are the most widely read in France, and they represent different political orientations – while Le Monde tends towards centre-left, Le Figaro inclines towards right. The selection of the two newspapers is based on the fact that they cover a wide audience and provide broad perspectives on youth violence. These perspectives are more or less apparent in both newspapers, but as mentioned above, the purpose of this essay is to study the *banlieues* as a spatial phenomenon, and not to discuss political notions such as ‘left’ or ‘right’. Rather, the two newspapers will be analysed as giving a multi-sited image of youth violence, and together they offer a deeper insight into what role youth violence has in the construction of the *banlieues* in contemporary France.

The selected articles were published between the dates of 27th October and 15th November, to delimit the number of articles that cover youth violence during the riots. All articles are written in French, which is why I have translated the quotes used in this paper to English. I am aware that the process of translation is not unproblematic as it is an interpretation of the original content. This is why the quotes have been directly translated, and stylistic efforts such as homophones that are particularly used in French journalistic texts, are not taken in consideration. However, as this study’s main focus is on the role of representations related to the *banlieues*, it will be analysed through space theory instead of applying a discourse analysis or focusing on linguistic strategies.
The analytic work consists of categorising the news articles into different themes, depending on how different actors comment on youth violence in the banlieues. The articles are categorised depending on who is commenting on youth violence (such as politicians, Muslim representatives) as well as how they are commenting on it (as a product of social inequalities or a culture of a certain ethnicity etc.). The disposition of the essay has therefore been edited according to these categories that provide a picture of how newspapers display youth violence in the banlieues.

1.4 Disposition

The outline of this study is organised in two main chapters. In the first chapter, Representations of youth violence in 2005, the topic of urban youth violence and its media representations is discussed under three sections. These sections correspond to three different ways of conceptualizing violence in the banlieues, namely (1) as a territorial issue, (2) as a proof of unsuccessful integration on an individual and a collective level (3) and as a question of age and unemployment. In the second main chapter, Production of the Banlieues, youth violence is analysed in relation to questions about culture, religion, class and age. This negotiation lays the basis for how the media portray banlieues as an excluded or included space. Lastly, the conclusion will summarize the main questions that this study poses: how images of youth violence in the banlieues are instrumental in the production of the banlieues in France.

2 REPRESENTATIONS OF YOUTH VIOLENCE IN 2005

The 2005 riots have been called the “most important riot in the history of French contemporary society” (Mucchielli 2009: 733). The total number of violent actions is estimated to include the burning of 10,000 cars, 3,000 rubbish containers and hundreds of public buildings, most of them schools in 280 cities across the country (Ibid.). This particular burst of violence is however not a unique phenomenon. In France, urban violence can be traced back to the first protests of the beur-
movements\textsuperscript{8} in 1982. Gathering an immigrant population, the \textit{beur}-movement made a first attempt to call for an anti-racist upheaval, claiming economic as well as social rights. Violence from both the movement and the police incited a debate on citizenship rights in the Republic.

For many years, both ‘urban violence’ and ‘\textit{banlieues}’ have had different names that are dependant on how they are perceived in France. From the 90s, urban riots came to designate the burning of cars and fighting of youths. The realization that social segregation between immigrants and French is a suburban problem brought about different integration initiatives in the 1990s (ibid. 732). The authorities recognized the care for youths in the \textit{banlieues} as a priority, and provided more resources to schools in selected areas. The new label of \textit{Zones of a Prioritised Education (ZEP)} shaped the integration youth politics since the 1990s and forward. This project included the labelling of areas that are most likely to be victims of urban violence; areas that are to be called “sensitive neighbourhoods” (Delmas 2007: 277-278). In 2005, the riots and youth violence were again identified as a phenomenon of the \textit{banlieues}.

When the two newspapers report on youth violence in the Paris riots of 2005, they gather opinions and voices that declare that youth violence is a phenomenon of the \textit{banlieues}. The journalists try to identify the youths and to understand why they are rioting. Furthermore, the journalists mention how politicians, policemen, Muslim representatives and other individuals discuss why they belong to certain social categories and not others. For them, it is a question of who is responsible for the acts, what could be done to prevent it as well as who is capable of preventing it. The news reporting follows a pattern of three different topics: first, they see youth violence as a territorial phenomenon. Youth violence can expand and grow geographically, but it can also be prevented by state intervention in certain areas. Second, the newspapers illustrate the youths as delinquents that must be feared. This is a fear of uncontrolled youths that do not obey to the legal system. In the media, journalists and Muslim representatives understand youth violence as a consequence of bad integration. They discuss on the role of religion and ethnicity, and whether these are factors that can explain why the youths act against the state. Third, journalists and notably politicians discuss

\textsuperscript{8} \textit{Beur} is a Verlan word for “arabe” and designates a North African population of France. Verlan is colloqual language that has a principle of inversing words, ara-be, thus switched to be-urs. The Verlan rose during the second world war as a code language of the banlieues and the working-class society.
youth violence as a product of an unjust society. The youths’ actions tend to be justified by the fact that the youths suffer from socioeconomic discrimination.

2.1 Violent Culture and Contagious Places

“From the law of the gangs, to the urban jungle: A history of an explosion in crime that draws in more and more minors”, wrote the journalist Jean-Marc Leclerc (2005) in Le Figaro, 12 days after the death of two youths in the department of Seine-Saint-Denis. During the riots in October and November, metaphors such as “urban jungle”, “barbary” and “savagery” replaced the common names of the banlieues such as ‘the sensitive neighbourhoods’, (les quartiers sensibles) or only ‘the hood’ (les quartiers). These notions refer to a view that some cultures are less developed and successful than others in the ladder of social evolution (Moberg 2012: 120-122). The message is that the more youth violence in the banlieues expands, the more it is detached from a developed society. They describe the banlieues as a place that is naturally marked by youth violence. That is, youth violence is in this case an inevitable part of what the banlieues has come to mean in contemporary France. According to the newspapers Le Figaro and Le Monde, urban youth violence has been growing over the years and reached its peak in 2005. In an article about this phenomenon, curves and tables illustrate the state of disorder in the banlieues. They show that the evolution of urban violence has accelerated since the 90s, and also present the French departments that are the most affected by these crimes.

The journalists describe youth violence with two metaphors with medical connotations: disease and contagion. First, they see youth violence as a consequence of growing youth unemployment in the banlieues during the 20th century. The situation is explained as a product of the de-industrialisation of France and population growth, with increasing amounts of people moving in to the banlieues. In this context, what identifies the ‘problematic banlieues’ is an environment full of youths that are victims of unemployment. Calling the banlieues a “disease” of

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9 A French department in the region of Île-de-France.
10 Mattéi 2005.
11 Leclerc, 2005.
12 Ibid.
13 Bourmaud & Visot 2005
unemployment, the newspapers emphasise that the youths are marked, or even infected by socioeconomic hardships. The journalists tend to give an impression of violent culture being a natural outcome of high unemployment in the nation. Second, the newspapers describe youth violence as a growing problem, both on a national and an international level. On the 7th of November, the newspapers reported that the violence is a “contagion” that spreads outside of the borders of Paris, and decreases with time: “Every night the fire starters beat a new ‘record’.”14 Both Le Monde and Le Figaro frequently referred to international newspapers to describe the fear of a contagion abroad. According to the newspapers there is a fear that the violence will inspire youths in other countries15. The fear that is characterised by journalists is that the violence will diffuse the image of France as a non-integrating state.16 A columnist gave the following accounts on the situation:

Is Paris on fire? The foreign media burst out, the consular service is on red alert. France is a country in war. The urban violence that is spreading in territories inspires serious commentaries and most worried reactions everywhere. Moscow recommends their citizens to avoid the Parisian region; the Finnish government do not recommend excursions in the night in the banlieues; The Portuguese embassy offers their protection in case of emergency. The American newspapers do not hesitate to compare Paris with Bagdad, la Seine-Saint-Denis with the Gaza strip and qualify the crisis as the ‘Katrina of social disasters’. Good lord, Muammar Kadhafi even proposed his help to Jaques Chiraq.17

Here, a journalist’s portrayal of youth violence transcends national borders. Gathering foreign media’s reporting is a way of identifying French national borders as well as depicting the nation as feared by international spectators. The examples above show how media illustrates urban youth violence as spreading in two ways: first by inspiring more violence within the national borders, then by causing a buzz in the foreign media, spreading a rumour that threatens the image of France as a well-integrated nation.

14 Le Figaro 2005 [1].
15 Le Figaro 2005 [2]
16 Le Figaro 2005 [3].
17 Thréard 2005.
Politicians answer to this proliferating violence to assure that order will be restored - “rétablir l’ordre”\textsuperscript{18} - in the banlieues. The minister of interior Nicolas Sarkozy took charge over the state security during the riots in October and November. Sarkozy incited a debate in magazines by naming the youths of the banlieues as “scum” (racailles), by demanding a cleansing of their territory (nettoyer au kärcher)\textsuperscript{19}, announcing a decision to deport immigrants without a valid travel visa. He received plenty of criticism for his statements and his actions from within the government, the opposition and from the banlieues. However, in the media, voices of both critics and defenders of Sarkozy’s actions can be found. While the president and minister of interior have been “silent”, the argument is that Sarkozy is the one that took action into this case: “All means that are useful in re-establishing order are good”\textsuperscript{20}. In this way, politicians’ discourse on security and order provide the idea of the banlieues as dangerous.

Politicians also offered to cure the so-called disease of youth violence in the banlieues by offering youths socioeconomic support. In a span of few days, Dominique de Villepin was reported to have visited the banlieues and “told [the youths] that what matters there is to work for a professional, economic and social future”\textsuperscript{21}. State representatives went to sensitive areas that were previously labelled as territories of social discrimination by the state. The solution to the youth violence, that the newspapers offered, was therefore that politicians facilitate the possibilities for youths to make a career and give direction to the youths’ lives. Another suggestion was to work on urban development in the form of aid given to certain departments of France. The politician Manuel Valls, representing the oppositional socialist party (PS), proposed further residential policies:

[The criteria for positive discrimination] are territorial and social. This includes a more efficient system of subsidiary support for: zones of a prioritised education, the municipality politics, the conventions of certain schools, such as upper high schools, and therefore not according to ethnic, racial or religious criteria.

\textsuperscript{18} Le Figaro 2005 [1].
\textsuperscript{19} Le Monde.fr 2005 [1].
\textsuperscript{20} Le Figaro 2005 [4].
\textsuperscript{21} Jeudy 2005.
Urban policy and residential projects would be another solution in preventing the youths from committing violence. As discussed earlier, this is not a new proposal as urban development projects have given financial aid to ‘sensitive zones’ since the 90s. Urban planning as the key factor to socioeconomic inequality is in this sense an idea that is reproduced rather than produced during the 2005 riots.

Evidently, the newspapers report about youth violence as a problem of banlieues. They produce the image of the banlieues as a space of a growing violent culture. Locating certain departments as if they are marked by youth violence creates the idea of the banlieues as a space that has lost its order. The banlieues is also depicted as a space that needs to be included in the society. This is proposed by politicians’ actions, either by entering areas in the banlieues or by encouraging projects that will classify sensitive areas. Above all, the banlieues is a space in need of help to restore the order or create new possibilities for the inhabitants related to it.

2.2 Fear of the New Immigrant

Only five days after the death of Ziad and Bouna, le Figaro published the article “When Clichy blazes in the night” which described the first days of the riots. In the article, the police are represented as agents that preserve the order of the state, by trying to calm down the youths. On the one hand, the police are hiding and receiving insults and projectiles while on the other hand, the youths are either observing the drama, or are in the hands of the police:

A rain of projectiles, from out of nowhere, just struck the policemen’s cordon that is spread around the entrance to the small building. Wearing helmets and body armours, the military police retaliate with a burst of tear gas randomly thrown into the darkness […] Blazes from cars and rubbish bins, harassments from the gangs, first interrogations: From Monday night to yesterday, more than 400 policemen stood ready to go into the battle of Seine-Saint-Denis, five days in a row […] On a parking spot in the suburban area of Chêne-Pointu, a car is ravaged by the flames […] A couple of
meters from the car that stands ablaze, an unknown gang dressed in tracksuits and hoods are observing the spectacle.22

In the article, a vivid language that would be suitable to narrate the tale of a great battle identifies the spaces as the *banlieues* (more specifically in Clichy-Sous-Bois of Paris). The descriptions paint up an image of the *banlieues* as a battlefield where policemen and rioters are clashing. The story is evidently an after-construction of what happened in the *banlieues* the night before. The focus is on the policemen’s preparation for the confrontation: clothes, armour, and small spaces are props that symbolize protection of a threatened population and the order of the state. Whenever the youths are allowed a voice in the newspapers, it is to manifest their rage. Their strong emotions call for a rejection of the society and the politicians, of racism and police violence.

They are “outraged” and pronounce words of the misery that they endure: “We feel more rebellion than hatred”, “we are no dogs, but we react as animals”. Sometimes, they say that they are not able to find their words, in order to express their emotions: “We only know how to talk by starting fires”.23

My interpretation of such dramatic descriptions of the youths in newspapers is that it reflects a fear and anxiety of what rioting youths are capable to do. The fact that the quote is in the beginning of an article, outlining a text that talks about what action the government needs to take in order to counter the violence of the *banlieues*, reaffirms that the journalist wants to stimulate emotions. To re-emphasise, the image is that the *banlieues* is a battlefield that stands in opposition to the ordered state.

Moreover, opinions about the youths and their identities display the emotion of fear. As already seen, journalists portray the riots as a consequence of social inequality, but important to note is that the youths are also accused of social irresponsibility. The newspapers trace this irresponsibility in the youths’ refuse, or incapability, to conform to French values and norms.

22 Cornevin 2005.
23 Dumay 2005.
Even though the youths have had to endure inequality, the principal reason for the uprising against the society is that youths are not capable of integrating into the French society. One journalist expresses his opinion through the following logic:

This violence is not solely a product of the society, as the spontaneous thought recites. The Asiatic immigrants, but also European or formerly the “pied-noir”\(^{24}\), did also encounter poverty and marginalisation, without causing any troubles. Today, the contours of the lost territories of the Republic are being drawn, encouraged by the Friends of Disaster.\(^{25}\)

Naming the youths “Friends of Disaster”, the journalist makes an effort to characterize these Other youths as agents of disorder, working against the French society. Instead of blaming the society – that is to say – the socioeconomic and political system in France, here newspapers give voice to those who characterise the youths as irresponsible citizens with no respect for the national order. The obeying individual is the one that conforms to the society, and those who don’t fit this image, remain troublemaking immigrants. The youths are not referred to as being of a certain ethnicity, but are highlighted by the ethnicity that they do not have. According to journalists, there are certain cultures that are better suited to live and integrate in France, and the youths in the banlieues do not belong to this category. The only common trait of the ethnicity of the youths would thus be that they are not of European origin, and that they are troublemakers born and raised in the banlieues.

In addition to ethnicity, religion is also a frequently discussed topic in both \textit{Le Monde} and \textit{Le Figaro}, above all involving discussions about the relation between youth violence and Muslim identity. Even though religion is not seen as a source of violence, they go hand in hand as journalists write about the riots as something that can inspire youths to join extremist ‘religious’ groups. In an article the journalist tries to analyse the consequences of the violence during the riots: “\textit{...the revolts that originate from a social failure defy our political and cultural values.}"

\(^{24}\) A pied-noir is a term for French citizens living in Algeria before its independency in 1962, and refers more specifically to descendants of French or European settlers that were born in Algeria.  
\(^{25}\) Riofoul 2005.
Whether it is manipulated by Islamists or not, the revolt increases the number of candidates that commit terrorist acts, by choosing leaders and fabricating martyrs.”26 The journalist relates youth violence to religion that is one factor that goes against a secular society. Later, the journalist criticises the Republic for not taking sufficient actions. In this sense, religious extremism is something that stands in contrast to what is conceived of as French.

Even though youth violence is to some extent blamed on religio-political ideologies, it is yet important to note that it is more frequent to identify the youths as non-religious. One week after the first riots, imams and other representatives of Muslim institutions in France called upon the youths to stop rioting. Parents in the banlieues, labelled as religious Muslims, organized night patrols to cut down on the violence. Even “good youths” united to persuade their friends to calm down.27 Journalists characterize thus a part of the so-called Muslim community as an alternative police on unsafe terrains. Representatives persist on the fact that the “delinquents” are not products of religious devotion or fundamentalism but are insecure youths. A man working for the Union of Islamic Organisations in France (UOIF) notifies that:

They are lost souls with a very weak connection to religion […] Many of them are not Muslims. When you greet them ‘salam aleykum’28, they answer you with a bonsoir. There are more Sub-Saharan Africans than Maghrebi ans.29 This revolt has nothing to do with religion. Most of them do not even know that there is a mosque just next to them. All they want is to confront the police.30

In the newspapers, Muslim representatives have to reject the idea that religion has anything to do with the youths’ ideological motivations to commit violence. It is the emotion of rage that urges these youths to commit crimes. Referring to a certain ethnicity, The Muslim community identifies the youths as mostly Africans. They emphasise that this ethnic category is not as included to a Muslim community as Maghrebin groups. Yet at the same time, descriptions of what the Muslim

26 Thread 2005.
27 Kessous 2005.
28 A greeting phrase in Arabic.
29 Inhabitants of the Maghreb: Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Libya and Mauretania.
30 Temisien 2005.
community does, imply that they have the responsibility to protect the *banlieues* from the youths.

In short, from newspapers’ examples above, one notices that politicians, journalists and Muslim representatives portray suburban youths as an uncontrolled violent group, ready to strike at any moment. The way of preventing youth violence is that policemen and Muslim inhabitants in the *banlieues* counter the youths. The uncontrolled youths display a fear of religious extremism, or perhaps most interestingly, how they force a Muslim population to condemn the youths’ actions.

### 2.3 A Marginal Space of Age

Coming this far, the French newspapers see youth violence as a natural part of the *banlieues*. The opposing perspective is that urban youth violence is a consequence of the *young population* being victims of society. The director Bertrand Tavernier, known for his critiques of French contemporary society, urges to *Le Monde* that: “*Even if a youth was able to commit a cowardly act […] such as burning down a kindergarten or attacking firemen, the politics should give him a second chance.*”\(^{31}\) The reduction of violent acts to a youth’s cowardice and age is clearly effective to explain youth violence. Being young and male, the youths make mistakes like everyone else, as they had not yet grown up to be mature and responsible grown-ups. In the newspapers, the police identify the youths by contrasting them to older individuals. The youths are participating in the riots, while the older are those who take the opportunity to commit crimes with no political aim:

> In general, we tackle young thugs from the neighbourhoods but this doesn’t prevent us from coming across delinquents that take advantage of the situation […] A couple of weeks ago, we arrested a 43-year-old pyromaniac that took advantage of the riots to burn eight cars after a romantic disappointment…\(^{32}\)

This example shows that youth and adult are separated by a certain age, but it is yet not frequently discussed where this limit goes. Here, the age of 43 years old is evidently too old to be counted as “youth”. The bureaucratically determined age between youth and adult in France is usually of 25

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31 Kessous 2005.  
32 Cornevin 2005.
when buying a transport ticket or receiving other discounts – would this be the limit that is applied in newspapers? One cannot know. What is observed, however, is that the identification of youths by their social status is more powerful than merely referring to a certain age. Even though both Le Monde and Le Figaro develop a claim that it is difficult to understand what drives the youths to riot, in the end, the way to justify the youths is by arguing that it is due to social inequalities for the younger population. Politicians or commentators that talk about the youths problematize the idea that they are not able to enter the political life. This means, the revolting youths have no access to the public sphere, and the only way of expressing their mistrust to the state would be to participate in the riots. The politician Eric Macé described the situation as:

We live in a world where social experiments are extremely difficult to conduct, where the social and economic environment is brutal, and do not provide political means to express resistance or opposition to existential conditions. Most frequently, one observes forms of violence that are directed to oneself. For the older ones it’s alcohol or medicines, and for the younger, different forms of self-destruction that are either suicidal, of high-risk behaviour, or violence against others. From this point of view, the riots carry once again a positive dimension since they permit to express this revolt in another way than as a private or self-destructive act.  

Interestingly, there is a preference in how the youths should manifest their hardship. Instead of hurting themselves, it is better if they direct their frustration against the society. Through these logics, the society is responsible of protecting the youths. Those who justify youth violence in newspapers classify the riots as a form of youth revolt, just as the socially troubled teenager would revolt against his or her parent. Another article even suggests that the youths are somewhat nostalgic to the “glamorous thirties” that they envy from their parents or great-parents. Journalists thus portray the youths as victims of an economic crisis. The youths that commit violence in the banlieues are the individuals whose age is between being a child in their parents’ care and being adults in a society where unemployment is an inevitable fact.

33 Le Monde.fr 2005 [3].
34 Le Monde.fr 2005 [4].
3 PRODUCTION OF THE BANLIEUES

The media representations of urban youth violence create a space of ideas about social boundaries between peoples and imagined territories. Lefebvre stated that the production of space is a process that can be compared to looking at various maps, each one of them with different boundaries. (1991: 85). The production of the banlieues can be seen as putting different maps of youth violence together. The maps demonstrate boundaries between people of different culture, ethnicity, political status and age that become visible when youth violence is represented in the name of the banlieues. From the illustrations above, we can conclude that the representations of urban youth violence present different ideas of culture, ethnicity, religion and socioeconomic status. These topics function to situate the youth violence as a phenomenon of a certain social group. Youth violence in the banlieues is on the one hand excluded by those who condemn youth violence, and on the other included by those who justify it. Youth violence is a topic that can effectively provoke a discussion on the role of the banlieues in France as a problem of (imagined) territories, or as a problem of individuals. A recurring theme in the news reports on the riots in 2005 is to see who is responsible for youth violence. The society is responsible for the formation of the youths, by offering them an equal opportunity to grow up as adults, despite their socioeconomic situation. In contrast, youths themselves are responsible for the acts as they are expected to follow the laws of the state. They are also expected to integrate and behave as citizens of France. This is also the rationale of the contrasting ideas of the banlieues as either a lost or an abandoned space of the Republic as mentioned in my introduction. The remaining question is to analyse in what way these images of youth violence are effective for the production of the banlieues as a social space.

3.1 “The territories are lost…”

In the newspapers, different voices negotiate the identity of the individuals behind the urban riots. According to Naomi Schor, politicians or intellectuals that play on the emotion of fear of the ‘Other immigrant’ have been those whose discourse adheres to the traditional policy of integration through assimilation (2001: 53). According to her, this fear has changed since the millennia shift. Today, a fear of the new immigrant can be described as mistrust of individuals that want to live in
France and obtain a citizenship without accepting the culture (ibid. 51). This means that the immigrants can be integrated in the society without dismissing their own culture or religion. With other words, it is not a fear of immigrants or religion per se, but rather how they pose a threat when they claim rights to cultural or religious expression in public or in politics. The *new* in ‘new immigrant’ does not refer to ethnicity, but defines an individual that refuses to integrate by revolting against the society. In newspapers, however, powerful institutions that express this anxiety are politicians, intellectuals and Muslim representatives. The image of the youths of the *banlieues* is therefore that they are not claiming their rights, but are revolutionaries who want to reformulate these rights and oppose to the obedient citizen of France. The newspapers also illustrate a fear of youth violence as infecting a certain territory. Their aim is to identify places that are more or less susceptible to violence in the streets, and to contrast them against territories that need protection. The fear of its expansion informs discussions of protection and security of territories where youth violence has not yet taken place.

In one way, the representations of youth violence are reactions to an epidemic that threats and demands for different institutions to act against it. Evan Lieberman (2009) shows how epidemics, such as AIDS, affect how policy makers obtain power to reshape the demographic map. When a disease is related to certain ethnic groups, political leaders and institutions can re-enforce social boundaries. Social competition between ethnic groups is one of the most important factors that influences and legitimises how policy makers perceive, and therefore respond, to the AIDS epidemics. Alternatively, youth violence could be seen as a form of social anomaly (Douglas: 2002). Institutions categorise people in different boxes to maintain a certain order, and whatever cannot be categorised threatens the order. This would both explain the politicians’ discourse about maintaining an “order” and why journalists ascribe youth violence to certain territories. As youth violence is not related to different ethnicities, it is yet more useful to see it as a social threat, rather than a social competition between ethnic groups. Institutions classify youth violence within a social system that separates categories such as ‘French’, ‘immigrant’ and ‘Muslim’. We see how urban rioters challenge these notions as actors in the media negotiate on whether or not their actions can be categorised as a product of ethnicity or religion. To conclude, what is perhaps most frightening about these youths is that they do not belong to a certain social category. In this way, they challenge an already established social order. When newspapers define a social space as an
issue of “lost territories”, we can understand that they actually re-enforce social boundaries so as to exclude youth violence in the banlieues.

3.2 “…or abandoned?”

The newspapers do not only refer to youth violence as a dangerous phenomenon that demands the expansion of existing structures for preserving social security and order. As seen above, the media representations exclude banlieues by representing violent youths as rejected from different social groups. The alternative argument is that the youths in the banlieues are in need of social development. Politicians, and journalists embrace the banlieues as a product of social inequality. Therefore they include the violent youths into categories of socioeconomic status or age. They are unemployed, lack of political engagement and are young. Identifying the youths as such, recognise that youth violence is not only limited to the banlieues, but is also a problem for the whole nation.

As seen, the newspapers separate the rioters of the 2005 in two categories; victimised youths, and delinquent adults. Thus, they manifest the innocence of youths or children through their age; the defence of infancy is one way to excuse younger people when committing crimes. The age of the youths is not exact, which makes it ambiguous to make a strong demarcation between them and adults. The issue is not of an exact age, but merely the fact that they are troubled youths. Just as Lisa Malkki (2015) has shown in The Need to Help, the conception of an innocent youth can foster, as well as legitimate, a need to help. It shows that there exists a powerful image that de-naturalises violent actions from youth. This is also why anthropologists have tried to de-construct the forces that draw youths to violence, analysing why they choose, and are not forced, to become combatants in war to show why it is problematic so see them as either delinquents or victims (Utas 2003; Hoffman 2011).

The newspapers portray the youths as non-responsible actors, which means that other characters must act as the raising and responsible parent. Politicians, the integration system, or enterprise recruiters are represented as those in power of helping the youths to integrate as full worthy citizens. Politicians thus recognize the banlieues as national territories on one condition: that they are still in their youths. However, even though newspapers see youth violence as a product of
victimized individuals, politicians suggest solving the problem by labelling certain areas that are sensitive to delinquency. Evidently, there is a contradiction in trying to embrace youth violence as a national problem of socioeconomic status that is still located to certain territories. In the end, this gives the impression that it is indeed a place that has a social status, and not certain individuals. Again, social issues are reduced to a territorial problem that can be managed through urban projects.

This puts forward the view that if the violent youths are defined as victims, this also ascribes the responsibility from the banlieues. The outcome, as we can see, is that it blurs sociocultural boundaries such as ethnicity or religion that are otherwise strengthened. Interestingly, the majority of the actors are either politicians or researchers (notably sociologists) that portray the youths as victims. Whether they are more sensitive to the image of the innocent youth, use this image to legitimate their power, or want to blur cultural boundaries in France remain an unanswered question.

4 CONCLUSIONS

This study has highlighted ideas about how media reflects the negotiations regarding the territorial distribution of culture, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status or age, going on in French society. While the banlieues is literally translated as a suburban area, or understood as a physical place, it must equally be seen as a space of social relations with rather clear demarcations and boundaries. These boundaries are both strengthened and blurred when analysing how media represent urban youth violence. Ideas of social boundaries lay out a considerable tool for how to interpret the banlieues as an urban space inside, or outside certain social borders. The outcomes of this study provide a reflection on the sociocultural related to space in Lefebvre’s terms (1992) terms, in this case, to de-construct the perception of suburbs as a peripheral place outside of the city.

Analysing how journalists, politicians, intellectuals, Muslim representatives and inhabitants of the banlieues discuss about youth violence, provides a view on how they negotiate the banlieues as a social space. One can understand youth violence through two perspectives. First, the youths in the banlieues are excluded from social groups and institutions. As the youths are not categorised into
any social group, they also pose a threat against a social order. Second, politicians see them as helpless youths that suffer from an economic crisis. Whenever defined by their age, politicians show more empathy against the youths, which almost tend to justify their actions.

While earlier research has focused on the *banlieues* as an excluded or stigmatised space of France, this essay shows that there is an ongoing discussion on how to both exclude and include these spaces by categorising youth violence differently; according to age, to class, and to some extent to culture. Journalists, intellectuals, politicians and Muslim representatives ascribe, or exclude, the youths to different social groups in society. When the youths are defined by their age or social class they are included within the sphere of being granted help. Newspapers define the *banlieues* as a space that has been abandoned and is in need of help. Alternatively, when seen as marked by a ‘violent culture’, it is easier to exclude the *banlieues*, as they are seen as being the only actors responsible for their actions. The rationale proposes that the *banlieues* are the ‘lost territories’ of the Republic in that the youth refuse to integrate in the French society.

Instead of restricting the image of youth violence as producing reckless delinquents, this essay has investigated how youth violence is discussed through how it engages different actors to negotiate on questions such as social class, religion and culture. The negotiation is characterised by how to fear, counter, prevent, or understand how urban youth violence has become a phenomenon of the *banlieues*. The study is thus useful for determining how media representations of a phenomenon can be effective for the concept of a social space. In order to be produced and reproduced, a social struggle needs to be spatialised through representations (Lefebvre 1992: 38). In this essay, I have thus shown how Lefebvre’s notion of *space* can be used to explore how power relations dependant on social class, religion, culture and age can intersect to constitute an idea of the *banlieues* as an excluded or included space of France.

Lastly, the study poses new questions about the *banlieues* and their role in France. How are readers affected by the debate that is represented in the media? Further research can also be carried out to compare the results to an ethnographic study of youth violence and how it is perceived by either the inhabitants or by the youths themselves. How do they apprehend the intrinsic debates about youth violence and how do they relate to this in their everyday life? These
questions are essential for understanding how the banlieues are constructed in France, but before answering them it is important to remember that the representations of youth violence are not univocal, but offer several perspectives on how to understand the role of the banlieues in France.

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